

Letter to editor 17.2.20

Dear Editor

Re: both hard copy and online coverage of Kilkivan aged care issue in Gympie Times Sat., Feb. 15, 2020

The members of Kilkivan & District Community Care Association are bewildered as to why Council continues to dodge the central request here: agree that in principle, with conditions attached, a particular Kilkivan block of land can be used by a community group to develop, in a timely way, an aged care facility for Kilkivan and district.

It seems to us that Council is determined to keep fobbing off the community and is using spurious reasons to justify their inaction. For example, the online coverage of the issue last Saturday included this quote from a "Council spokesman" (whoever that is): "Council is aware of the preferred site for residents; however, any site selection is premature as land will be determined in due course once community needs and the preferred structure and operating model is identified and confirmed."

*By whom?* we ask. Is Council suggesting that *it* will decide what's best for us? Our community members who have been extensively, repeatedly, consulted over two decades about what they want in this matter are tired of repeating themselves at seemingly never-ending rounds of consultation. In the vacuum of inaction by Council on this matter, we decided to do something to help ourselves. For the last 5 months we have consulted a lot of external stakeholders, including Council, to ensure that we approached the process systematically and thoroughly. We have waited until now to put our proposal to the wider community because we were concerned that we would prematurely raise our elderly residents' expectations. Now, just as we want to get going, Council stalls us yet again.

We went to Council last October with a detailed outline of our research and proposal, and at that meeting we were told that Council would get back to us in December. We heard nothing at all from Council! So we wrote the letter discussed at Wednesday's general meeting, asking for an assurance that the land we had approached them about last October would be made available. Our community is rapidly ageing and quite frankly, the time for waiting for this Council to act on this matter is over. The former Kilkivan Shire Council purchased in the mid-1990s this block beside and behind the Kilkivan Catholic Church for the specific purpose of aged care, so we regard that land as rightfully available to Kilkivan and its surrounding districts. It is not as though Gympie Council paid for the block with ratepayer dollars from the whole region! We want Gympie Regional Council to indicate now that they will not continue to stall or block this initiative, will provide the assurance of the land's availability to the project so long as conditions are agreed to, and just act in a supportive manner to assist the community-managed proposal. We can then get on with the next sequences in the project's development. We are not asking Council to pay for anything at this stage – we acknowledge that Council has significant financial constraints, and we intend to ask for State and Federal grant funds to build it. If Council is transparent and accountable, it should immediately explain its obstructive, delaying actions. The draft minutes of last Wednesday's Council meeting do not shed any light on the matter and

instead indicate that councilors unanimously (despite a valiant effort from the Division 6 councillor to discuss the matter in a meaningful way) voted to support a motion for more talking! Council's own report into the matter relied on the community engagement findings in both 2018 and 2019 – how many times do they need to chat to us about this topic? We don't want a one-size-fits-the-whole-region approach – we just want the opportunity to decide when and what our frail/aged population has available in our own district.

Yours sincerely

Rosie Fitzgerald

President, Kilkivan & District Community Care Association.