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Founder still waits for approval of commune



Byron Shire councillor Ian Hoskens ponders impending legality on the Namarra-Tya community he helped found at Upper Main Arm 17 years ago.

By RICHARD CONRAD

The Namarra-Tya commune at Upper Main Arm has been going for 17 years. On Tuesday, nine of the 10 Byron Shire councillors will decide whether or not it should be approved.

The odd man out is Cr Ian Hosken, who once again will be left in the dark outside the Mullumbimby chambers during debate on the fate of the commune he helped found long ago in the hills way up west.

About three weeks ago councillors voted six-three to approve the 'multiple occupancy' or MO, the proper name for what once were branded hippie communes.

But Cr Ross Tucker, Cr Bob Higgins and Cr Eric Singh lodged

a rescission motion against that approval for six houses on the 69 hectare property. Reasons include wanting to charge about \$80,000 in developer contributions instead of the \$5,260 figure worked out by council staff.

During debate three weeks ago Cr Bob Higgins challenged his colleagues' impartiality, saying: "One of the applicants is a good mate of the other councillors and no doubt they'll approve it no matter what."

At deputy mayor Cr Jenny Coman's insistence, the mayor Cr Ian Kingston asked Cr Higgins to withdraw his remark.

"I'll withdraw it, otherwise you'll throw me out," Cr Higgins replied.

The protracted and at times

bitter council debate over Namarra-Tya contrasts with the MO's idealistic origins during the 1970s wave of hippie settlement in the North Coast's 'Rainbow Region'.

Namarra-Tya translates from an Aboriginal language as 'Mother Earth'.

"Yeah, I was a hippie I suppose," Cr Hosken says. "I had frizzy curly hair and a bushy beard, but my hair never grew that long."

"There was brown rice but there wasn't that much free love - I was married for 14 years."

"Basically, it was a lot of hard work living here. There was lantana to clear, water systems to install, huts, sheds and then a house to build."

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5.0 STAFF AND COMMUNITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

From the information available there appeared to be no obvious link between the professional development experiences of staff and the school management plan. The school has a professional development committee which appears to have no major role in this regard as funds are distributed on a Faculty basis. Priorities within faculties are then established. Of the \$24,304 allocated for professional development at Casino High School \$17,500 is managed in this way. Despite this allocation to faculties, staff development appears to be individual driven. Two objectives of the school's professional development policy are "to promote sharing of skills within the staff" and to "evaluate" and document planned staff development programs. There was no evidence of any reporting mechanism whereby staff could share their professional development experiences with colleagues and no evaluative data which identifies the outcomes of these experiences.

Discussion

Relevant to this report is the lack of opportunities noted by the staff for professional development in Aboriginal Education. Significant also is the under representation of community participation in professional development activities of the \$13,953 allocated in Semester 1, 1992. The records indicate that there has been a \$25 allocation for parent/community participation. It is not clear as to how parents and community members are made aware of the availability of professional development activities in which they may have a potential interest.

Recommendation

- 5.1 That a significant amount of professional development funds be directed towards improving interaction and effective involvement with the community, with particular regard given to the Aboriginal community.
- 5.2 That all future staff development plans be directly linked towards achieving the objectives of the school's Strategic Management Plan.
- 5.3 That effective and continued input be sought from the community into setting objectives for professional development.
- 5.4 That a special "one off" grant be provided to the school to help stimulate better race relations in the school. These funds be aimed at having Aboriginal and broader community involvement in setting programs within resources allocated.
- 5.5 That specific school resources be allocated to ensure the effective implementation of Aboriginal Studies throughout the school.
- 5.6 That school resources be allocated to host an Aboriginal workshop to develop community skills in "Effectively playing a role in your school". Such a workshop should be convened by the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group in consultation with Department of School Education consultants and the school.
- 5.7 That the school survey all staff members to determine professional development needs and that needs be prioritised and funding distributed to meet those needs.
- 5.8 That the community be surveyed to ascertain its professional development needs.