Minutes Diamond Bay Precinct Committee meeting Thursday September 1

Chairman and Minute Secretary David Spicer.

Attended by 27 people including Councillors Sally Betts, Leon Goltsman, Miriam Guttman-Jones and Prue Cancian.

No minutes were discussed from previous meetings as this was a single issue meeting.

Agenda was to discuss the damage to the South Head General Cemetery Wall at Burge Street in Vaucluse and proposals to remedy it.

The meeting was addressed by several staff from Waverley Council including Dan Joannides Divisional Manager Technical Services.

He made the following points.

1. There are two large cracks/failures in the wall caused by root damage from the trees which pose a threat to public safety.
2. He predicts another collapse or possibly two in the next couple of years.
3. The trees have taken over a number of gravesites which the council has an obligation to protect.
4. A proposal put forward by Ron Nothman to build a new retaining wall to give the tree roots more space would cost ( according to the Council officer but not endorsed by Ron Nothman ) $4000 per square metre – totalling in excess of $1,000,000. He said it was not viable because within 5 years the same problem would re-occur with the new wall.
5. The Council Department’s preferred remedy is to remove 16 trees in stages – replacing them with new mature trees (2 metres high) planted on the footpath to provide a screen into the future. Repair wall as needed. Total cost $400,000.

Many residents at the meeting voiced strong opposition to this proposal. I summarise their main points as follows.

1. The Trees are more important than the wall.
2. You would not kill a person who had 50 years to live why do this to a tree.
3. Impact on Bird life is not acceptable.
4. Loss of screening of graveyard would impact on property values.

There was further discussion. It was established that the tree’s roots could have a diameter of 90 centimetres and there was debate about the impact of removing the trees on subsidence to grave plots. There was also debate about whether the trees were considered heritage items. Different views were put forward. Some suggest they were planted by residents 50 years ago – others referred to anecdotal reports of council staff planting them. Council officers argued that the trees do not have heritage protection.

An alternative option prepared by Joe Tweg was presented to the meeting. This proposed dividing the wall into essential and non essential sections. Survey the Tree roots and trunk. Dismantle rock wall in sections and upgrade footings where appropriate. Landscape to enhance streetscape.

The following motion was passed.

“This Precinct calls on Waverley Council to investigate alternatives to the current plan to remedy the wall collapse on Burge Street and protect grave plots.

These alternatives include.

1. Balanced pruning of branches and roots.
2. Allow the tree roots to grow out of the wall and cover them with landscaping.
3. Upgrade the footing as per the plan put forward by Joe Tweg

With the aim of saving all the trees. ”

Final Amended motion was moved by Christophe Bailhache .Seconded by Joe Murphy. Passed by 14 votes to 5.

(The original motion moved by David Spicer stated ‘with the aim of saving as many trees as possible’ – was amended by Christophe Bailhache – to the motion passed above)

A further motion was passed.

“Council provide detailed costings of the five year impact of the preferred option on root decay and soil subsidence.”

Passed 16 – nil. Moved by Throshni Naidoo. Seconded by Jason Juna-Ross.

Meeting Closed at 9.15pm.