



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT  
AND CITY SERVICES**

(Reference: [Inquiry into the Management of ACT cemeteries](#))

**Members:**

**MS S ORR (Chair)**  
**MR S DOSZPOT (Deputy Chair)**  
**MS T CHEYNE**  
**MR M PARTON**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**WEDNESDAY, 11 OCTOBER 2017**

**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Mr A Snedden (Ph: 620 50199)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

**WITNESSES**

**ANDERSON, MR THOMAS**, Chair, Weston Creek Community Council ..... **14**

**CARRICK, MS FIONA**, President, Woden Valley Community Council..... **14**

## **Privilege statement**

The Assembly has authorised the recording, broadcasting and re-broadcasting of these proceedings.

All witnesses making submissions or giving evidence to committees of the Legislative Assembly for the ACT are protected by parliamentary privilege.

“Parliamentary privilege” means the special rights and immunities which belong to the Assembly, its committees and its members. These rights and immunities enable committees to operate effectively, and enable those involved in committee processes to do so without obstruction, or fear of prosecution.

Witnesses must tell the truth: giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter, and may be considered a contempt of the Assembly.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, it may take evidence in-camera if requested. Confidential evidence will be recorded and kept securely. It is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly; but any decision to publish or present in-camera evidence will not be taken without consulting with the person who gave the evidence.

*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 3.03 pm.**

**CARRICK, MS FIONA**, President, Woden Valley Community Council  
**ANDERSON, MR THOMAS**, Chair, Weston Creek Community Council

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon, and welcome to the second hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services into the management of ACT cemeteries. The standing committee adopted this reference in July 2017 and will report its findings to the Legislative Assembly by the end of this year. The committee's terms of reference are on the committee's website and a copy is on the table at the committee room entrance. The committee has received 11 submissions, all of which are published and lodged on the committee's website. The committee invites feedback from interested persons on any of the issues raised by submissions. The committee is holding three public hearings on the reference, the third of which is scheduled for Wednesday, 18 October 2017.

Today's hearing is public and is recorded by Hansard and accessible through the Assembly committee's on demand webstreaming site. Today I welcome Fiona Carrick and Tom Anderson from the Weston Creek Community Council. I expect you are aware of the pink privilege statement on the desk. You have noted that and understood it?

**Mr Anderson:** Yes.

**Ms Carrick:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. The committee has your submissions for the inquiry for discussion and consideration today. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Ms Carrick:** Thank you for the opportunity to appear in front of this inquiry to provide the views of the Woden Valley Community Council on the management of ACT cemeteries. Our focus is on the proposed expansion of the Woden cemetery into Eddison Park and the need to commit to developing a new site for future cemetery services in the south of Canberra. Eddison Park is important to the Woden community for the open green spaces that it provides for social, recreational, physical and psychological wellbeing.

The population of the Woden Valley is increasing and the town centre is experiencing densification. The draft variation to the Territory Plan provides for tall residential towers and at the same time reduces the open green spaces available to the growing population. Woden is losing the green courtyards at the Alexander and Albemarle buildings, the pitch and putt site and the green corridor along Athllon Drive, and the draft precinct code rezones open green space to community facility land at Arabanoo Park. This land is proposed to be rezoned even though a community facility has not been identified for the site. This significant loss of open green space should not be approved unless analysis is undertaken to determine the demographics, the forecast population of the area and the future requirement for open spaces.

In order to meet the needs of the community, the Woden Valley Community Council

seeks retention of three hectares in Eddison Park and improved lighting and connectivity in the area to facilitate pedestrian and cyclist access to the town centre. The cemetery, unfortunately, can be a scary place at night, so it should not be expanded into an urban area that people will be passing to access the town centre.

The loss of precious open green spaces for community activity is a permanent appropriation of Eddison Park to meet a short-term need for cemetery services and cannot be reversed. To meet the burial needs of the community the Woden Valley Community Council advocates a funding commitment from the ACT government to develop a new cemetery in the south of Canberra.

With respect to the funding model for developing a new cemetery—section 2 of the terms of reference—the Woden Valley Community Council suggests that the ACT government commit to the capital cost of construction with an appropriate level of cost recovery for the ongoing operation of the cemetery.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Anderson, do you have an opening statement?

