



Laidley Community Centre Inc.
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1 October, 2021

Ms Corrine McMillan MP
Chair
Community Support and Services Committee
CSSC@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Ms McMillan,

Our organisation has been encouraged by the interest shown by Committee into the issues of social isolation and loneliness. As outlined in our written submission to the inquiry, our community centre sees the impacts of these issues on a daily basis. I was pleased to be able to appear as a witness at the public hearing in Toowoomba and hope that the Committee found my evidence useful in informing their investigations.

Through the course of the public hearings, I have noted the Committee's interest in the development of multi-purpose community hubs as a strategy to address social isolation and loneliness. Our community has identified the need for, and potential benefits of, such a response in the Laidley area. Our organisation has developed an initial scoping report in response to this need and are in the initial phase of contacting key stakeholders in the relevant government departments for support to progress our plan beyond vision to reality. I have attached the report, **The Need for a Purpose-built Community Facility in Laidley**, for the reference of the committee.

The report highlights the level of need for such a facility, including a lack of public transport, lack of place-informed services, and increased risk of loneliness and social isolation, coupled with pockets of deep socio-economic disadvantage (the suburb of Laidley has SEIFA score of 849 placing it in the most disadvantaged 5% nationally).

The report makes reference to the Community Hubs and Partnerships (CHaPs) Program delivered by the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning and the work they have done with Deloitte Access Economics on the social and economic benefits of the CHaPs program. Certainly, indications are that multi-purpose community hubs should be further investigated as possible best-practice models for social infrastructure. It is our submission that, should consideration be given to future trial sites for CHaPs projects, that Laidley be selected as an ideal location.

There currently exists in Laidley the right mix of highly driven and engaged community champions with the long-term energy and aspirations to see a multipurpose community hub through from development to completion and beyond, giving it the best chance of success. I am personally aware of key people in our region across multiple sectors including education, health, disaster response, agriculture and communities, as well as local groups that represent seniors, disability inclusion, arts, environment, mental health, parents and youth, LGBTIQ+ and our indigenous community who all support the development of a community space such as that envisioned in our report. In short, we believe there is community-wide buy-in that would optimise the success of an ambitious project such as this, and achieve positive outcomes in the lives of people in our community who are currently lonely and socially isolated.

To best achieve success, I note that a key element of our submission in relation to this project is that, while the resulting facility may be government-owned, it should remain community-managed (such as occurs at our current venue). This is critical to overcome the stigma (and trauma) that some members of our community associate with institutions. Additionally, given our long history



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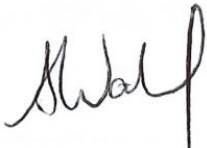
and established trust within the community, we strongly recommend that any future community hub be under our proven stewardship.

In summary, we request that the committee note our recommendation that, as a strategy to address loneliness and social isolation, the next trial site for a multi-purpose, community-managed hub be Laidley, under the stewardship of Laidley Community Centre Inc.

We welcome any suggestions or feedback that any members of the committee may have in relation to our proposal. Please don't hesitate to contact me if we can provide any further information in relation to this matter.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit this additional information for your consideration and look forward to the findings of the inquiry.

Kind regards,



Alana Wahl
Manager

The Need for a Purpose-Built Community Facility in Laidley

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline a case for purpose-built facilities to enable Laidley Community Centre Inc. (LCC) to respond effectively to the changing and growing needs of its community. The current premises have severe limitations and are unsuitable for further expansion. New, purpose-built facilities, on a more suitable site, could enable the delivery of more and better services to the community as well as providing a boost to economic activity in the Laidley district.

Ideally, this paper will provide the impetus for stakeholders to commit to a thorough evaluation of all main options, including more detailed designs and costings, and a detailed business case.

Background

Over thirty years ago, the State Government had the foresight to invest in local Neighbourhood Houses in a variety of locations as locally-managed, community assets to support people coming together to share in activities. Around this time, a dwelling at 13 Mary Street was sold to the Department of Communities and entrusted to the Laidley Shire Community Care Association Inc. to manage. Although the organisation has undergone various name changes, and the building has also undergone some changes and improvements, the basic objectives of the premises as a community asset have remained unchanged. A history of improvements and additions is well-documented but the site has no further potential for growth.

