



Batemans Bay Performance and Exhibition Centre
Working Group Inc.

Newsletter February 2019

Hi Members,

Recently you may have seen this article in the Beagle. It also went to Councillors and other interested parties and there has been a good response. It is part of preparing a **submission on the three concept plans** for the proposed Mackay Park Arts/Aquatic Centre and, as you can imagine, that is keeping me busy.

I would welcome your input. The submission is due the 17th Feb, so I would need your input by the 15th Feb at the latest.

It is also **membership time** and you will receive an email from Greg Bowman, our treasurer, soon, to let you know how to renew (mainly online transfer, but let us know if that does not suit you). We would like you to encourage others to join. For many reasons:

- to show support,
- to boost the coffers (it would be nice to give a 'gift' to the centre if we feel it represents our vision of a vibrant creative arts centre well. We can't afford a piano, or even a curtain at the moment – a long way to go – but it would be nice to leave a memento of all the work that has gone in to this project from PerfEx)
- to spread information on Arts and the project to have a Performance and Arts Centre.

It will be accompanied by some information on our role so that you may forward it on to your friends and colleague who may be interested in joining us on this venture. There is a long way to go yet, and with elections and processes to go through, it could be quite a ride.

For instance: You will note in the article that going forward with an Arts Centre has other repercussions, in particular that Council is **planning to demolish (and sell) the present Community Centre** that is so widely used now. This would seem such a loss. What are your views? A petition will be put out shortly to test community response to this.

Hoping 2019 has begun well for you and gets better and better

Regards

Dr Susan Mackenzie -PerfEx president

Mackay Park in Focus -a PrefEx perspective

Over the last few weeks the Council has held information kiosks in the Stocklands Shopping Centre, Batemans Bay, and Moruya, plus several focus groups for reps from groups specifically interested or involved with the proposed Mackay Park Arts/Aquatic Centre and its aspirations.

As President of PerfEx, a long-time major lobby group for a Performance and Arts Centre in the Bay, I attended three focus groups (two for the Arts and one for Community Centre users) and several hours on random days at the kiosks in town since the three options (Concept Plans) were released, plus attended earlier focus groups when the Architects, NBRS, were first engaged.

I want to commend Council on this process – the most comprehensive I have seen to date on engaging the wider community on a topic. Council has also held other meetings with related interested parties, including First Nations representatives, businesses and visitors, as well as politicians.

I look forward to ‘plan D’ as there were many, many comments made by the general public, and in the focus groups, on changes they would like to see in the plans. Most of these were related to practical usage of the proposed facility, and the nexus between a commercial proposition and a community facility. I do not envy the architects their task, so it is important the community is listened to and our needs and wishes reflected strongly in the plans.

I shall speak mainly about the Arts facility as I am sure Carolyn (Harding) has her own observations re the pool centre.

The most raised issue was why a gym has been included when there are so many in town already. It was stated many times by the council reps that discussions with other Councils had reinforced the need for a gym as part of the viability of the enterprise, especially as Council will have the ability to offer a combined gym/pool membership, something the other businesses cannot.

This revealed a strong commitment to making money from the facility and its parts, or at least breaking even. This will be welcome news to ratepayers, but raises a fundamental question on whether this is primarily a community or commercial venture, and this is not clear. From Council responses, particularly re the Arts facility, it appears as being thought of as a primarily commercial venture geared towards visiting artists and their usage.

This is evident in the minimal Gallery, meeting and café spaces on offer.

Community Centre is to be demolished

The Mackay Park venture is not a stand-alone project, which many are unaware of. It was stated in one focus group that the Community Centre is to be demolished, but no further plans were revealed at this stage. The tourism centre is also to go, with Internet Kiosk stands the main replacement.

Losing the Community Centre is of great concern to us as the new proposed facility does not replicate or improve on the Community Centre, with its dividable hall, large and small meeting rooms, a rentable office and a commercial scale kitchen (relied on heavily by Meals on Wheels who will not be accommodated in the new centre) and flat surrounds. U3A has some 40 bookings a week there (including weekend talks); there is a youth café; dance classes; a food and crafts market; social outreach events and more. It is easily accessible (no major highway to cross), has plentiful parking; and a carpark between it and the Museum that can easily be sectioned off for outdoor markets,

festivals and events. The Water Gardens flow on from it also. There is green space that could be made into community gardens.

