



**Village of Hall and District Progress Association Inc.**

VHDPA Inc.  
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[www.hall.act.au](http://www.hall.act.au)

**President: David Hazlehurst**

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## VHDPA Public Meeting

20 August 2015

7:00 PM, Hall school building.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: David Hazlehurst, , Tony Morris, Rod Barnes. Bob Richardson, Phil Robson, Peter Howard, Barry Huckstepp, Rosemary Jovanovic.

President David Hazlehurst presented the Consultation Paper of the Future of the Hall Primary School Site (attached). Phil Robson assisted with background discussion.

Discussion involved the tenure of the school site and Pavilion.

It was agreed that the strategy in the paper be pursued, including that some income from the Pavilion site may be necessary to support outgoings on the school site

CLOSED 8.30pm. Sect .VHDPA - Bob Richardson.

# Future of Hall Primary School Site

## Consultation Paper August 2015

This paper provides an update on the future of the Hall Primary School site and seeks views from the community and members of the Hall and District Progress Association on next steps.

### Background

Against the wishes of the community, on 13 December 2006 the Hall Primary School was closed. The preschool remained open and fell under the administration of Gold Creek Primary School.

The Village of Hall & District Progress Association (VHDPA) immediately sought, and obtained agreement from the ACT Government for use of the Cottage, multi-purpose courts, garage (now the Men's Shed) and the Hall School Museum. The ACT Government did renovation work on the Cottage and this continues to be used for community activities, church activities and also to run computer literacy programs. The tennis courts are in frequent use. The ACT Government also did work to upgrade the Pavilion. This was because the VHDPA did not want the 'community hub' model being developed at other closed school sites as the Pavilion was serving this purpose for Hall, but was in need of work. However, the amount invested in Hall to date has been small compared to other school sites (precise comparisons are difficult as figures for other school sites have not been attainable).

The Hall School Museum, under the VHDPA and stewardship of the Friends of Hall School Museum, has grown its collection and, with the informal agreement of the ACT Government, is using a number of other school buildings (see map). The Hall Men's Shed was formed in 2010 with members participating in a range of activities from just enjoying a cuppa and discussions with other men to projects of a community nature. The Men's Shed occupies the old garage and is informally using the old school hall.

However, the tenure over the site for these activities, and other potential ideas community members have raised, remains uncertain.

The January 2011 Hall Primary School Master Plan was commissioned by the ACT Government by Eric Martin and Associates. It is available on the website ([www.hall.act.au](http://www.hall.act.au)).

The key points in this report are:

- the heritage considerations for the heritage listed site and associated restrictions on redevelopment;
- the recommendation to remove all the demountable buildings from the site and replace the asbestos in remaining buildings with fibre cement sheet;
- the recommendation to move the preschool to classroom block 2; and
- possibilities for landscaping.

The Government has not yet acted on this report.

The area covered by the Martin Report is Block 3 Section 6 Hall. It is zoned by the Territory Plan as a Community Facility and has a full heritage registration.

## **Community consultation in 2014**

In the first few months of 2014 the Village of Hall and District Progress Association engaged the community on the future of the site. This culminated in a public meeting on Sunday 23 March attended by around 70 people and the further views being canvassed by email.

Community consensus was for five overarching principles for the future of the school site:

### **1. Heritage**

Hall Primary School is included on the ACT Heritage Register as part of the Hall Village Heritage Precinct, which includes clear heritage guidelines. The Primary School, the Education Museum and the 'Peace Tree' are named as places of specific value within the Precinct. The heritage values of the School site should be preserved.

### **2. Whole-of-site**

In considering the balance of maintenance costs and revenue a whole-of-site approach should be adopted. In other words, provided sufficient overall revenue is generated to cover maintenance and outgoings across the whole site, the users of each individual building should not necessarily be required to pay rent. The other aspect of this principle is that the site should be managed as a whole for landscaping and heritage management.

### **3. Tenure**

The whole site should be managed by the community through a legal arrangement with the ACT Government. Under this arrangement, major maintenance would be undertaken by the ACT Government but minor maintenance would be undertaken by the Village of Hall and District Progress Association or its associated members. This does not rule out part of the site being leased for a community activity provided the whole site is managed as one for heritage and landscape purposes. Arrangements for the Preschool would continue under whatever the current lease arrangement is.

### **4. Community Use**

The site should remain as a Community Facility as per the Territory Plan. The priority for the use of the site should be for community benefit and use by community members.

### **5. Long term vision**

Whatever is decided in the shorter term regarding the use of demountables should be compatible with the longer term vision for the site.

There was also strong support for continued community use of the site, in particular for the activities of the Preschool, Museum and the Men's Shed. The community was open to other community groups or activities also occurring on the site.