**Mr Anderson:** I would also like to thank you for the opportunity to come along and speak. I echo what Fiona is saying in relation to expansion of Woden cemetery: I do not think it should occur. With what is happening and what is going to happen in the future in the centre of Woden, they need all the green space they can get to cater for the large increase in people that is coming. It is going to be dramatic for the town centre with the numbers that are going to be there. There is not a lot of green space, and I think that three hectares should be kept to support the people that are there. A lot of facilities have gone in recent times; I will not go through them all but they have gone, and the green space is vital for the people there. I also support the need to look for a new cemetery in the south of Canberra.

On the funding issue, I think cemeteries are only one part of the cost of burials. You have two factors in there: the private sector and the public sector who run the cemeteries. Cemeteries should be looked at in terms of a community service obligation in some way so we can support those members in the community who struggle to meet the costs of burial or cremation.

**MR PARTON:** I am not a local at Woden so I do not spend a great deal of time in Woden town centre. What goes on at Eddison Park right now? I am assuming it is very much an underutilised space?

**Ms Carrick:** It is underutilised, but there are a lot of people that go down there for picnics. There is a great skate park, which is one facility that Woden has got and that we are very happy about for the children. The kids love the skate park so they will go down there. There is a playground, so you will have families with young kids cycling around. So it is well used. I would not say it is packed, but it is used.

**MR PARTON:** Those facilities that you mentioned—the playground and the skate park—based on where we believe the cemetery would be expanded, would they be impacted?

**Ms Carrick:** No.

**MR PARTON:** No. So for the land that would be taken up by this expansion, what is actually there now?

**Ms Carrick:** At the moment it is open green space and it is just used generally for people. It is a nice, fairly quiet area. However, the fact is that Woden has lost a lot of facilities—we have lost the pitch and putt, we have lost the basketball stadium, we have lost the tennis courts, we have lost the bowling greens, we have lost the bowling alley—and we have lost a substantial amount of activity. We are at risk, too, of losing the pool and the ice skating rink.

**MR PARTON:** I heard you mention that this morning.

**Ms Carrick:** We would love to have a community centre/arts centre. We need a plan that identifies where our local green spaces will be and where our community assets will be. The current site is next to the athletics oval so we need to determine the best use for that site. It could be open green space, and we need a plan for where our open space will be given that we have lost so much. We also need a plan of where our community facilities should be. That site has potential to be a community asset, whether it is open green space or some sort of community facility, as opposed to an expanded cemetery. It has a higher value to the Woden Valley residents than expanding the cemetery.

I note that we had a public meeting with about 180 people where we asked about the expansion of the cemetery and not one person put their hand up to expand the cemetery.

**Mr Anderson:** If I can add to that, it is my understanding that that is the only real park in Woden. If you want to reduce that, it is just another body blow to Woden. I would go the other way and seek the government to put some support mechanism in—tables, chairs—to allow people to picnic there and encourage the use of it, rather than just say, “Well, no-one’s using it, therefore, we’re just going to take it for the cemetery.” When you add the numbers that are going to come into the town centre, they need to be able to go somewhere. Some of them will not hop in a car because they will not have a car; they will choose to travel by public transport. It is an easy walk across there. They can picnic, they can do what they like. They can use the playground, and go beyond. And once it is gone, it is gone.

**MR PARTON:** Yes, absolutely. If that decision were made, as you said, you cannot turn it back after that.

**THE CHAIR:** You have very clearly made the case for why you would like to keep Eddison Park.

**MS CHEYNE:** What proportion of the community currently living within Woden, as well as people who come into Woden, use Eddison Park.

**Ms Carrick:** I am not sure. People go down there perhaps not weekly; they might go every six months or so. Some would go weekly, some would go daily, and some would go less frequently. But, as you know, the Woden town centre is not vibrant.

There is not activity there, and that is reflected in Eddison Park, too. What we are trying to do is bring the activity back. If we were lucky enough to bring the activity back into Woden and make it vibrant, you would see that flowing through Eddison Park as well. We want to put amenity in there that encourages people to come; we want a future for the place rather than saying, “Oh, no-one’s there at the moment, so, pfft, get rid of it.” We want to improve it and make it better.

**MS CHEYNE:** Do you think having a cemetery neighbouring the park might be affecting the numbers of people using the park?

