

SPORTLINK: TURNING A STRATEGY INTO A BUILDING

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Abstract

The City of Whitehorse in 2004 adopted the Recreation Strategy Plan 2004-2009. This Strategy identified that there was a need to provide more facilities for women to play sport particularly netball. A more thorough analysis of sports facilities resulted in a recommendation that an indoor netball/multi-purpose facility be constructed at Hanover Road Vermont South. Council accepted the recommendation and allocated \$8.3million across the 2006/2007, 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 budgets for a multi-purpose indoor sports facility to be constructed.

Community consultation has been a significant component of the project. The multi-purpose nature of the new facility, adjacent community facilities, residents, the wide range of sporting and community groups interested in using facility and the funding from the State Government and the local netball association has required stakeholder input on all aspects of the project.

Stakeholder engagement, funding, project delivery, the role of the architect, asset management principles and environmentally sustainable design, were considered in all aspects of the project.

Delivery of the project raised questions about the merit of using 'on-time' and 'on-budget' as the assessment criteria for the delivery of a successful project. This project has been delivered in a timely manner and within budget but these are not criteria that the stakeholders use in determining the success of the project. The stakeholders are more interested in the way they have been engaged in all parts of the project, the facility being fit for purpose and the level of service and amenity provided to them as users of the facility.

Key Words: Recreation strategy, community consultation, capital works, funding, project management, asset management, environmentally sustainable design.

Introduction

In 2004, the City of Whitehorse adopted the Recreation Strategy Plan 2004-2009. This Strategy identified that there was a need to provide more facilities for women to play sport, particularly netball.

Council committed to undertake an indoor sports facility feasibility study to assess the current provision of indoor court space in the municipality, quantify existing and likely future demand for indoor sports (basketball, badminton, gymnastics, netball, soccer, volleyball) and identify an appropriate strategic approach for the future provision of indoor sports facilities.

Establishing a need for the facility

During 2005, Council in conjunction with Sport and Recreation Victoria engaged Sykes Humphrey Consulting (HSC) to work on the Indoor Sports Facility Feasibility Study. From the community consultation and research undertaken by HSC the following issues were identified in relation to the provision and access to sports facilities in the City of Whitehorse:

- Sport and recreation activities play an important role in the lives of many residents in the municipality.
- A lack of quality indoor netball facilities.
- The need for additional indoor sports facilities to cater for less traditional sports, range of interests, age, gender and abilities.
- The importance of encouraging participation in sport by a broad range of people regardless of age, gender or cultural background.

HSC evaluated many sites across the municipality and recommended that a netball/multi-purpose indoor sports facility be constructed at Hanover Road, Vermont South. This Hanover Road site, abutting the Livingstone Primary School, was, at that time, part owned by Council and the former Department of Education and Training. The site had 12 outdoor netball courts, a constructed 90-space car park, lighting for night time play and was the home of the Whitehorse Netball Association. Unfortunately it provided less than

satisfactory amenities for the netball administrators and players. It was considered that Council could construct four indoor multi-purpose courts, four outdoor netball courts and associated amenities on the Hanover Road site at an estimated cost of \$5 million. Council, along with Livingstone Primary School applied for \$2.5 million from the Victorian State Government's Community Facilities Fund. This application was viewed as being the first of many partnerships between Council and local schools to provide improved recreation facilities to the community.

The Victorian State Government through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development subsequently made an allocation of \$500,000 to Livingstone Primary School for the school to 'buy into' and 'partner' Council in the project. Council and Livingstone Primary School have had a longstanding arrangement and commitment to sharing facilities to the benefit of the community. The school had outgrown its hall and a new multi-purpose indoor sports facility on the Hanover Road site was viewed as being ideal for a wide range of School activities.

Council was satisfied that there was a need for a multi-purpose indoor sports facility as outlined in the HSC report. During discussions held in preparation of the Council 2006/2007 Budget, Councillors committed to funding the construction of the facility. This multi-purpose indoor sports facility would be the first new building constructed by the City of Whitehorse.

