

Minutes – Ainslie and Gorman Arts Centres Resident Advisory Group

Meeting #G-21-003-G

Date: 09/12/2021 Venue: Main Hall, Gorman Arts Centre
Start time: 12:04 pm End Time: 1:35 pm
Meeting Chair: Joseph Falsone (Arts Capital)

Residents attending:

Andrew Sikorski
Angela Hannan (Canberra International Music Festival)
Faith Stellmaker (Tributary Projects)
Franki Sparke
Hugh Withycombe
Phoebe Porter
Robin Davidson (Rebus Theatre)
Stuart McMillen
Phoebe O'Leary (Girls Rock)

Arts Capital board/staff attending:

Joseph Falsone, CEO
Adelin Chin, Business Manager
Lachlan Johnson, Strategic Planning Officer
Isabelle Sheppard, Customer Service and Administration Officer

Apologies:

Shane Dobbin (Music for Canberra)
Lucy Alexander
Eric Martin (Arts Capital)

Agenda Item

Item 1 Welcome and apologies

Joseph Falsone (JF) welcomed everyone to the meeting and led a round of introductions beginning with Faith Stellmaker (FST) as they represent Tributary Projects, a new B Block resident.

Item 2 Conflicts of interest (if any)

No conflicts of interest were declared.

Item 3 Resident Suggestions

JF invited the group to share any observations, ideas or questions not listed in the agenda.

Stuart McMillen (SM) noted regular morning tea events with residents and staff were a regular occurrence before the pandemic and suggested that reintroducing these opportunities to mingle would be valuable for a sense of community.

Phoebe O'Leary (PO) joined the meeting.

JF noted lockdowns over the last two years have negatively impacted personal insecurities on social gatherings and sense of community at the centres. He explained this was reason for only inviting residents, Arts Capital Board, A+G staff and regular hirers to the A+G Christmas party.

Franki Sparke (FSP) seconded SM's comments.

JF suggested the resident bulletin could be used to provide profiles to help navigate changes and connection in the community.

Hugh Withycombe (HW) echoed Stuart's sentiments and noted that changes to access brought about by COVID restrictions have made some spaces feel less accessible to residents.

FSP agreed and cited disappointment in lack of public access to the centres.

JF noted that these issues have been heard and have come through strongly in the resident and community surveys, interviews, and research work Ellis Jones undertook in the Centenary Renewal Planning Project. JF explained that locks were changed in line with our ACT Chief Health Officer-approved COVID-Safe Plan, which minimizes the risk of community spread and centre-wide shutdown should a case be present. JF added that there are also safety issues with being completely publicly accessible. With the centenary renovations there are opportunities to address these concerns.

Phoebe Porter (PP) asked what our current policy is regarding keys and being able to access communal spaces in other blocks.

JF reiterated that the currently policy of residents not being able to access other blocks with their own keys ties into the COVID risk management previously mentioned.

HW questioned if the current COVID policy is still relevant given relatively stable situation in the ACT.

JF noted that COVID is listed as an agenda item under his CEO update to the Board and would be discussed in due course.

Toilet block access was discussed, noting:

- toilet block doors must remain locked (given the public nature of the centre, minimising aggressive and unsafe encounters to minors, residents and staff is important)
- Residents have access to their block toilets, as previously noted above in COVID-Safe Plan.
- Acknowledged key system is laborious to track, and the code system provides easier use amongst residents, arts organisation staff and customers/visitors/patrons. Part of the centenary renovations brief is modernising access/security.

This transitioned to door/entry points, where it was discussed that the aging building does not fully meet the needs of accessibility and will be addressed in the centenary renovations.

Adelin Chin (AC) joined the meeting.

Robin Davidson (RD) raised issue with the current booking system and asked if there is a possibility for it to change to an automated system with less repeated signing of agreements.

JF agreed that changing to an automatic system is a possibility with renovations although there is a concern with automation that there may be oversights. JF acknowledged that the current booking system required repetition although it is a system that ensures limited clashes of bookings.

RD enquired if there was scope for short term improvements on the current booking system, noting the need for regular hirers to sign multiple agreements for ongoing bookings.

JF advised process review is currently underway and will continue in the new year.

Item 4 Update from the CEO

JF gave an overview of the COVID safety measures currently in place noting that a meeting to review the current policy is booked in before shutdown. JF noted that last month Access Canberra inspectors audited the centres and our COVID-Safe plan, and the feedback was extremely positive, noting that Arts Capital had gone above and beyond the government expectations. JF cited the policy around mask wearing as an example, noting that there is currently no legal obligation to keep masks on in common areas, however the centres have retained this as policy due to the large amount of school aged children who access the centres who are not vaccinated.