**Ms Carrick:** No. The cemetery, sure, you do not want to be hanging around there at night.

**MS CHEYNE:** Why not?

**Ms Carrick:** Wondering through a cemetery at night time by yourself is not that terrific.

**MS CHEYNE:** They can be lovely places.

**Ms Carrick:** They can be. And that is what I am saying: during the day it is different. You can wander through there and it is like a nice, quiet place, a nice reflective place, and the doors are open. You can wander right through the cemetery. I would think most people do not have a problem with wandering through the cemetery; it is terrific. So I do not think that adversely impacts on their patronage of the park. I just say at night time people might not want to wander through there.

**MS CHEYNE:** I want to test some of the things you said before. You have just described the cemetery as terrific and particularly in the daylight—it is pretty welcoming, it is not a scary place to be. So if it is not off-putting to park goers, it seems not inconsistent that a cemetery does not have to just be thought of a cemetery; it could also be thought of as a park. Something we heard Father Wellspring say last week was that any planning for a future cemetery, not just at Woden, should have facilities for picnics—I do not think he said playgrounds, but why not?—and making it a genuinely lovely place for the community to enjoy. I know you have said you are opposed to expanding, but if it kept those green-space characteristics whilst still expanding, would you be less opposed?

**Ms Carrick:** No. We do not want to expand it because we see that there could be better uses for that site. We respect the cemetery we have and we are happy to try to make the cemetery that we have a bit more active, but we do not want to see it expanded. We need to determine what green areas we have and where community facilities could be. If for one reason or another that site were to be a picnic and open green area, then we could look at other options for the value of it. Perhaps it could be a basketball stadium or an ice skating rink. There is going to be a new ice skating rink; perhaps that could be—

**MS CHEYNE:** But then that is removing green space.

**Ms Carrick:** Yes, it is, but it is keeping it in the hands of a community facility for the

benefit of the community and for activity stuff to do for kids.

**MS CHEYNE:** Is that consistent with your view, Mr Anderson?

**Mr Anderson:** I have not really thought about a basketball stadium. What I was looking at was the green linkage that comes from the playing fields opposite the hospital through the athletic and soccer fields there around and down to Eddison Park. The expansion of the cemetery will cut that, as far as I understand where it is going to expand to, so you would have two blocks of green space with a cemetery in the middle. I have not known a cemetery not to be fenced in latest times, so that would just make a cut there and put it into two areas—one where it is fixed, which is the athletics field and the open area of sports grounds, and the other being the remainder of Eddison Park. I would not like to see that.

**Ms Carrick:** I agree. At the moment, Eddison Park, there is that site that we are talking about and it goes through the athletics area. So there is this whole connection along Yamba Drive opposite the hospital right through. If you extend the cemetery out to Yamba Drive, you are cutting the connectivity. We want to be able to even improve the area. The athletics area does not have very good parking at all and the connectivity is poor. We were talking about the connectivity yesterday. We would like to see that site retained in community hands and have better connectivity through there.

**THE CHAIR:** I want to go in a slightly different direction. You noted that the Woden town centre is about to undergo quite a lot of renewal and a lot more people will be moving into the area. Given that a lot more people are going to live there and the proximity is very good for servicing the community that is coming, are you still comfortable with the idea of not expanding Woden cemetery?

**Ms Carrick:** No, we are comfortable that a cemetery in the south of Canberra somewhere, more probably on the fringes, would still be accessible to the people of Woden and a better use of land than using inner urban land for burials.

**THE CHAIR:** So if an alternative cemetery were established for people in southern Canberra to access, it is possible that there would be a lapse of time between when Woden cemetery might reach capacity and when a new cemetery could come on line. We obviously have the Gungahlin facility which has land supply. Do you think it would be palatable to residents of the south if that situation eventuated to use Gungahlin cemetery in place of not being able to expand in Woden?

**Ms Carrick:** I understand what you are saying, and the situation would have to be managed. But when the Woden cemetery was closed—whatever year it was that it was closed—quite a number of people from the south were buried in the Gungahlin cemetery. We all go over there to the crematorium because it is only the crematorium. I know a lot of people from the south are buried in Gungahlin.

**Mr Anderson:** And Queanbeyan.

**Ms Carrick:** And Queanbeyan. Ideally, you want your loved ones to stay close, but the situation would have to be managed.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned the crematorium, and I would like to focus on that a little bit. We have one crematorium in Canberra and it is located on the north side. Do you feel the wider southern community would benefit from having a crematorium on the southern side of town?