Current Situation

Due to the challenges at the Mary Street premises, LCC has at various times sought additional venues to meet overflow requirements and to increase its profile and capacity. This has led to the service currently operating from three different premises. As mentioned above, its main location is the State-owned facility at 13 Mary Street, Laidley. This location provides reception, office space and most of LCC's service delivery including provision for community to access Centrelink and an undercover rest area/playground. A second location, the Laidley Youth Centre, is a demountable building at 39 William Street, which is leased from the Council by LCC to deliver youth activities, play-based activities for mothers' groups and to partly meet the excess demand in relation to visiting services room hire and meetings of other community groups. The third separate site is the social enterprise café, "Community Grounds," which operates from leased premises at 129 Patrick Street, Laidley.

The main **Mary Street location** suffers from some serious drawbacks:

- It has not been designed specifically for the purposes it needs to serve. Originally a dwelling house, it has been added to and adjusted but constrained by the original structures. It is now an inadequate set of spaces given the nature and scope of LCC's services. The addition of demountable offices provided a temporary solution but, as demand has increased, this stop-gap measure is no longer meeting need.
- It is too small. The largest room comfortably fits only ten people. It does not provide sufficient meeting spaces for the needs of either LCC staff or community groups that may need friendly, safe locations to meet formally or to be a more casual drop-in centre for those who may be feeling isolated or vulnerable. There is inadequate storage, something that has been even more apparent since the Centre became increasingly involved in emergency food distribution and relief.
- It is physically dislocated from the town centre and other community support services, such as doctors, pharmacy, Post Office, banking, etc. The 1.2 kilometre distance from the town centre is

a significant issue and barrier for anyone with mobility issues, with children in tow or for the elderly.

- Paradoxically, given its distance from almost everything else in Laidley and thus the appeal of driving/riding, there is limited safe parking at the centre itself and almost no public transport. Because there are only four parking spaces at the centre itself, clients and staff are required to park on the opposite side of the road on an area which is grassy, often muddy and not adequately maintained for parking purposes. This can lead to an unsafe situation, particularly for parents with prams and seniors with mobility issues. The centre can have many such people attending on any given day. The other alternative is parking in front of the residences of our neighbours, which can create problems with vehicles at times parking across driveways or on verges, or staff and clients being parked in. The parking issues have, at times, been a barrier to us holding community events or workshops at the centre.
- The site and its surrounds are flood prone. This limits its potential usefulness as either an evacuation/collection centre or as an emergency relief distribution centre in the event of flooding (which does unfortunately impact Laidley from time to time). Even during heavy rain events, the site is impacted by localised flooding, particularly overflow of tanks and gutters into the undercover area.

