

September 21st 2007

General Manager
Blue Mountains City Council
Locked Bag 1005
KATOOMBA NSW 2780

Via email: council@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Pinyon

Re: Springwood Town Centre Project – Option Report Management File F00241

The Springwood Neighbourhood Centre Co-Operative Ltd (“SNCC”) Management and Board are opposed to the redevelopment of Springwood Town Centre as outlined in the Options Report of July 2007.

SNCC’s position is based on the following concerns and objections.

1. There is insufficient transparency in the decision making process that has resulted in the call for an EoI for the redevelopment of the Springwood Town Centre. According to the Options Report, the EoI and town centre revitalisation concept was instigated following concerns raised by Councillors regarding “depressed levels of retailing in Springwood Town Centre”.

No evidence has been provided to the community by the BMCC, to show that the introduction of a multi-national retail concern into Springwood would be of benefit to the community in either the short or the long term. Experiences within Australia and internationally suggest the contrary: that village atmosphere, tourism potential, and social amenities are negatively affected and that commercial interests not supported by the community, ultimately fail. Two examples of failures follow:

- External access has been closed off to the patrons of public libraries relocated into shopping centres at Warrawong and Randwick. The shopping centre owners have dictated that library patrons must enter the library through the shopping centre, whether they want to or not. The libraries have been adversely affected by the atmosphere and noise of the shopping centre complex and are not conducive to quiet contemplation.
- Controversy surrounds the Woolworths development at Maleny, QLD, where the thriving local economic, social and cultural core of the community, based on arts production, arts and eco-tourism, was severely impacted by this development. So angry are residents that they have begun to fight back, returning all unsolicited advertising material from Woolworths to the company’s reply paid address. This has resulted in more than 90,000 flyers being mailed back in the past year costing Woolworths over \$50,000. Other community actions, including boycotting, have been undertaken at great expense to the company.

2. Whilst a “full social and cultural assessment, including a comprehensive assessment of the existing and future social and cultural needs of the community” is recommended in the Options Report, BMCC plans to complete this assessment after an Eol has been called and responses are received.

One of the stated objectives of the Springwood Town Centre project is:

- *To maintain and enhance the community facilities and services currently offered within the Town Centre*

How will this objective be achieved given the Eol process will be completed before an assessment of the current and future social and cultural needs of Springwood and lower Mountains communities has been completed?

Further, how will the social and cultural needs of the community be explained to potential developers without the findings of this assessment? Surely the absence of this information could mislead potential developers about community expectations around the provision of community services and facilities.

3. SNCC does not support the sale of community land to private developers. Community owned land has greater power than any commercial-community partnership agreement. Agreements can, and are, frequently changed. If community ownership of land is extinguished, community control and influence go with it.

Should the use of community land be required to meet possible redevelopment needs, SNCC would only support the leasing of community land for such purposes.

4. SNCC does not believe there has been sufficient community consultation on the Springwood Town Centre Revitalisation project. The first consultation on March 29th 2007 was a stakeholder session, by invitation only and the second consultation on August 25th 2007 presented pre-determined options to those in attendance.

Community feedback received by the SNCC has been consistent in its opposition to the proposed Springwood Town Centre redevelopment. The general consensus is that:

- a) the Springwood community has not been consulted on whether or not there is even a need for redevelopment. The community has been presented with a limited Options Report that favours one outcome and this is unacceptable to the community.
- b) the Springwood community favours the continuation and possible extension of a cultural precinct within the Springwood village. This area would comprise the Civic Centre, the public library, the SNC, Braemar Gallery, outdoor performance space and Senior Citizens Club. The Options Report does not promote this concept.

- c) the Springwood community does not support either retailers or private developers ultimately determining the type and range of community facilities that will be made available to them. The community believes that the BMCC must retain ownership and management of community facilities.
- d) the EoI process appears rushed and the reason for the speed of this process has not been articulated to the community. The community is concerned that a hastily managed process could result in a fractured community outcome, as is the case in Lawson.

The SNCC plays a vital role in the Springwood and the lower Mountains communities. SNCC provides a range of services, programs and facilities that are designed to meet known community needs and to help build cohesive and caring communities. Whilst SNCC's existing facilities do not fully meet its current and future needs and the SNCC would welcome a new neighbourhood centre, SNCC's Management and Board does not believe the redevelopment proposal as presented in the Option Report of July 2007 is in the long term interests of Springwood and surrounding villages.

Members, staff and management of SNCC are not opposed to change per se, or to planning and redevelopment that ensures the economic health of the Springwood town and environs. We are, however, opposed to redevelopment that privileges commercial concerns over the economic and social wellbeing of the community as a whole.

The community has a right to expect that our elected representatives will support the social, environmental and economic wellbeing of the whole community, not the commercial interests of a multi-national corporation that has no allegiance to, or interest in our community beyond the balance sheet. Our local businesses can only benefit from a triple bottom line approach. There are other ways for the BMCC to ensure its economic viability other than turning to multi-national corporations to absorb or take over public facilities. SNCC would support the Council undertaking a genuine exploration of those possibilities.

Based on the concerns and objections outlined in this latter, SNCC requests that the Springwood Town Centre Revitalisation project be placed on hold until a genuine community consultation takes place and the views of the community are fully explored, discussed and considered.

Yours sincerely,

Ainslie Yardley
On behalf of the SNCC Board

Janet Mays
On behalf of the SNCC Board