**Ms Carrick:** I personally think it would be good to have a crematorium on the south side, but I think it all comes down to whether it is economically or financially viable to have two. My experience when I go to the crematorium is that it is very busy; it is just one funeral after another and it just churns funerals through. I do not know when it is forecast to reach capacity or if it is at all forecast to reach capacity. Also I think there is an issue with the size of the room for funerals. I have been to ones where it is standing room only and people are out in the car park. I think it needs to be determined whether we need a second crematorium in Canberra with a growing population. If we do, then perhaps it could be located in the south.

**Mr Anderson:** I would have thought that there is a need and requirement for another cemetery in the south. I go back 7½ years when I wrote a submission to a previous inquiry on a cemetery in the south. Nothing has occurred from that; nothing has changed. The population in the ACT has risen considerably and the demand will always be there and grow as we age, particularly in the south. Belconnen is another area where you have this mixed age group of people that came here 40 or 50 years ago and they are reaching their 70s and 80s, like me, and another group that are coming in at a lower level that are much more active and are much younger. There is a regeneration going on. You have got all this happening, and trying to get a handle on it all is difficult at times. But I believe the south badly needs a new cemetery to provide that support for its population.

**MR PARTON:** Your submission, Tom, is quite happy with the location of the proposed new cemetery. I note, Fiona, that the Woden Valley submission has a few question marks, a few problems with the Long Gully Road location.

**Ms Carrick:** My understanding is that when that location was chosen as the preferred site the tip was going to close, and now it is not. I think you might need to have another little look in light of the tip not closing as to whether that site is still the preferred site.

**MR PARTON:** Have you seen Martin Miller's idea?

**Ms Carrick:** Yes, I have.

**MR PARTON:** I know everyone here would have seen it. What do you make of that as an idea in Tuggeranong?

**Ms Carrick:** It depends on—

**MR PARTON:** Many things.

**Ms Carrick:** It depends on whether you want to locate these sorts of facilities more locally in areas. His idea is basically to have burial services, a cemetery, in each

district pretty much. I guess that is up to analysis to determine whether each district is large enough and/or requires its own burial services.

**MR PARTON:** But first and foremost from the Woden Valley perspective, you just do not want them extending the cemetery at Woden?

**Ms Carrick:** That is right. From the Woden Valley Community Council's perspective our view is that we need a commitment to a new cemetery and not the short-term solution of expanding the Woden cemetery.

**THE CHAIR:** Going back to the possibility of a new cemetery in the southern part of Canberra, a number of views have been put forward, and one of the things in our terms of reference is what we should be considering for the needs of the Canberra community. I am interested to know if you have any views. We have spoken about burial and cremation. Are there any practices or rituals, if that is the right word, we should be accommodating within any new facility we might have?

**Ms Carrick:** I think one should look at the experience of cemeteries around Australia and what the needs are. Presumably you need the religious needs met. Where there are burial needs of a group of people, those needs should be met in a cemetery, if we have that population in Canberra that requires catering for a minority group's needs.

**THE CHAIR:** A number of people have raised with us the potential for natural burials to be in a new cemetery. Does either of the councils have a view on what might be considered less traditional?

**Mr Anderson:** From where we sat we did not object to that seven years ago, and I see the same situation now. If that is what people want, I think they ought to be able to have it in the same way as if people want to be buried with a traditional headstone or if people want to be cremated they should have that as well.

**MS CHEYNE:** What about renewable tenure? Particularly noting in your submission and your point earlier about making sure that burial or cremation is accessible for people, particularly economically, the maintenance of cemeteries is very expensive and this, perhaps, could be a way to reduce costs.

**THE CHAIR:** That was actually my next question, too, but from a slightly different perspective.

**Mr Anderson:** I have been there with a family grave, if you like. One of the problems even with that was when we had six people in it and wanted to put a seventh in, there was not room at the inn. So then we had to find another spot. You can put more than one person on that spot, and the people who run the cemeteries will tell you how deep you have got to dig before you can put two or three.

**MS CHEYNE:** It is not just putting a few people in a plot; sometimes it is putting people into the ground and then digging them up 30 years later and exhuming their bones.

**Mr Anderson:** I have no knowledge of the length of time of that, but I would have

thought you would need to be careful for probably two generations past that person.

**THE CHAIR:** My interest in that question is going more to the point that at the moment in Canberra we have burials in perpetuity. What we have seen through this inquiry is some examples, interstate in particular, where you purchase a plot at the cemetery that is for specified period, and one of those options could be in perpetuity. That allows for potentially different pricing structures which provide more access for people. But it is up to the person who is undertaking the plot to decide how long they want to hold it for. They might choose to have a family plot that they can keep renewing and continue to bury additional people in the plot as time permits.