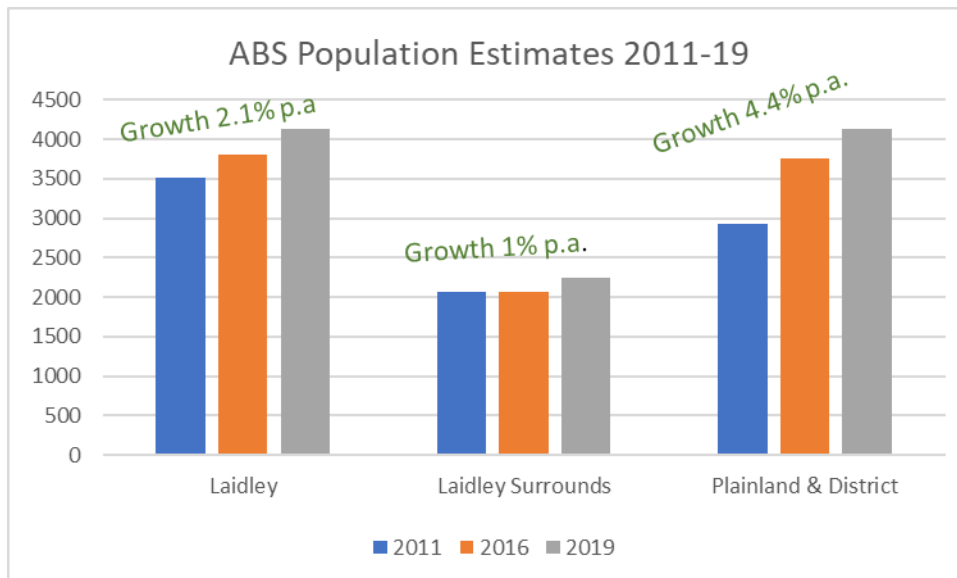
The **Laidley Youth Centre** (William St.) provides a useful location near the sports grounds and town centre of Laidley. This building basically consists of two separate rooms, only one with a kitchenette and toilet, which is problematic and means the space can be hired to only one group at a time. Each room has a maximum capacity of only ten. Whilst the ability to use this facility is appreciated, it is not a particularly welcoming or well-appointed space. It is old, in need of significant maintenance and lacks disability access. For these reasons, Lockyer Valley Regional Council (LVRC) is considering decommissioning the building, partly due to understandable reluctance to upgrade a demountable construction. Should LVRC decide that it will renovate the facility, the changes that would be necessary to make the building more serviceable would include removing the wall between the rooms and installing a moveable partition to allow for larger groups to use the space, replacing the deteriorating wooden ramp, improving privacy and disability access to toilet, and repainting/redecorating). On the other hand, the Youth Centre's benefits include plenty of parking and location in the heart of Laidley. Further, the building backs onto the local sports ground which allows for an integration of services operating at the Youth Centre with local markets and events that regularly occur in Ferrari Park.

The establishment of "**Community Grounds**" **social enterprise café** as an additional venue was a project undertaken, in part, to negate some of the locational challenges of the current main venue at Mary Street and to increase the ability of residents to access our services. This has involved LCC committing to a significant monthly lease expense that is not covered by current revenue. While the café is well-located from the point of view of foot traffic in the heart of Laidley, it is quite small and its layout is not suitable for actual service delivery. Because of a lack of spaces providing privacy, it is limited as a drop-in centre for anyone needing to disclose sensitive matters. While the café currently enables worthwhile hospitality training, even better training could be provided with a more spacious and better-appointed kitchen, which could also lead to more varied café menus, and address a catering gap in our community. Its distance from the main offices also makes it difficult for a supervisor to transition smoothly between matters at the various venues. The café's layout and acoustics also limit its usefulness for potential small-to-medium sized community events such as committee meetings, book signings, music evenings or similar. At least some of these limitations as a social enterprise could be addressed as part of the consideration of new premises for the LCC itself.

Changing Needs of LCC's Communities

(a) Population Growth and Distribution

The community serviced by LCC is changing and growing. Growth will continue, not just in the traditional catchments, but in increasingly urbanised areas such as Plainland.



Laidley's population was estimated as 4141 in 2019 (ABS), having grown by about 2.08% per annum since 2011. Laidley Surrounds¹ had lower growth at about 1% p.a. However, the fast-growing area of Plainland and District lies close to Laidley and, for many purposes, is part of LCC's community. Plainland's population growth rate, at about 4.4% p.a., has been more than double that of Laidley. The identification of Plainland as a growth corridor has led to substantial investment including housing developments, Bunnings, fast food outlets, a private high school, and forecast government infrastructure including a hospital and 1000-bed prison. Such projects and the associated jobs will see even further housing developments in the area in future. A report on future growth over the next 20 to 30 years is being developed to supplement this document.

(b) Growth in Needs

As well as serving a growing population, LCC has observed that support needs of residents are becoming more complex and urgent. It is well documented that the rural communities in the Lockyer region have experienced long running drought, with still no real end in sight.² Water storages are low, irrigation offtakes are minimal and conditions for both grazing and horticulture are extremely difficult. This impacts rural families in many adverse ways. It also affects the prosperity of townsfolk and the viability of their businesses. Bushfires also invaded some local communities and caused extensive damage.

