GPA Development Update - 2 December 2011

Public Comment Period to Start in January 2012

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has issued its decision not to do a formal assessment of the Scheme Amendment for the proposed residential development in Gracetown. A copy of the EPA’s letter of advice to the Shire has been added to the GPA website (http://gracetownprogressassociation.weebly.com). This means that, subject to the Shire receiving some amendments to the proposal documents as a result of the EPA’s advice, the proposal is ready to move to the advertising stage. The Shire has indicated that the advertising and public comment period is likely to start in mid January 2012, and will last for 42 days.

GPA Committee activity

While you may not have heard much from the GPA Committee over the past 6 months, there has been a fair bit of development related activity. As previously reported, the Planning Assessment of the traffic related aspects of the proposed development has been completed and a copy of the report prepared by Gordon Smith in association with Halsall and Associates has been added to the GPA website. The Committee has also been working on issues associated with the waste water treatment facility (WWS) and the second access road.

This update provides a brief summary of the main issues that the GPA has been dealing with over the past 6 months. If you would like further information on any of the topics covered, please refer to the GPA website or contact any member of the GPA Committee or the relevant sub-committee. Details of the committees can be found on the GPA website.

Community Initiatives

Notes of the community meeting held on 22 April 2011 have now been placed on the GPA website. In summary, the outcomes of the meeting were that the Overarching Statement of Vision for Gracetown was affirmed and the top 10 community initiatives nominated by those who attended the meeting are:

1. Build a multi use path from South Pt car park along bay road to Caves Rd
2. Gas bbqs (query whether gas or electric better) and define/fence picnic area at main beach
3. Define (seal) main beach car park entry/exit points and paths
4. Build enviro toilet at North Pt car park/boat ramp
5. Enlarge and upgrade North Pt car park and access track
6. Cross walks north of bridge and store to main beach and footpath east of bridge
7. Melaleuca beach picnic area replace wood bbqs with gas or electric
8. Cross walks cnr Percy/Bayview and cnr Bayview/Salter
9. Footpaths Salter/Langley to South Pt car park
10. Upgrade main beach shelters and maintain
It should also be noted, as requested at the meeting, that the second access road remains the community’s highest priority infrastructure issue. It was not included on the list of community initiatives because it is seen as a basic development infrastructure issue rather than an optional item.

**Second Access Road**

A copy of the Planning Assessment has been sent to our local members, Barry House MLC and Troy Buswell MLA, and meetings have been held with both. Both are very supportive of the second access road and have undertaken to take up the matter with Bill Marmion MLA, the Minister for the Environment, whose portfolio includes the Department of Environment and Conservation. Aside from the question of funding, the biggest issue appears to be the stance of DEC against the second access road.

The Committee encourages all residents and ratepayers in Gracetown to write directly to Messrs House, Buswell and Marmion in support of the second access road. You may wish to refer to the arguments made in the Panning Assessment when doing so. The Fire Management Plan for the Gracetown Residential Development, prepared for Landcorp by FirePlan WA in 2010, is also on the GPA website. The clear recommendation in the FMP (on p 8) is that a second access road be constructed, regardless of whether a new development proceeds.

The GPA Committee is meeting on Monday 5 December with Roger Banks from Strategen Environmental Consulting, who has been commissioned by TME and Landcorp to undertake the independent risk assessment of the second access road. This was one of the Shire’s requirements when they initiated the development process at their March 2011 meeting.

It should be noted that the EPA’s decision to “not assess” the Scheme Amendment was made on the basis that a second access road is not part of the amendment. The EPA states in its advice to the Shire that if the amendment is modified to include a second access road the EPA would consider that a significant change and would expect the amendment to be referred back to the EPA for consideration.

**Waste Water Treatment Facility**

The Committee has had a lot of internal discussion and correspondence with the Shire planners regarding the WWS and its implications for the Gracetown community. Most of this discussion has been directed at determining the Shire’s intentions with respect to the design of the waste collection system and the rates that will be levied with respect to the operation of the facility. The key issues that are emerging from these discussions are the potential cost and engineering works associated with existing properties connecting to the collection system and the level of sewerage rates that may be levied by the Shire whether or not a property owner elects to connect to the third pipe system that will deliver treated water back to the properties.
The general position adopted by the Committee regarding the WWS is that it is in effect a pilot project (for WA) to demonstrate the viability of such systems, and while the community is prepared to participate in the pilot project it should not be financially worse off than other ratepayers in the Shire as a consequence.

The Shire has indicated that the sewerage rates for Gracetown will be Specified Area Rates based on the cost of maintenance and operation of the WWS and will include a provision for depreciation. We have advised the Shire that the GPA’s position is that the rates paid by Gracetown ratepayers should not exceed the level of rates paid by ratepayers in Margaret River or Cowaramup. The Shire has pointed out that Water Corporation is responsible for providing and charging for water and sewerage services to other parts of the Shire, and that Gracetown is outside Water Corporation’s licence area. If the Shire was to cap the cost of such services to Gracetown then this could involve other ratepayers subsidising the cost of such services. We have requested from the Shire a copy of the business case for the Witchcliffe development, where a similar system is proposed, in order to get further detail on the way in which rates may be set.

In its decision to initiate the planning processes for the proposed development the Shire included a condition that the developer pay 50% of the cost of connection. Given the above concerns we think this position should be reviewed and further contributions should be made.

**Timing of next meeting**

As mentioned above, it appears likely that the Scheme Amendment will be advertised for public comment some time in January 2012. The community will have 42 days to make its submissions. As soon as the Scheme Amendment is advertised, the GPA will convene a public meeting at which the community will have an opportunity to discuss the proposed development. Both Landcorp and the Shire planners have said that they will be happy to attend such a meeting to answer questions. This is likely to be mid-way through the public comment period, probably the 5 March 2012 long weekend, to give the community time to prepare submissions.

Please contact me or any other Committee member if you would like to discuss any aspect of the proposed development.

David Martin
President
Gracetown Progress Association