

Benalla Art Gallery Committee

Minutes

Date: Tuesday 13 April 2021

Venue: Civic Centre (Council Meeting Room)
13 Mair Street, Benalla
and via MS Teams

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Minutes

Chair	Barbara Alexander AO	
Committee	Cr Danny Claridge	Council representative
	Cr Peter Davis	Council representative
	Tim Abdallah	General member
	Brad Hearn	Friends of Benalla Art Gallery representative
	Winsome McCaughey AO	General member
	Bess Nolan-Cook	CEO Tourism North East
	Anna Parle	General member
	Fiona Stephens	General member
	Alice Tallis	General member
In Attendance	Eric Nash	Director Benalla Art Gallery
	Dom Testoni	Chief Executive Officer

The meeting commenced at 5.03 pm

Apologies

Apologies were received from Cr Peter Davis and Bess Nolan-Cook.

Cr Danny Claridge; Fiona Stephens

That the apologies be accepted.

Carried

Discussion

- Barbara Alexander welcomed Anna Parle; noted thanks to former Committee members Suzy Martin and Dennis O’Brien for their contributions.

Action: Eric to draft a Letter of Thanks to be sent to Suzy Martin and Dennis O’Brien

Disclosures of conflict of interest

There were no disclosures of Conflict of Interest presented to the meeting.

Confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting**Cr Danny Claridge; Brad Hearn****That the minutes of the meeting of the Benalla Art Gallery Committee held on 10 December 2020 be confirmed.****Carried****Business****1. Director's report – April 2021**

The Director provided an update on the operations of the Benalla Art Gallery since the previous meeting and a report of progress against the Benalla Art Gallery Strategic Plan.

Fiona Stephens; Winsome McCaughey**That the report be noted.****Carried****2. Exhibition schedule 2020/2021/2022**

The Director presented the 2020/2021/2022 exhibition schedule.

Cr Danny Claridge; Fiona Stephens**That the report be noted.****Carried****3. Acquisition proposal**

The Director presented a recommendation for acquisition of artworks offered by the artist Michael Cook through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program.

Fiona Stephens; Tim Abdallah**That the offer of works by Michael Cook be accepted.****Carried**

4. Benalla Art Gallery future development

The Chair and Chief Executive Officer provided an update on the future development of the Benalla Art Gallery.

Brad Hearn; Anna Parle

That the report be noted.

Carried

Discussion

- Barbara Alexander expressed enthusiasm for \$3m investment, having been involved in lobbying for funding for Gallery works for many years. Stressed importance to see it used wisely and with a view to complementing future aspirational visions for the Gallery's redevelopment.
- Dom Testoni provided update on \$45,000 State Government funding for community consultation. Internally involving Tom Arnold, Community Development Coordinator, and Eric Nash, Director Benalla Art Gallery. A contractor will be appointed to conduct consultation, which will focus largely around what the Gallery can become in terms of increased operational output and community outcomes, and seeking support for expansions of the facility required to achieve those outcomes. Questions have not been designed as yet but the Committee will be used as a reference point in this process. Outcomes of the community consultation are required by the end of June 2021. Expressed that the Gallery and Council needs to go further with its community consultation through this process, into sections of the community underrepresented in previous consultation processes owing to access limitations. Underlined that at a recent meeting the Minister for Creative Industries, Danny Pearson MP, was complementary of the Gallery's current output and future vision and was eager to see the outcome of engagement with the broader community about possible expansion. Engagement will be by limited tender and members of the Committee are welcome to email through suggestions of possible suitable consultants to invite. Dom Testoni also confirmed that through the community consultation funding, Urban Enterprise have now completed the Long Form Treasury document, which allows discussion with multiple tiers of government to seek funding.
- Dom Testoni advised the Committee would likely see a high volume of consultation from the Council in coming weeks, with community engagement on the Council Plan to commence in about three weeks times, occurring in parallel.
- Dom Testoni touched on Winsome McCaughey's presentation of the Feasibility Study and Business Case to the Assembly of Council, and thanked her for her efforts, noting the presentation was well received. Dom distributed a slide from Winsome's presentation (Proposed Increased Space and Technical Inclusions by Each of the 3 Options) while Winsome also made physical copies of the presentation in full available. Dom touched on the presentation's value in covering the critical project elements. Process moving forward is to embed the expansion of the Gallery footprint in the Council Plan, which will not be finalized until October 2021 following consultation, however by virtue of receiving the current State Government grant, the redevelopment of Benalla Art Gallery will be included in the Council Plan.
- Dom Testoni touched on the Committee's request for the Council to adopt a preferred

option from the December 2020 meeting. Dom clarified Council can't formally adopt a preferred option prior to the Council Plan being finalised, however recognising the Committee's strong preference of Option 3, the current \$3 million grant will be used in a manner that delivers against a number of the critical Technical Inclusions of Option 3 which currently present operational limitations, and will be seeking for any plans to be developed and works to be undertaken in a way that could see an aspirational outcome achieved in 'stages'.