The current COVID situation in Canberra was discussed, noting:

- The value of being prepared for a changing situation with the Omicron variant
- The relatively stable situation in Canberra currently and the value in enjoying freedoms while we can.
- The A+G staff and Arts Capital board are reviewing current metrics to inform decision making and address the diverse range of users and needs across the centres. The review will take into account the differences between the buildings thus the different amounts of risk.
- There are similarities between mask requirements at the centres to those at schools, hospitality and retail settings.
- Gorman Arts Centre has possibly less risk due to separation of buildings and Ainslie Arts Centre has possibly more risk due to the central building entry and activities-
- A+G have not had any encounters with someone who is anti-vaccination, but they are working on a vaccination policy for their own staff.

It is at each resident/organisation's discretion to implement COVID measures in their office.

PP left meeting.

Moving onto emergency training, JF explained that new evacuation maps have been installed at both centres. Last year A+G raised with artsACT that the previous maps were not current and that the previous emergency training was not relevant to the centres. In response, artsACT requested that Arts Capital engage a new provider directly. There has been a positive

response from the new emergency trainer, Ferst, as training was held at Ainslie Arts Centre on Tuesday 7th December. This training remains mandatory for residents.

FSP expressed concerns over the logistical difficulties for residents to be available at specific times for mandatory training and suggested that having emergency training via video would be more accessible.

JF noted that more accessible ways of emergency training are going to be further discussed.

AH left meeting.

Transitioning onto funding updates. JF relayed information from artsACT that indicates a new round of funding applications for arts organisations may open in 2022. Clarity is still being sought on these potential applications, though suggestions have been made that they would cover 4–6-year funding cycle. The ACT Government is currently using the ‘Your Say’ survey to gather information on community attitudes which will shape government decision making and that this survey includes questions around arts funding priorities.

ACT Government rent relief was discussed, noting:

- Application deadline ended on 1 December and that Arts Capital is aware of 5 applications.
- This rent relief was available to Gorman sub-licensees only
- Arts Capital have a COVID hardship policy in place for all residents and AC should be the first point of contact for further information.

JF provided an update on the Centenary Renewal Planning Project, noting the rich insights gathered from the project so far. In the new year Arts Capital will be hosting a series of presentations to play back these insights to residents and provide information around new website, strategic plan and preliminary sketch plans for renovations.

FST left meeting.

Potential Renovation Processes were discussed, noting:

- that renovations are expected to appear in the ACT Government July 2022 budget announcement and that work may start in January 2023.
- There are two potential ways the renovation process could be undertaken.
- The first would involve shutting the entire centre for 12–18-month period and renovating all at once. The second would be to renovate block by block over a longer time period, noting that this could have potential impacts on project budget and cause longer term disruptions. If the first option is undertaken, then everything will have to be removed from studio spaces during this time.
- Arts Capital are working to ensure that there will be as much notice as possible for when renovations are scheduled to start and the impact this will have on residents.
- Arts Capital are currently in discussion with artsACT to assess relocation options for residents.
- At this stage residents need to be aware, and that further information will be provided in the new year.
- The facilities are owned by the ACT government and, due to the government’s chronic lack of maintenance, renovations are the only way to ensure the safety and continued use of the buildings and address the maintenance and access issues raised by residents.
- Despite the lack of any legal obligation to rehouse current residents, Arts Capital are already in conversation with artsACT to look at options for relocating residents during the renovation period.

- Current residents will be the first to be consulted with before the re-opening of the renovated centre and will be given preference over other potential applicants.

RD asked to clarify that existing tenants will be offered space and current sublicence arrangements were discussed, noting:

- Currently all sublicences are on a month-to-month basis with a 30day notice period
- This notice perdio is a two-way street and was taken up by the ACT Writers Centre when they vacated.
- The head licence will end when renovations commence, and this will mean that all sublicence agreements will also have to end.
- Arts Capital will work with residents and the government to facilitate relocation. There will be a presentation of spaces that will be available and then a negotiation process.
- There would be no obligation to return if during renovations, an alternative preferable location was found by a resident.

FSP raised concern that renovations would result in an increase of rent and potential impacts on future rates were discussed noting:

- There is certainly a possibility of increases, but this is by no means an inevitability.
- Future rent rates would largely depend on the outcome of the next key arts organisation funding round.
- A funding increase would open up opportunities to not treat individual artist sub-licences as income and that there would be a total review of processes in due course.
- Successful renovations would increase capacity for revenue from other sources, such as venue hire.

HW questioned whether residents would be provided with an opportunity to contribute directly to the process in the new year and the expected process was discussed, noting:

- Thorough consultation work has already been conducted with various opportunities for residents to contribute, in particular the opportunity to provide detailed written submissions regarding resident needs.
- In the new year there will be a series of meetings where the findings are played back to residents and that they will have a chance to respond and provide further feedback.
- Preliminary designs will also be shared with residents when they are ready and there will be an opportunity to provide feedback. This feedback will be on a higher level that would have implications on artistic and creative disciplines as a whole, and not necessarily in specific detail on preferences of locations.
- The exact timeline of the project is still being negotiated with the government and there will hopefully be more clarity in the new year.

JF concluded the meeting and thanked the residents for attending.