## **Current community activities on the School site**

The community groups currently utilising the buildings on the site are not self interest groups. They are all run by volunteers for the benefit of the ACT and wider community.

**Hall and District Heritage Centre:** the Friends of the Museum, with 40 members drawn largely from Hall and the District, have done an enormous amount of work in restoring the school building and collection. Archival records and photographs are also maintained on their website. The Friends have staged a major exhibition each year since 2010. The current 'When Hall Answered the Call' exhibition marks the Centenary of ANZAC and was opened by Andrew Leigh MP in April.

The Museum's collection was assessed by Emeritus Professor Edwin Braggett for national significance. In Professor Braggett's final report to the National Library, the collection together with the original school building, the school site and its strong connection to the cultural heritage of Hall Village was rated as being of National Significance as it met all the criteria laid down by the National Library in accordance with the Council of Australian Museums' Significance 2.0 Guidelines.

The Hall School Museum is now associated with Museums Australia, the National Trust, the National Library, the Australian National Museum of Education and the Canberra and District Historical Society. With these associations the Museum is gaining a higher profile and a wider audience not just from the ACT but also nationally. This recognition is being promoted to ACT schools as being a place to visit for the benefit of education in cultural heritage. This is a component of the new history element of the National Curriculum. This has been evident by the growing number of ACT Primary school groups that have been visiting the Museum.

Over the last 5 years funding grants have been received by the Museum from ACT Heritage and the Federal Government to carry out conservation work and mount special exhibitions for the benefit of the ACT community.

**The Hall Men's Shed** provides interaction and activities for over 30 members to assist with men's health education, mental issues including depression, loneliness and other issues. The Shed is open on Tuesday and Thursday mornings and also Saturday mornings for those younger members who still work full time. The Men's Shed contributes to the broader community in variety of ways. Activities have included building special workstations for autistic children, maintenance work for the equipment used by intellectually handicapped children, maintenance and construction of play equipment for the pre-school, repair and maintenance on sports grandstands at the Hall Showground and sporting field, and minor building works and furniture repairs for the Museum. Regularly, the members of the Hall Mens Shed and the Friends of the Hall Museum gather together on the site for communal events such as barbecues and morning teas.

**The Rotary Club of Hall** are using one of the school buildings as meeting room and storage facility. This includes collection, restoration and storage of re-usable medical equipment and aids and clothing for disaster relief in the Pacific region, as well as storage of Club archives.

The Hall Collectors Club, the St Michael and All Angels Church, the Hall Community Fire Unit and the Computers for Seniors group are also utilising facilities on a regular basis.

## **The Government's position**

In the second half of 2014 the ACT Government advised the VHDPa that responsibility for community facilities was moving from the Community Services Directorate to the ACT Property Group in the Economic Development Directorate. At an initial meeting with the ACT Property Group in September 2014 VHDPa was advised the Group was undertaking a review of community facilities and would provide further advice when it was complete. We were also advised peppercorn rents are no longer available and the standard rent for community facilities is \$128 per square metre per year, regardless of the condition of the asset. For the 700 square metres we were assessed as occupying this was \$89600.

Subsequent correspondence from the Chief Minister (7 May 2015) laid out the Government's position (extract below).

We are working as a matter of priority to establish tenancy arrangements with groups that have historically had informal arrangements that provide them with no security. This process will ensure that groups are not occupying public buildings without lease protections. The Village of Hall and District Progress Association is one such group. The group does not currently have a formal tenancy arrangement, does not pay rent, and does not pay for its share of the utilities or the upkeep of the grounds or buildings, as other organisations under similar arrangements do. This is not a sustainable or equitable arrangement.

The government's policy is to charge a fixed rental amount to not-for-profit community groups occupying its properties. This figure is set as low as possible and only provides for cost recovery. It is calculated on the average cost of managing and maintaining buildings across the portfolio. Charging cost-recovery levels of rent allows the government to maintain a larger and more diverse portfolio and cater to a wider range of community needs.

The rent for the buildings the Association occupies will be subject to detailed discussions with ACT Property Group and will be broadly based on the cost-recovery methodology outlined above. One of the matters your organisation may wish to consider, in order to reduce the financial impact, is the volume of space it occupies at the Hall site.

As suggested by the Chief Minister, the VHDPa met again with the ACT Property Group, including Mr Daniel Bailey, the group's Director. Mr Bailey confirmed the Chief Minister's position that an agreement would need to be based broadly on the cost-recovery principles outlined in the Chief Minister's letter, but also that there may be potential for flexibility in rent charged. Mr Bailey asked the Association to provide them with a proposal for ongoing occupancy of the site.