The Laidley community ranks low in general indicators of socio-economic wellbeing, and, particularly when considered at the suburb level, it is apparent there are pockets of extreme disadvantage. Given the ongoing calamity of drought, the lingering impacts of COVID19 and the low level of socio-economic wellbeing in the community, the growth/urgency of needs will only increase.

¹ As designated by LVRC. See Laidley Surrounds Suburb map at <https://profile.id.com.au/lockyer-valley/about?WebID=160>

² The extent of any longer-term beneficial impacts of the March 2021 rainfall cannot yet be properly assessed

Known and predictable areas of increasing need include:

- Acute financial distress, including need for food and emergency relief
- Access to welfare and the need to provide vulnerable residents with additional support navigating Services Australia (formerly Centrelink)
- Housing/homelessness
- Lack of transport, lack of driving licence resulting in lack of access to services and employment
- Educational disadvantage, starting from pre-school
- Health issues, most notably, mental health
- Youth under-employment, antisocial activities, lack of positive engagement and motivation
- Domestic violence
- Need for safe, welcoming places that enable social interaction, learning, self-development.
- Need for community access points with tech support due to increasing requirement of support services to be online, yet connectivity being unaffordable for many residents
- Activities/places that support community recovery after disaster and build community resilience.

LCC is able to provide a more detailed report on these areas of unmet need should it be desirable to further inform the project.

(c) Needs are increasingly complex and multi-dimensional.

The experience of LCC and other community service organisations is that community needs are complex and multi-dimensional. Services and places will increasingly need to be multi-faceted and multi-purpose. This is reflective of the changing needs of society in modern Australia and these factors should be taken into consideration in any future plans for community infrastructure. Some of these changing needs include a community desire to have increased inclusion of members who experience disability and mental health challenges, the increase in ageing residents being cared for at home and being more likely to attend activities in the communities than in residential care facilities, and a change in the nature of volunteering and natural community gathering points. Without pre-empting the vision for new, purpose-built premises, the Ideal LCC premises could be premises that other groups could also utilise. This suggests a “community hub” or “community precinct” rather than premises devoted solely to one organisation.

(d) Needs of our community partners

LCC is aware of the needs of other agencies and organisations in the community where the benefits realised through co-located services as part of purpose-built facilities would support their objectives, and they are highly supportive of the concept. A more detailed report outlining this, including letters of support will be prepared to inform the development of a business case that may follow this report.

The Changing Face of Community Services and Facilities

There is a vast array of different types of facilities and services offered in the community services space. In Queensland, although there are some overlaps, we can discern at least three different models:

- a. Neighbourhood Centres have tended to develop from the original “Neighbourhood House” concept of the 1980s, with a core level of ongoing financial support from the (Queensland) Department of Communities Housing and Digital Economy (DCHDE). In some cases, as for LCC, the premises utilised were originally dwelling houses, and retain much of that look and

feel today.³ However, many of the Centres supported by DCHDE are of more recent construction and were designed and built for purpose as community need grew. An example of this is Leichhardt One Mile Community Centre.⁴

- b. Community Facilities, which can go by a variety of names (including “Community Centres”), are generally owned, managed and supported by local governments. They can be thought of as an extension of the “shire hall,” with a stage for performances, dancefloor, kitchen – in other words, somewhere for the community to gather, socialise and conduct functions (often dances and wedding receptions in the country). Nowadays, they usually incorporate a range of different sized areas – from areas suitable for dance or indoor sport to meeting rooms of different sizes. An example of this is the ageing Laidley Cultural Centre.
- c. “Community Hubs” endeavour to provide a cluster of community services, which are co-located and subject to overall co-ordination and management. The intention is to have a “one-stop shop” for community members to attend and access a variety of services in one place. This allows for a more holistic model of support for residents and also increases integration and collaboration between support agencies, reducing duplication and improving outcomes for clients. Place-based hub-models of service delivery are supported by recent research as an ideal model for communities who are located away from metropolitan centres.⁵ Such a hub ideally provides space for visiting services to deliver support, removing the requirement for clients to travel and thereby overcoming the major barriers to access that can exist in rural communities. An example of a purpose-designed community hub is the Springfield Lakes Community Centre⁶ that includes rooms appropriate for activities such as health checks, counselling, parenting support including child play areas, larger communal areas, centralised reception and common areas, community shed, areas to support fitness and active use, rooms for occasional hire and offices that are tenanted permanently by visiting services. Another positive example is the Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre which includes a social enterprise café and facilities for hospitality and catering to support training and employment in the community.