- Anna Parle clarified that, if down the track Council formally adopted Option 3 as a preferred Option and some of this had been achieved through the \$3 million grant, the remainder would be sought through additional grants. Dom Testoni confirmed this as the approach, and also referred to Winsome's presentation of the Committee's recommendation; that funding for capital works would be sought through government grants, while a corpus would also need to be raised to cover increase in operational expenditure.
- Winsome McCaughey raised a need for some agreed wording that can be used in discussion with prospective donors in the immediate term, as she is aware of some interest in this regard. Cr Danny Claridge believes terminology such as 'supportive' was the only way Council's position could be framed currently, prior to the community consultation and Council Plan processes being completed. Dom Testoni agreed to draft wording and have checked by Cr Claridge, to provide to Winsome for use by the Trust.
- Winsome McCaughey informed the Committee that the Trust had met informally.
- Dom Testoni discussed current make-up of the Committee and being bound by Terms of Reference, and desire to start a conversation as to what the Committee may need to morph into moving forward to enable autonomy which may be desirable for possible philanthropic supporters. Winsome McCaughey also raised this in her presentation and is undertaking some initial research of possible models, referencing examples in other galleries and other sectors.
- Dom Testoni advised there is still some work to do on the current Trust (Trustees Winsome McCaughey, Marg Richards, Cr Peter Davis), however with some minor tweaks it may be able to remain in its current form and accept funds.
- Dom Testoni provided a more comprehensive update on the \$3 million grant, and expressed how fortunate the Council has been to receive this funding, as earlier expressed by Barbara Alexander. Still awaiting full detail in Funding Agreement, however Dom advised that since the last meeting of the Committee, Council had met with Heritage Victoria in the first week of January to seek advice around possible scope of redevelopment of the Gallery. This certainty is sought as, over the years, different conflicting advice has been provided as to what would be feasible. Heritage Victoria has provided some written advice, abridged below:

"While Heritage Victoria acknowledges current limitations and Council's aspirations for the broader site, we note that any proposed expansion to the Gallery itself would present a challenge in terms of maintaining the integrity of the current built form an potential impact on the setting and context of the place. In this regard, we provide the following general comments to assist you in further considerations of options for the place."

"To begin, in progressing detailed design for an expansion of the gallery, the architectural significance of the place should be a primary consideration, particularly in retaining an understanding of the building 'in the round'. In contemplating new built form, a viewline analysis and impact assessment of key site lines should be

undertaken to inform potential placement of an addition and how it would physically and/or visually impact on the cultural heritage significance of the place.”

“In undertaking a preliminary review of the draft plans prepared by Powell & Glenn in 2016 and the alternative concept options prepared by Kennedy Nolan architects in 2020, it is Heritage Victoria’s preference that the latter form the basis of a more thorough and investigative design process, noting that it is highly unlikely that the Executive Director would support the construction of a large extension as proposed by Powell & Glenn which would overwhelm and dominate the heritage place and obscure key site lines. Heritage Victoria support the benefits identified within the Kennedy Nolan Architects concept plans, particularly in new built form being visually recessive to the heritage place, in maintaining view-lines from the road bridge, opposite banks of Lake Benalla and from within the Botanic Gardens, and in maintaining the original point of entry and utilizing existing fabric for gallery/exhibition space. Put succinctly, it is Heritage Victoria’s view that a scheme which proposed a single story detached pavilion/s with visual and physical separation from the heritage building (rather than a large multi-story addition), would be more acceptable in maintaining the cultural heritage significance of the place, primarily being the integrity of the current built form, an understanding of the place ‘in the round’, and maintaining the current setting and context.”

Brad Hearn queried a couple of definitions from Heritage Victoria such as ‘detached’, and if HV are receptive to a walkway approach. Dom said where appropriate and precedent can be provided, it will still be possible to challenge Heritage Victoria recommendations.