More recently ACT Property Group has provided a breakdown of outgoings and minor capital expenditure for 2013-14 which totals just over \$50,000. This includes around \$14,000 for utilities, \$8500 for grounds maintenance, \$19,000 for security, and nearly \$7,000 for repairs and maintenance (more than half of which occurred in 2012-13). The

expectation is we would meet a proportion of these costs based on the extent of our occupancy of the site. A proportion would also be met by the Gold Creek preschool.

## **Options for the community position**

The VHDPA continues to work with the Rotary Club of Hall on a workable, long-term arrangement with the ACT Government for the occupancy of the Hall Primary School site. It was the VHDPA, not the Government, which raised the need for this.

We accept with formalising this occupancy comes the need for the Association and groups operating under its auspices to make a reasonable contribution to the costs of the site. However, we also still strongly believe three factors need to be taken into account in assessing what contribution is reasonable.

Firstly, since the Hall community groups have occupied the vacant school buildings some years ago there has been thousands of hours spent by the volunteers on maintaining the interiors of the buildings for community activities. A dollar figure cannot be put on this volunteer work but it has saved the ACT Government many thousands of dollars by ensuring that the buildings were cleaned, safe from pest infestation, vandalism and general deterioration.

Secondly, the main activities occurring in the buildings are of significant value to the community. The Friends of the Hall School Museum have contributed a vast number of hours to the conservation of its unique collection and being volunteer guides on open days and visits by seniors and school groups. This is apart from the time spent in mounting a number of successful exhibitions over the last 4 years as part of the Canberra and Region Heritage Festival. A log of hours spent by the volunteers from the museum has been kept over 3 months in 2015 which recorded a total of over 1200 hours. This is a typical amount of hours spent and would extrapolate into a total of over 16,000 hours since the Friends of the Hall School Museum began in 2010.

Similarly, the Men's Shed provides an important community service. We understand many Men's Sheds across Australia operate under the auspices of other community organisations that receive government funding to provide social services. In other words, they are at least subsidised, if not directly funded, by governments.

Thirdly, most of the community activities and services offered on the site are largely unfunded and seek no fee for service, even on a fee for service basis. This distinguishes these services from others that may occur in community precincts elsewhere where incoming fees/income are available to offset costs including rent and maintenance.

Against this background, the future management (and possibly development) of the site can be considered in three distinct phases:

- Short term – the next year

- Medium term – the following year
- Long term – after the next two years

### **a) Short term**

The ACT Government is focussed on immediate cost recovery of recurring outgoings associated with Hall Primary School and all other community facilities in the Territory. Consistent with the Chief Minister's advice, we propose to negotiate with the Government a cost neutral approach to a license agreement for occupancy of the whole site.

Various options can be considered to generate income and/or meet costs:

- (i) One or more government grants to meet operational costs of activities occurring on the site that are of benefit to the community. For example, taken together the Museum, the Men's Shed, the Collectors Club and the Computers for Seniors could be described as a seniors hub, with a mix of activities that benefit both the participants themselves and the broader community. Alternatively, the Museum itself could be provided with a small operational grant from the government in exchange for it being available for visits from school or seniors groups.
- (ii) Fees for one-off or regular use of facilities and rent from permanent occupancy of part or all of buildings.
- (iii) Discontinue security patrols and rely on the back to base alarm and perhaps a CCTV system. There would be a initial establishment cost, but almost 40% of the recurring cost for the whole site could be eliminated. This would be low risk – no significant security incidents have occurred in the eight years since the School closed.
- (iv) Grounds maintenance (ie. mowing and trimming) and other minor maintenance could be carried out by the community with equipment supplied by the Progress Association and/or Hall Rotary (subject to discussion and agreement).

The Progress Association and Hall Rotary could also then meet our share of the utilities costs from income generated on the site and other sources. For the Progress Association this is likely to draw on any surplus income from the operation of the Hall Pavilion.

In the short term, an asbestos management plan needs to be developed and implemented for the site.

### **b) Medium term**

There is a need to update the Hall Primary School Masterplan prepared by Eric Martin and Associates (January 2011) to reflect current ACT Government policy and existing stakeholders expectations. Activities such as the provision of an expanded Men's Shed, Rotary Storage and Respite Care, or semi-commercial artists premises could be a positive part of the Masterplan. The plan should include a landscape plan and budget for the whole site. A fund raising strategy should also be developed, including funding through ACT Government Budgets (2016-18), as well as from other sources.

### **c) Long term**

Implementation of the Masterplan as funds become available through via grants funds from Government and partnership with likeminded organisations such as Hall Rotary and the Men's Shed.

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FEEDBACK**

1. Do the principles previously endorsed by the community remain sound?
2. Should the Progress Association seek to negotiate a cost-neutral license agreement for the whole site with the ACT Government?
3. (For members of the VHDPA) should any surplus income from the operations of the Association be available to be applied to a cost neutral license agreement with the ACT Government?