In addition to the role of such facilities in providing day to day community services, there is a growing awareness of the need for spaces adequate to support disaster recovery. Utilised during disasters as “evacuation centres,” they are often also used to house displaced residents and, in the aftermath, as a centralised point for people to access emergency support services. Rarely are community buildings designed for this sole purpose; rather, such places are sought at the time of the incident depending on requirements. In modern times, such a place should have ample facilities including toilets and showers, kitchen facilities, charging ports and WIFI, air conditioning, space for sleeping quarters, ample parking and spaces for temporary support services to be set up. As a topical example, due to an increase in the frequency of heatwaves in some locations, attention is being drawn to the desirability of community facilities being able to perform an additional role as “heat refuges”.⁷ In the last two years Queensland Families and Communities Association (QFCA) has produced three specific reports outlining the roles of community centres during disaster recovery in relation to bushfire, drought and monsoonal rains.⁸

³ For example, Acacia Ridge Community Support Centre or Burdekin Neighbourhood Centre

⁴ The State also committed to rebuilding/redeveloping the Wilsonton Neighbourhood Centre on its current site and an acquired adjoining site.

⁵ <https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-DOCUMENTS/rr32.pdf>

⁶ <https://springfieldlakescc.org.au/> and <https://hbnc.com.au>

⁷ See example at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/heat-refuges-may-be-one-solution-to-heatwaves>

⁸ <https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/dcdss/community-recovery/qfca-chris-mundy-.pdf>

What is apparent is that all of the above models seek to serve related and overlapping areas of community need. It also suggests that there is no “one size fits all” and that what is appropriate in each case depends on an analysis of community needs and resources. Further, there needs to be flexibility to provide for varying services as needs evolve over time. An exemplar involving convenient or even co-location of various educational, recreational, cultural, health and welfare-oriented services would have a lot going for it. Further, community buildings in a region such as ours should be designed to be able to serve several purposes and achieve the well-researched positive outcomes of a place-based approach.⁹

The Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy has adopted the following definition: *“Place-based approaches are collaborative, long-term approaches to build thriving communities delivered in a defined geographic location. This approach is ideally characterised by partnering and shared design, shared stewardship, and shared accountability for outcomes and impacts. Place-based approaches are often used to respond to complex, interrelated or challenging issues—such as to address social issues impacting those experiencing, or at risk of, disadvantage, or for natural disasters.”*

Certainly, this summary reflects the vision that LCC holds, and the way in which we hope to impact and empower our community through this project.

The Vision

Whilst we hesitate to constrain the possibilities of such a complex being developed for our community, we have included below some early ideas that contribute to such a vision. These include ideas that have been gleaned from various community consultation opportunities over the years. As the project develops, further consultation opportunities should be created to ensure the views of residents are given full consideration.

Core Design Concepts:

- Community owned and managed (through LCC stewardship)
- Well-designed
- Flexible use of space(s)
- Capacity for growth
- Welcoming
- Multi-purpose community facility
- Future-proof, able to meet modern tech expectations
- Meet range of needs from core economic needs, through social interaction, games, relaxation, arts/music/cooking, education in computers, youth activities, parenting, life skills.
- Serve important secondary purpose as disaster recovery hub when needed.

A list of some desirable functional specifications for purpose-built premises for our community is provided as Attachment A. Although it can be regarded as a “wish list” rather than a hard and fast set of specifications, the list provides a further indication of the type of community resource that LCC aspires to be and the range of services and facilities it aspires to offer.