Rather than lose this facility, built by community funds, we would like to see the Community Centre remain and made into a **locals community precinct**.

More and more we see council prioritising visitor experience over local community. Ironically, if there are plans to sell it, will people remember that when the bats arrive, the whole area is almost uninhabitable for noise, smell and health/sanity issues?

Three Concept Plans

Will the locals use the new facility often enough for it to be 'seen' as a local amenity? No doubt the pool complex will, with its variety of facilities to meet the needs of all ages, but I am not so sure on the Arts area in its present form and layouts, and accessibility from the CBD.

While each of the three plans is slightly different, there were many general (and mostly practical) issues raised. The separation of the buildings was very popular and the use of the space between the two, as a usable creative space, was raised often.

In all discussions we were asked to focus on general issues rather than the nitty gritty, such as internal layout, and no scaling or dimensions made some discussion difficult.

Questions were raised re:

- Can orientation be adjusted to make more use of the northerly aspect?
- Accessible parking and drop off issues
- Café facilities for the Arts community (Art/Music/Theatre etc)
- Art exhibition areas being so small
- Making access for setting up exhibitions easier
- Can the gym in concept 'A' be placed upstairs and the ground area used for Art/photography/local exhibitions and community events, with a large, usable kitchen?
- The relative number of male/female toilets
- The wisdom of placing toilets in a foyer next to a bar considering the press and ambiance of interval at an Arts/Theatre event
- The scale of the foyers appearing too small for the number of patrons in the theatre
- The number of parking spaces to meet the demands of a concurrent theatre and pool event (not viable to close one when the other is open, as has been suggested)
- The placement of roof terraces on the south side of the buildings when, if placed on the north side, being above mozzie level, commercial and community events such as open air cinema, cocktail parties, pop-up restaurants, local food tastings and promotions could be accommodated there
- If there is to be a gym, can it be upstairs (people will go upstairs for a gym, but not so easily for a gallery, and with our demographic nearing 40% for over 60s, this needs to be considered)?
- Could there be outdoor, covered theatre and dance areas?
- The size of theatre, from 500 to 350. Again, council reps said this decision was made after discussion with other councils re viability
- Is there sufficient room for storage, movement of theatre and music equipment, people and costumes?

- Could more be made of the open green, sky and tree vistas? These are seen as invaluable as they cannot be built out and are sharp contrast to the relentless busy-ness of the highway
- What are the expansion options?
- Can the entrances be more inviting and accessible?
- Can utility areas be more on the southern/highway sides as little traffic – foot or vehicle – will come from there?
- How is ease of access from across the highway and CBD to be encouraged/developed?
- Could delivery/cartage vehicle access to loading points be made more accessible and away from the approach, to the Arts building particularly?
- Re safety and lighting and outdoor weather protection – e.g. covered walkways
- Is there safe piano storage to ensure use by Music Society?
- What’s the “WOW’ factor of the ‘iconic’ character?

A few general things I will make comment re the pool:

- Parents like to be able to see their offspring while they are in a pool, or even a crèche, and even both when they have more than one child. The present plans need adjustment to enable this
- Is there adequate room for marshalling schools for carnivals, or for seating a whole school?
- The capacity to raise (or slide) the pool walls to enable an indoor/outdoor experience seems to be essential but that level of detail was not encouraged; rather we were asked to stay on general matters
- To maximise the sun year-round, can the majority of pools be clear of solid shade caused by adjacent buildings
- The positioning of the entrance to the pool effectively cuts it off from people interested in both Arts and the pool, whereas a closer relationship could well inform users of activities in both areas
- Are there ‘enough’ lockers in the pools amenities?
- Can there be more ‘free-activity’ space?

As well as practicality and meeting our perceived needs, use of the facility by locals is also contingent on financial accessibility, for which no information was available other than a proposition that locals would get a season pool pass at a lesser rate than visitors to the town.

We look forward to seeing plan ‘D’ and whether the time, money and goodwill expressed in the consultation process, results in a design closer to our community expectations. If it does, we could have a wonderful asset to be proud of, and to draw people to the Bay, but let’s not forget to provide for the locals first. Let’s keep the local Community Centre to complement the Creative Arts space catering for a wider audience.

Contact us on

info@perfex.org.au or ring me on 44729259

PerfEx committee members - 2019

Dr Susan Mackenzie - President

Henk roubos - Secretary

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