

Tenant Consultative Forum (TCF)



Thursday 20 March 2015, 1pm
Community Room, Convent Building

ATTENDEES:

John Di Natale, Mirella Zandegu, Matthew Quick, Roland Harvey, Lisa Dombroski, Rick Matear, Maria Davina-Sirpis, Graham Hardy, Maggie Maguire, Robyn DeVries, Domenic Raco Jnr, Tom Rendell

APOLOGIES:

Sal Cooper & Jo Saunders

Item 1: Updates from previous meetings

Wi-Fi in the Convent Building

Update

Budget pressures, which will be clarified during the Congestion Levy discussion of the meeting have put this project on hold. It is being considered by external funders as a possible partnership option.

Discussion

The ACF now employs a full time Development Manager whose primary role is to source funds for the Convent.

It was suggested that the ACF looks at companies such as Telstra to off-set its fees in exchange for a partnership. The ACF has approached Telstra before but will consider revisiting this.

It is difficult to prioritise Wi-Fi compared to other ACF projects. The priority of any given project depends on its scope, appeal and suitability in relation to the funder it is being pitched to.

It was reiterated that even if Wi-Fi was installed tomorrow, it would only offer a moderate data limit to each tenant. The local Abbotsford infrastructure currently cannot support any more data off the street and any Wi-Fi would have to be patched in via a satellite dish.

Telstra has agreed to bring a fibre optic cable on site based on an agreement with the Sophia Mundi Steiner School. More details to come but this may extend the possible scope of the Wi-Fi project.

Potential short term alternatives to be considered included a tenant common area with Wi-Fi where more extensive download requirements such as uploading video media may be possible.

Leasing Policy

Update

To date, the ACF has not received any feedback from the tenant community on the policy. The ACF will present a draft of the new Policy to the tenant community before it is ratified in the second half of this year.

Item 2: Congestion Levy

Purpose: To provide an update to the tenant community and an opportunity for discussions about the Congestion Levy.

Background: In late 2013, the ACF became aware that the State Coalition Government would be extending the levy to include the Convent at its eastern most point. The definition of what was a taxable car space was amended to include all off-street car parking including short-term, visitor and weekend parking services; regardless of charge.

The Congestion levy is imposed on each individual car parking space at a rate of \$950 per year. The Convent/Farm car park became liable to pay the levy from 1 January 2015 for approximately \$265,000 per year.

The ACF and CCF had an exemption bill put forward by the Greens party which was supported by the Labor party in May 2014. It was defeated and at that point it was decided to await the outcome of the November Election.

Update: Despite their pre-election support, the Victorian Labor Government has to date stated it will not review our exemption in isolation.

The ACF and CCF have incurred around \$45,000 of debt over January and February 2015.

It was decided that the fees had to be passed on to all car park users, otherwise it could put the whole Convent project at risk. Casual fees were forecast before and adjusted on 1st March 2015 and swipe card agreements were forecast before and will be adjusted on April 1st 2015.

The ACF will monitor the impact of the tax and hopes that no further increases will be necessary in the near future. We will continue to seek an exemption based on our not-for-profit status and our role in providing cultural, educational, social and recreational services to the public.

Discussion The question of having flexible passes was raised. Unfortunately without a full time car park attendant, completely flexible systems are not possible. The ACF will collect information on swipe card users who use five days recurring that are not Mon-Fri with the aim to provide some flexibility.

Providing free car parking for tenants will not avoid the congestion levy. Any off street car space that is used for private commuter parking accrues the levy regardless of the fee.

The likelihood of an exemption is unknown. If there is an exemption, the ACF will review the pricing structure. Whether an exemption applies retroactively is one of many variables that make it difficult to forecast what any changes might be.

Feedback Sought Swipe Card Users are invited to apply for an alternate 5 day pass where the days are different to Mon – Fri but recurring. For example a swipe card that gives access Tues – Sat, every week ongoing.

A three day option may also be developed. Again tenants must have a rigid set of recurring works days for this option to work.

Please contact Tom Rendell by email: trendell@abbotsfordconvent.com.au

Item 3: Other Matters

Lourdes

As far as the ACF knows, The City of Yarra has nothing planned for the Lourdes site. The ACF was looking at converting the site into extra parking (with permission from the City of Yarra) but introduction of the Congestion Levy has deferred this plan.

The impact of the destruction also means that the Lourdes site is unusable for the previous event parking uses.

Security Measures

The ACF acknowledges that over summer this year, there have been more security issues than usual. Incidents requiring emergency services for an increasing transient and traveler group has spiked in recent months.

The closure of the Clarke St Gate and hiring of additional Security Guards were short term measure taken to regain control of the gardens. We plan to have a more sustainable plan in place for next summer. The ACF will contact tenants and request feedback before the next TCF.

Tenant Movements

It was noted that there has been an increase of tenants leaving the Convent. There was a suggestion that the unifying reason for this is the cost of tenancy.

The ACF believes the slight increase in tenants either not renewing leases or in breaking their leases is not due to any one cause. The recent movements are independent decisions made for a number of different reasons by a varied group of tenants.

Noise in Convent Courtyard

Children and large groups of people congregating in the natural amphitheatre of the Convent courtyard disrupts tenants working in Convent building.

The ACF will erect temporary signage within the week and monitor its efficacy.