Funding

Given LCC’s limited resources and overall reliance on grant funding, the proposal will rely heavily on support from government. Community fund raising in Laidley could be expected to raise only a very small proportion of total funding required. A funding formula involving State and Federal Government and perhaps LVRC would need to be established.

⁹ <https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/industry-partners/place-based-approaches>

Business Case

If it is considered that the concept has merit, LCC should explore obtaining more modest funding for a further feasibility study and/or business case, where possible leveraging off work already undertaken by government. There has been recent relevant work undertaken by the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning on the Community Hubs and Partnerships Program (CHaPs). This program aims to ensure best practice considerations are given to social infrastructure and refer to a social and economic benefits report commissioned by Deloitte Access Economics¹⁰.

While more location-specific investigation will be necessary, worthy of consideration in the context of this submission, the above report cites examples of multipurpose hubs with co-located services achieving:

- increased service access & referrals
- increased awareness of relevant services.
- improved community networks, cohesion and engagement
- improved opportunities for community, particularly vulnerable populations, to participate in various programs and events.
- observed educational outcomes
- Operational cost savings where collaborative service delivery was evident, enabled by the sharing of resources, spaces, equipment, staff and data.
- Additional revenue generated through the lease of excess space, or the sale of excess land.

The Location

While our familiarity with the community means we have some awareness of potential opportunities, we have deliberately not specified an ideal location at this stage so as not to exclude options that may not currently be known to us. There may be information we are not aware of in relation to the changing plans for and use of public facilities. At this stage, we welcome input and reactions to the general concept from stakeholders across the three levels of government and community organisations.

Next Steps

- Distribution of this report to key stakeholders for feedback and advice regarding strategies to progress the matter.
- Revision of the “case” in the light of this feedback, with a view to obtaining funding for feasibility study/business case
- Multipronged approach to progressing business case, including formal pathways via relevant contract officers, as well as via other strategic opportunities, should they arise.

Concluding Note

The Laidley community has experienced very testing times. It deserves the best service delivery that LCC and community partner organisations can provide. In the longer term, this will require new, purpose-built facilities.

An important side benefit for the community would be the economic and employment benefits of such a project. The project would reward the community’s perseverance and provide a tangible demonstration that better days lie ahead.

¹⁰ <https://chaps-report-03-social-and-economic-benefits-review.pdf> (statedevelopment.qld.gov.au)

ATTACHMENT A

Functional Specifications for a Purpose-built Centre (“Wishlist”)

- Core Spaces:
 - Three substantial community rooms (3 x 40-person capacity) with modern facilities/sound/projection screens, etc.
 - Able to be joined into a large conference space (capacity perhaps 150)
 - Purpose-designed and secure Reception
 - Minimum of 5 back offices/private client meeting rooms for co-located (or outreach) services
 - Minimum of 5 staff offices for Manager, administration and program support staff
 - Staff/visiting services kitchen and meal room
 - Space for welfare support (including privacy to access Services Australia assets)
 - Tech area for computer use, FOPCOP/printing, with WIFI and charging ports
 - Secure storage areas
 - Pantry for food relief.
- Semi-detached spaces:
 - Commercial/training Kitchen. Café facilities
 - Couch/lounges social space, including games /music/crafts
 - Youth games room
 - Play and games equipment storage
 - Showers/toilets/laundry
 - Medical services room (visiting services, breast screen, child health nurse, skin checks)
- External:
 - Child-friendly spaces (fenced playground and gardens) with adjoining parent rooms
 - Community gardens area
 - Undercover picnic/BBQ area
 - Men’s Shed/ Community Recycle-Repair Shed.
 - Large items storage (including evacuation equipment)
 - Minibus parking
 - Easy drop-off/collection area for donated food/goods
 - Bus parking (including blood donation, breast screen, temporary emergency support services during disaster response and recovery).
- General
 - Appropriate security, CCTV, etc
 - Disability access/inclusion considered for all spaces
 - Environmentally-friendly design considerations.