Eventually Council allocated \$8.3million across the 2006/2007, 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 budgets for a multi-purpose indoor sports facility to be constructed.

Communicating with stakeholders

The consultation process for the City of Whitehorse Recreation Strategy Plan 2004-2009, the HSC study and Council Officer workshops identified the diversity of stakeholders for the multi-purpose indoor sports facility. It was determined that the project required extensive consultation with all the stakeholders including Councillors, residents, Whitehorse Netball Association, Livingstone Primary School, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Netball Victoria, Vermont South Cricket Club,

Vermont Junior Football Club, Vermont South Shopping Centre, Vermont South Community House, Vermont Library, local indoor soccer, badminton and basketball clubs.

Regular newsletters on the progress of the project and associated matters were distributed to the key stakeholders during the life of the project. These newsletters were supplemented by regular articles in the Council's newspaper, *Whitehorse News*.

Many meetings were held with a subcommittee of the Whitehorse Netball Association to discuss and resolve a wide range of issues, including the design of the facility and where netball would be played while the multi-purpose indoor sports facility was being built.

Workshops were held for potential users of the facility to identify expectations of the level of service to be provided by the facility.

Project delivery

In June 2006, Council confirmed the availability of funds to allow for the completion of the new multi-purpose indoor sports facility in late 2008.

Three Councillors were appointed to a Councillor Reference Group. This group would work with Council Officers to monitor progress and provide feedback to the Council on the delivery of the project.

Project Managers, Davis Langdon were appointed in October 2006 to assist Council Officers to deliver the facility as required by Council.

Cost planners Donald Cant Watts Corke Pty Ltd (DCWC) were appointed in November 2006 to provide independent advice on the funds required to deliver a facility that aligned with Council's vision.

Williams Ross Architects were appointed in March 2007 to design the facility.

At this stage, there was general agreement for a comprehensive design for the facility to be developed and documented. This allowed Council to appoint a builder to construct the facility under the direction of Davis Langdon and Williams Ross Architects.

Along the way Council sought legal advice on the contracts with these consultancies to ensure that there was a clear understanding of the roles, responsibilities and obligations of all parties to deliver Council's vision.

An initial assessment of the project timetable and the broad funding requirements for

delivery of the project identified some challenges.

A planning session was held with Councillors to establish their vision for the new facility. Councillors confirmed that their vision for the facility was to have four indoor multi-purpose courts and four outdoor netball courts. They outlined a desire that the facility include environmentally sustainable design, seating for 3000 spectators, a function centre and associated amenities and car parking.

Other key stakeholders generally supported the Councillor's vision.

This vision would, however, be modified as the concept design was developed and the associated funding requirements identified.

Design development and approval

Building on the consultation work undertaken by Davis Langdon and Williams Ross Architects confirmed the scope of the project with the key stakeholders and sought preliminary project costs from DCWC. DCWC determined \$14 million was required to deliver the facility envisaged by the Councillors. This estimate did not include the cost of providing additional carparking, while the cost associated with providing for 3000 spectators was prohibitive.

A traffic engineering assessment using the Councillor's vision for the facility identified substantial additional car parking would be required and the additional vehicle activity would cause some loss of amenity to the adjacent residential area.

Williams Ross Architects in developing a concept plan for the project provided advice that the site was not large enough to accommodate a facility that catered for the requirements of 3000 spectators.

Council accepted a concept design that featured a level site and comprised four indoor multi-purpose courts, four outdoor netball courts, a meeting room, cafe, administration area and a multi-purpose room to accommodate community activities, including an occasional child care service.

A high-quality model of the concept design was constructed to assist stakeholders to understand what was proposed to be built. The model was put on display in numerous public places and was a major factor in the engagement of the Whitehorse community and understanding the design of the proposed building.