As discussed previously, Dom stressed that in recognizing the \$3 million grant opportunity, whatever is designed needs to be done with a view to the ‘green column’ and ability to be delivered in stages.

- In relation to the \$3 million grant, a piece of land near the airport has been secured for the offsite Collection storage facility and the levels are correct. The facility itself has not been designed yet. Through Eric’s connections these designs will be tested. Given this is an offsite facility and the need and opportunity is evident, the grant will essentially be split in two; with an aim for the Collection store to be delivered by the end of the calendar year, and for works on the Gallery proper to commence by end of October 2022. It is expected a concept design on the \$3 million works could be in the vicinity of \$150,000 from a suitable architect, and could reach \$250,000 - \$300,000 for the complete, ambitious \$10/\$15 million redevelopment. Approximately \$750,000 - \$800,000 of the \$3 million grant is earmarked for construction of the offsite Collection storage.
- Regarding architects, Dom confirmed while this will be a selected tender process, suggestions of suitable firms from the Committee are welcomed, as have already been provided by Heritage consultant Deb Kemp. The challenge for the successful firm will be in creating detailed designs for possible staged delivery, so that detail designs and tender documents are ready for various stages, or the project as a whole, so Council can be responsive to funding opportunities as they may become available.
- Barbara Alexander called for comments or queries from the Committee.
- Fiona Stephens discussed desire for the Committee’s aspirations to be matched by Council in what is put forward to community, and the balance of getting the design right within the timeframe available underlining the importance of engaging the right architect from the beginning of the process.

- Anna Parle queried if a heritage consultant would be involved in reviewing tenders to help eliminate any delays down the track, Dom Testoni confirmed this would be the case.
- Dom Testoni advised that as it is a Council tender process, Council will make the decision on appointment – being of a commercial nature external parties cannot be involved. It was confirmed however that the Committee would be kept informed, and that there will be a ‘Sunset Working Group’, on which the Chair of the Benalla Art Gallery Committee will be invited to represent the committee.
- Winsome McCaughey queried if the Community Asset Committee Terms under the Local Government Act allowed the ‘commercial in confidence’ interpretation to be relaxed so that CEO could provide regular briefing for the group on progress? Dom Testoni confirmed he is happy to provide information in such formats where the information doesn’t contravene the process, i.e. de-identified.
- Winsome McCaughey sought clarification if the \$3 million State Government grant was available owing to the Feasibility Study? Dom Testoni responded that it was a factor, as the Feasibility Study at that stage was at a point of development that he could confidently justify the need and benefits from the investment. Posited ‘Would we have received the funding without the document? Unsure.’ Winsome McCaughey expressed recognition for the history of work by current and past Committee to help achieve that outcome.

Action: CEO to develop wording regarding Council’s support of Gallery redevelopment, to be approved by Cr Danny Claridge, and provided to Winsome McCaughey for use by the Trust.

5. Meeting schedule 2021

The report provided a schedule of meetings for the remainder of 2021.

Proposed meeting dates for the remainder of 2021:

- Tuesday 15 June 5pm
- Tuesday 14 September 5pm
- Tuesday 16 November 5pm

All moved

That the schedule of meetings be accepted.

Carried

Discussion

- Winsome McCaughey raised meetings of sub-committees (currently ‘Exhibitions’, ‘Trustees’, ‘Business Case’). Exhibitions met in late 2020; Trustees have gathered informally; Business Case will morph into something determined by the next staged of the redevelopment process.
- Alice Tallis queried as an operational matter if a resource would be available for

future meetings to minute take; Barbara Alexander said that would be worked through.

- Friends of the Benalla Art Gallery update provided by Brad Hearn. Currently working on two fundraisers – an Ivan Durrant NGV bus trip at \$50 p.p., and a **possible** dinner in August. Three months are remaining in the current membership cycle.
- Barbara Alexander expressed to Committee a preference moving forward for a written report to be included with the papers with an update from the Friends of Benalla Art Gallery; and similarly if any Committee members wish to discuss advocacy initiatives to provide these reports in writing. Winsome McCaughey queried if a written report was similarly desired from the Trustees, which was confirmed.

Action: Eric Nash to develop and propose make up of appropriate sub-committees.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Art Gallery Committee was scheduled for **5pm on Tuesday 15 June 2021.**

The meeting concluded at 6.15pm