**Mr Anderson:** I do not have a problem if you have the option for perpetuity.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Carrick, you are nodding; do you have a view?

**Ms Carrick:** I agree. I think that all options should be considered and available: the natural burial options and the consideration of perpetuity or a time frame or the family can renew after the time frame or not. I think all those options should be available.

**THE CHAIR:** This question goes to the management of the cemetery. At the moment the crematorium in Canberra is privately run but the cemeteries are run by the ACT cemeteries authority. It is a government body and they are public assets. One of the questions raised in the terms of reference is whether this arrangement is still suitable. Father Wellspring believes cemeteries and burial facilities should be publicly managed. Is there a view you would like to share in that regard?

**Ms Carrick:** I am not aware of the adverse impacts of having them privately run. But perhaps if one had two crematoriums, if they were privately operated at least you would get a bit of competition in the pricing structure.

**THE CHAIR:** Running through potential scenarios, you could have two privately run crematoriums or you could have a publicly run one and a privately run one or you could have two crematoriums run by the same person. Those would be the realistic options. Do you have a view on each of those scenarios?

**Ms Carrick:** I think you have to be careful about having a monopoly so there is competition in the pricing.

**Mr Anderson:** In some ways there is a monopoly now. I had not really thought about that, but a personal view is that I have no problem with a publicly run crematorium at all. Coming back to my first point, that might assist people in lower socioeconomic groups who struggle with the cost of the whole process of burial. The government might be able to provide some support to them to allow that to happen within their means.

**Ms Carrick:** Likewise, we do not have a problem with a publicly operated cemetery or crematorium.

**MS CHEYNE:** Going back to Eddison Park, I appreciate your comments about walking through the cemetery at night, but people do not spend a lot of time in parks

at night either for sometimes similar reasons, perhaps not supernatural ones but more due to safety and lighting and things like that. If there were a guarantee that the east-west link in Eddison Park were not interrupted and if it were in some way made so that the cemetery were a more pleasant place to experience 24/7, would that make it more palatable?

**Mr Anderson:** It would not change my view.

**Ms Carrick:** No. We do not want to expand the cemetery. We see a better use for that land.

**MS CHEYNE:** Something that has been raised with us—including by Father Wellspring—is that we really are running out of time. I appreciate that what you might say next, Mr Anderson, is that there was an inquiry seven years ago, but I cannot comment on that. I understand that by mid-next year on the southern side of Canberra no more burials can be conducted or they will be severely restricted. Noting that it could realistically take years for a new southern memorial park to be established, is it better overall for the community to preserve Eddison Park and have to travel? This will potentially affect people's lives for a long time to come. If they live on the south side and their loved ones are increasingly being buried on the north side, that affects a whole heap of things economically but also perhaps the grieving process when you cannot easily access your loved one. Is that a fair trade-off for not expanding Woden cemetery even a little bit so that in the time it takes for a new southern memorial park to be built residents of the south can have that balance by still accessing their loved ones?

**Mr Anderson:** You have already the situation where if it is a cremation they go to the north anyway. It is very restricted at Woden anyway at the present time. So that situation is with us now. It is not really going to happen next year when the house full sign goes up there; basically the house full sign is up at Woden. I would turn it round the other way: it should be a priority for government and the government ought to be going forward with a proposal to establish it rather than putting it on another 7½-year long-arm list.

**Ms Carrick:** I do not know how long it takes to establish a cemetery. I think it would come down to political will and investment decisions. It does not take long to have an investment decision. I do not know how long it would take to do the earthworks and the roadworks to get into the site, but I would think it could be done fairly quickly if there were the will to do it.

**Mr Anderson:** It might be a good thing for the budget for 2018-19.

**Ms Carrick:** You do not even have to wait for the budget; you can make an investment decision when the Legislative Assembly sits. You do not have to wait for a budget.

**MS CHEYNE:** We are not cabinet ministers.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for your evidence today. *Hansard* of the hearing will be sent to you soon for any edits or corrections. The committee's next public hearing is

scheduled for Wednesday, 18 October 2017. A program for that hearing will be placed on the website before the hearing. Thank you once again.

**The committee adjourned at 3.39 pm.**