

SUSTAINABLE WILLIAMSTOWN RALLY
COMMONWEALTH RESERVE

JUNE 28, 2009

By Hon Joan E Kirner, AM

Thank you Godfrey for the invitation to speak. As a resident of 28 years of Williamstown and as your former local member (my best job ever) – I regard this opportunity to speak as a great honour.

INTRODUCTION

May I first pay my respects to the people of the Kulin nation, past and present and any elders here today. I thank them for their custodianship of this land. All of us here today pledge to maintain that trust and care. It is a particularly appropriate pledge as we stand together today to insist on full community participation in deciding the fate of the Woollen Mills site in Nelson Place, Williamstown.

May I also acknowledge the presence and support of Wade Noonan, MP for Williamstown and Colleen Hartland, Upper House Greens MP.

I also have an apology for his inability to be here today from Steve Bracks, former Premier and local member, Steve like the hundreds here today, considers the Walker/Williams high rise, high density housing proposal – outrageous.

May I also pay my respects to the elders of this wonderful Williamstown Community. Thank you for the work you have done to maintain Williamstown's heritage and to build a community which both respects its heritage and continues to build an ever stronger and more connected community. Our objective as a community and for this campaign is to continue to build connection and sustainability into our future. That objective will be seriously undermined if the Walker-Williams high rise goes ahead as proposed.

As members of this community, old and new, we see Williamstown - not just as a place to live, but as a strong connected and sustainable community. A community that will continue to insist on having our rightful say in shaping our city's future and the future of Victoria.

This is what we've always done and this is what we intend to do in the future.

I've spent a lifetime as a community activist, working with many other community activists trying to convince governments (Local, State and Federal) to work **with** communities not **on** them.

Why? Because I know from experience that the best and most lasting government decisions are those which are made in partnership with those who are affected by those decisions – the community.

Minister Madden, I am here today, I and 500 people in our Williamstown community are here today because we don't want to be patronised and told what is best for us by developers Walker & Williams. Nor do we want government appointed expert panels to decide what is

good for our Williamstown community. Instead we want our community to be part of making that decision. We are confident that we will only get a good decision for the proposed Woollen Mills, Nelson Place site – and I agree it is an excellent site for a sustainable housing development – if we, the Williamstown community, are an integral part of the decision on the site's future use and development.

We, the community of Williamstown would be very happy to direct our community energy away from protests and into working together with Council, government, and a developer who understands community as well as financial interest. We are good at this. Check out our examples like the successful Labor government partnerships between the Cain Government and our community in creating the Williamstown Rifle Range residential development and the adjacent flora and fauna reserve. Or check out the partnership between the Bracks Government and our community in ensuring Point Gellibrand became a protected historic park not a site for medium density housing.

Minister, can I make an offer which I hope you will accept.

Our community wants you to decide now **not** to call this project in. That would waste your and the community's time in managing community protests against the exclusion of the community from important decisions on Williamstown's future. Instead we ask you to endorse a partnership between government, our community, Council and an empathetic developer who will work together on planning and developing what is best for the people of Williamstown and Victoria in terms of the Woollen Mills site.

This Williamstown community knows how to do partnerships with government – but we also know how to fight. Witness our extraordinary effort in “Saving Our Train” from the Kennett Government's closure edict.

MEETING ACTION

Now to get clear what Walker and Williams are proposing for Williamstown. Look to your left and imagine four of these towers – the height equivalent of the existing 12 storey high rise Ministry of Housing tower - built in Nelson Place on our foreshore and next to a heritage precinct. Such a proposal is outrageous and must be opposed. Can I tell Mr Williams clearly on your behalf that the two 1960s Ministry of Housing 12 storey towers we are looking at today are a 1960's Bolte Folly **not** a precedent for future buildings.

Just imagine four of those towers plus low density housing built on a limited area of Williamstown bounded by Ann, Kanavice and Aitken Streets and Nelson Place. The Towers would overshadow the foreshore, the historic park, our historic Tineball Tower. It would also challenge community safety in a hazardous chemicals storage area and community access and egress in an active industrial precinct. Is that what the Williamstown community wants?
[Loud Response – NO!]

I have quite a collection of newspaper cuttings. One of the most recent ones is from the Woollen Mills site developers Ron Walker and Ashley Williams in a recent edition of the Leader, a local Fairfax newspaper. The Fairfax Newspaper Board is chaired by the same Ron Walker.

In this cutting the paper assured us that “Mr Walker has no direct involvement in this project other than a financial interest and will make no comment.”

I saw red when I read those lines. Mr Walker, I want to assure you, on behalf of the people of Williamstown, that we understand fully your financial interest. But we also want you and Minister Madden to know that we represent a broader view of community interest – environmental, economic, social, cultural and heritage. We assure you Mr Madden and Mr Walker that you will get a better result on this site for Williamstown and Victoria if the residential development on this site is built in the community's interest.

CONCLUSION

May I conclude by agreeing with Minister Madden's recent article on planning in the The Age. I have great respect for Justin and his family. And I ask him, on this matter to act according to his words in the article:

"I totally reject the sort of intellectual superiority of some "planning experts" that would dictate an inflexible planning solution. People deserve choice."

Yes, Minister that's exactly what we people of Williamstown want in regard to the outrageous Walker and Williams - Nelson Place, Woollen Mills proposal – we want a choice.

The choice to participate with you, Council, the community and a developer who has more than a financial interest in the project to develop a residential proposal for this site which will benefit the community and the people of Williamstown, the developer and the State government.

To conclude I have two questions for you, the community to answer. I need resounding and clear answers to take to the Minister

Question 1: Do we want the Minister to call this proposal in – thereby excluding the community from the decision on the future of this site?
(Crowd response – loud NO)

Question 2: Are we ready representatives of the Williamstown community if the site is zoned residential but is not called in by the Minister, to work in partnership with our Council, community, State Government and appropriate developers to build a sustainable low density, low rise residential development on the Woollen Mills Site in Williamstown?
(Crowd response – Loud YES)

Thank you.

Finally I ask you to keep your letters supporting a participatory planning process for the Woollen Mills site coming in to Minister Madden through Wade Noonan and Colleen Hartland.

Building a sustainable future for Williamstown is everyone's responsibility.

I rest my case.