

ACT Government dumps GWS Giants-Grocon unsolicited bid for Manuka Oval development

The Canberra Times Megan Doherty 5 August 2016

Just over two months until the ACT election, the Labor Government has dumped the unpopular proposal for the Manuka Oval redevelopment put forward by GWS Giants and developer Grocon.

Instead, a "panel of community representatives" will advise the government on a detailed masterplan for Manuka Oval, according to a statement from Chief Minister Andrew Barr.

Mr Barr said some development at Manuka Oval was necessary to ensure it remained world-standard but the GWS-Grocon proposal had been "outside community expectations".

GWS and Grocon put forward an unsolicited bid for an \$800 million proposal which would have seen land around Manuka Oval developed for a hotel, serviced apartments, retail, residential and office space, also bankrolling an \$80 million to \$100 million upgrade of the oval.

Mr Barr's statement did not spell out that the Government had rejected the unsolicited bid but the Chief Minister was asked if that was indeed the outcome on ABC Radio by Yarralumla resident Marea Fatseas.

"Does that mean that the unsolicited proposal will be knocked back for the moment and the masterplan will be developed?" she said.

Mr Barr responded: "Yes, that's the process from here on in."

Ms Fatseas was praising the work of local residents who had started a petition calling for the unsolicited bid to be rejected, a masterplan put in place and any development of the Manuka Oval precinct be opened to a competitive tender.

Mr Barr responded: "That is what I've undertaken to do".

"The unsolicited bid to redevelop Manuka Oval has prompted a broader community discussion on the future of the venue. The clear message from the community is a desire to be more involved in the future of the oval and its surroundings," the Chief Minister said in his statement.

"The Government will now establish a community panel to help inform a new, detailed masterplan for the Oval and its surrounds. This consultation model has worked successfully on other government projects, such as the Yarralumla Brickworks development.

"The goal is simple: a precinct that preserves the heritage-listed elements and attracts even more world-class sport to Canberra.

"While the scale of the bid from the Greater Western Sydney Giants was outside community expectations, some development at of the oval is necessary to make sure it stays world standard. Any development will need to improve the oval, be high-quality, and sympathetic with its surroundings."

Inner South Canberra Community Council president Gary Kent said he was "absolutely delighted" by the news that the Grocon-GWS Giants proposal was dead.

"We had very substantial concerns about the impact on the Manuka Oval precinct and very concerned about the unsolicited bid process itself," he said.

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"We believe the oval and the precinct should be kept separate. We are very pleased that there will be community consultation arrangements and hope they are as effective as those that were put in place for the Yarralumla brickworks development.

"We simply believe nothing should happen on the Manuka Oval site without a masterplan owned by the community. It's a special place that needs to be preserved."

Mr Barr said the panel would be established through an Expressions of Interest process, be "demographically representative of the Canberra community, and include members from across the community reflecting the Manuka oval's importance as a Canberra icon".

"Sporting groups will be represented, because it is important that any work at the oval improves it as a sporting venue," he said.

"Appropriate development of the precinct surrounding the oval will improve the match-day experience and help fund the much-needed improvements within the ground – including media and broadcast facilities, and improved crowd amenity to allow Manuka Oval to grow into being a truly world-class boutique sporting venue."

The masterplanning process will include parking and how the oval could be better connected with Manuka, Kingston, the Foreshore and Telopea Park.

Any future development will be through a competitive process, which GWS will be welcome to be part of.

The Panel will have their first meeting by the end of this year, with a view to a Territory Plan Variation being initiated by late 2017. An EOI for panel membership will be advertised within the next six weeks.