Council acknowledged during the development of the concept design that it would be an architectural challenge for the stadium be designed in a way that was sympathetic to the area. A major challenge for the design was to ensure the facility did not have the appearance of a 'big shed'.

From the time of appointment Williams Ross Architects and supporting consultants continuously consulted with all the stakeholders. There have been many benefits of this high level engagement. All the stakeholders were able to specify their requirements in detail, comment on the design response, ask questions about the approach taken to resolve issues of concern and overall feel part of the decisions made on the design.

All design suggestions and options from the stakeholders were examined with consideration given to aesthetics, quality of materials, fit for purpose, level of amenity, sustainability, build ability, cost, maintenance and the overall impact on the project.

Risks

A significant risk to the project was removed when Council reached agreement for the purchase of part of the site from the Department of Education and early Childhood Development. The land titles were consolidated and confirmed the site dimensions.

The existing site conditions were identified as a potential risk. Sewer and stormwater services were located in the middle of the proposed building envelope. The existing 12 asphalt netball courts were constructed on land that had previously been used for agriculture. There was some minor contamination of the site, leading to appropriate rehabilitation works being undertaken.

These site conditions were evaluated and a package of works undertaken incorporating removal of the existing netball courts (including the existing lighting infrastructure), removal of all existing services, construction of new sewer and stormwater services and levelling of the site.

The service and earth works were completed during September to November 2007. These works provided a 'clear' site, removed risks for the builder and ensured a prompt start on construction works.

Games played by the Whitehorse Netball Association had to be relocated onto the adjacent car parks on Council land and a netball court at Livingstone Primary School. This was a less than desirable outcome that required risk works to minimise the risks to the netball players and spectators.

Davis Langdon representatives advised that preparation of detailed shop drawings for the steel work would allow the successful builder to order the necessary steel in December 2007. This would ensure that the steel would be on site as required by the building program in February 2008. This was at a time when steel prices were increasing significantly and supply issues required placement of an early purchase order to achieve the targeted completion date. Council engaged a consultant to prepare the shop drawings in October 2007. The risk of delaying the steel arriving on site had been identified and appropriate action taken.

For a number of reasons, including industry demands and the size of the project, there were delays in steel works commencing and completion of the project was delayed.

Technical appraisal

Williams Ross Architects were required to ensure that the netball, basketball, indoor soccer, volley ball and badminton courts were all designed in accordance with the requirements specified by the various sports associations and relevant Australian Standards.

The interpretation of the Netball Victoria guidelines for netball courts presented some substantial challenges in the final stages of the project. Consultation with the sports associations and adherence to the court design criteria was always an essential requirement of the design work undertaken by Williams Ross Architects. In hindsight, the Netball Victoria guidelines should have been clarified and the interpretation of the design conclusively endorsed by Netball Victoria. For example, to achieve the designated 3.05 metre 'clear zone' requires, in practice, about 5 metres around the outside of the court to provide for spectators.

Tender

Project manager Davis Langdon, cost planners DCWC, service and earthworks contractor Simpson Construction Company,

Williams Ross Architects and the builder Behmer and Wright Pty Ltd were all appointed following an 'expression of interest' and tender process. Price was important but relevant experience to undertake the work, complete the works within the project timetable, quality of work (including processes) and commitment to occupational health and safety and equal opportunity were given weighting in the assessment of the submitted tenders for the works.

The obligations of Council were comprehensively documented in the relevant contract documents to each of the successful tenders. Over and above the contractual obligations there was a genuine commitment by all parties to produce a quality facility that would deliver a high level of service to the users and the Whitehorse community. The importance of this common goal should not be underestimated.

Landscaping of the site was undertaken by Council's ParksWide Department using day labour and competitively tendered sub contractors. The works were undertaken, to what is regarded as an extremely high standard, during extreme weather conditions in late January/early February 2009. Today the landscaping is maintained by ParksWide staff. The staff 'ownership' of the works has been a major influence on the landscaping being maintained to a very high standard.

Project completion and handover

The relocation of netball games was an ongoing challenge during the project. It was recognised by Council and the contractors that it would be beneficial to the Whitehorse Netball Association to complete and handover to Council the outdoor netball courts before the stadium and associated works were completed. This early handover of the outdoor courts in October 2008 was a great outcome for the netball community. The netballers had endured difficult playing conditions and many administrative challenges since works began on the site.

Appointment of the centre manager in mid-2008 enabled the development of an operational plan. The centre manager was able to freely access the building that was largely completed in December 2008. Staff were appointed and training commenced in the operation of the facility prior to the handover to Council on January 30, 2009.

Some of the formalities of the handover were challenging. Operational manuals, containing essential information for the staff and Council's Facilities Maintenance Department, would have, in an ideal scenario, arrived well in advance of the formal handover.

Behmer and Wright Pty Ltd continued to undertake numerous minor works following the formal handover. The centre manager and some of the users identified, in the first few months of the facility operating, that these additional works were required to ensure the facility delivered the service required by the users. In July 2009 minor defect, shelving, electrical and acoustic works were undertaken by Behmer and Wright Pty Ltd.

All the contractors played a part in ensuring the building was 'fit for purpose' in an extended handover phase.

A significant piece of work undertaken by the centre manager and his colleagues was the branding of the multi-purpose indoor sports facility. The naming of the facility as Sportlink was a key component of the project being handed over to the community.

Whole of life cost

During recent years Council has committed to improving the understanding of principles of asset management and allocated significant resources to improve the management of its assets. Part of this asset management work has been to identify a 'whole of life' cost of Council assets particularly new facilities such as Sportlink. Annual depreciation, operating and maintenance costs have been identified and a significant renewal project is already envisaged for 2033.

Council understands it needs to provide adequate funding to maintain Sportlink at an appropriate standard to ensure the facility delivers the required level of service.

Environmentally Sustainable Design

Williams Ross Architects engaged Sustainable Built Environment (environmental sustainable design consultants), to provide technical advice on the environmentally sustainable components for the project. Environmentally sustainable features of Sportlink include:

- low consumption lighting system
- solar hot water
- rain-water harvesting system

- use of recycled materials
- efficient thermal building envelope
- active and passive natural ventilation systems
- solar/thermal performance glazing
- natural lighting to the indoor courts
- passive heating and natural light
- low maintenance building materials
- non-vehicle mode of transport to the facility
- waste minimisation
- environmentally sensitive management systems for the operation of the facility.

These design features were complemented by the builder using recycled materials from the project where practicable and minimising building waste.

Conclusion

Sportlink was officially opened on Saturday February 7, 2009 with a great celebration. Council's vision for a multi-purpose indoor sports facility with four indoor courts and four outdoor courts with associated amenities was fulfilled.

While the project was completed four months later than planned, within the revised \$8.3 million budget, most importantly the facility has been constructed to the designated standard ensuring the level of service provided to the users is outstanding.

Sportlink is being used every day for many recreational activities and is addressing the needs identified in Council's Recreation Strategy Plan and the HSC's Indoor Sports Facility Feasibility Study.

Council's challenge is to now present the facility at an appropriate standard to maintain the level of service required by the users and the community

References

- "Recreation Strategy Plan (2004-2009)" Prepared for City of Whitehorse by Stratcorp Consulting Pty Ltd
- "Indoor Sports Facility Feasibility Study" (2005) prepared for City of Whitehorse and Sport and Recreation Victoria by Sykes Humphreys Consulting, in conjunction with SGL Consulting Group, BECE Pty Ltd and ML Design

Biography

Phil is the General Manager Infrastructure at the City of Whitehorse and is responsible for the Capital Works, Parks and City Works Departments. Whilst his career has been predominantly in the engineering area, he has also been the Manager of planning, building, local laws and environmental health departments. Phil was the recipient of the MEF(Vic) 2007 study tour of the United States and England.