



Speech by

**MIKE REYNOLDS**

**MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE**

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### **COMMUNITY RENEWAL PROGRAM**

**Mr REYNOLDS** (Townsville—ALP) (12.15 p.m.): I would like to inform the Parliament today of the great success of Labor's Community Renewal Program in Townsville, where the older suburb of Garbutt is gaining a fresh look and very much a new sense of pride. As my colleagues on this side of the House would appreciate, community or urban renewal is about the bottom-up revitalisation of older areas through a whole-of-Government strategic approach and strong partnerships with local governments servicing these older areas. That strong partnership is very much encapsulated in Townsville—a partnership between the Beattie Labor Government and the Townsville City Council.

Minister Robert Swarten recently offered a broad-brush statement about the philosophy underpinning community renewal. He said at that time that funds are allocated for renewal activities in targeted areas to raise community esteem, prosperity and self-reliance through tackling the core issues of poverty and disadvantage. Those twin issues of poverty and disadvantage are very much about what the agenda of the Beattie Labor Government in Queensland is all about.

Minister Swarten estimates that the Government will spend \$27m this year on urban renewal projects in communities throughout the State of Queensland. Suburban areas currently being targeted include Garbutt in my electorate of Townsville, Manoora in Cairns, Leichhardt in Ipswich, Inala in Brisbane and the north Albert region encompassing Waterford, Eagleby and Beenleigh. Other areas which have benefited from community renewal moneys include Riverview in Ipswich, where police reported a 60% drop in the local crime rate once the community renewal project began.

What is happening in Garbutt is equally spectacular in that a Police Beat introduced a few months ago is already making a major difference. Many Garbutt residents and businesspeople have told me that Constable Sue on the Garbutt Police Beat is winning a great deal of respect in the community for her determined efforts to increase public safety. Sandra Hague of Ramsay Street wrote to me recently to tell me that residents are saying that they feel safer walking around and more secure in their own homes in the knowledge that a police officer is on the beat. That is great feedback.

In a nutshell, the Community Urban Renewal Program as it is currently devised focuses on areas that do not attract private sector investment and which have generally in the past had poor public facilities. It is common for families in these areas to be under great financial stress and some would say that is a great recipe for crime. All up, the cost of crime in Queensland annually is in excess of \$2 billion, yet traditionally Governments have directed minimal funds to holistic and strategic measures which actually prevent crime occurring in the first place. That is the opposite, of course, to what the Beattie Labor Government is doing in terms of our strategic direction, which we are working on now in regard to a crime prevention strategy for Queensland.

The Goss Government's \$100m initiative to breath life back into these areas in terms of community renewal was thoughtlessly and aimlessly dropped by the coalition Government—the Borbidge coalition Government—which initiated a senseless capital works freeze that saw these urban renewal projects grind to a halt. I know that in Townsville that had a major impact. However, with the election of the Beattie Labor Government, work was soon recommenced.

In essence, Labor has reintroduced the concept of community renewal because we believe in enhancing the quality of life for people living in areas that have been often forgotten by others. We also choose not to ignore the need to increase employment opportunities for residents of these older,

distressed suburbs. The Labor Government understands that such initiatives help ultimately to provide a strong disincentive to criminal activity. In the longer term, building stronger communities benefits all Queensland citizens, because it makes our State safer.

Community renewal is not just about physical improvements. It is also about improving the social amenity and image of an area. This requires coordination of broader initiatives between Government agencies and the community. Community and social planning issues need to be addressed and employment and training initiatives provided. For community or urban renewal to result in optimal gains, there must be ongoing consultation with the community involved—for instance, through regular newsletters—so that residents are informed fully of new developments and have the opportunity to participate and help drive particular projects. That is exactly what has happened in the Garbutt community urban renewal program. There must also be a strategic vision driving the redevelopment of the area that opens the way for positive planning initiatives to make the area a better place for residents. It is important to have community consultation built into the strategic planning process, because residents must have a real say in the future direction of their suburb. After all, they know best the problems of their neighbourhood and they must be part of the solution.

In Garbutt, the community has got right behind the Government's \$3.3m community renewal project. That is the sum that is being spent this year. For instance, a Greening Garbutt group linked to the Garbutt Neighbourhood House recently helped to devise the project description and funding submission for the Mundy Creek nature way, a project that will employ six indigenous workers who will forge a nature path from Garbutt to the sea at Rowes Bay. Support for that project, which is funded jointly by the State Government and the Townsville City Council to the tune of \$160,000, came from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders and organisations, including Tropical Urban Production and Landcare, the Garbutt State School, the Castle Hill Police and Citizens Youth Club, the Townsville Youth Council and the Garbutt Public Tenants Group. Even the kids of Garbutt are getting behind us by designing their own BMX track.

A central focus of community renewal is improving the housing mix of the area. Normally that includes making better provision for seniors. The density of public rental housing may have to be reduced, or the public housing stock upgraded or changed in nature. Perhaps more duplexes, villa units or townhouses may need to be built. That is because the demographics, or the needs of local families, have often changed dramatically in those areas. For example, the population generally is ageing and the area may require better housing for older people, or there may be more people living alone. In Garbutt, Queensland Housing has spent \$2m this financial year refurbishing 54 dwellings for public housing tenants. Six new two-bedroom units are also being constructed in Meenan Street at a cost of \$705,500.

Community renewal also involves upgrading or extending recreation facilities and community meeting points. Better and more useful parks and recreation spaces may be proposed, along with ideas for improvements to shopping centres and the way they relate to surrounding residential areas. Streetscapes are upgraded and improved. Public art projects are initiated to give the area a unique feel. Improvements to parks in Garbutt and the general Meenan Street landscape are costing around \$203,000. A mosaic public art project in Magpie Park, funded as part of the community renewal project, celebrates an aspect of Garbutt's rich social history: the colourful Garbutt Magpies Australian Rules Football Club, which competed in the Townsville competition from the club's foundation in 1955 until it disbanded in the 1980s. In addition, the CWA hall is being upgraded at a cost of \$40,000. Around \$45,000 is being spent on social and recreational infrastructure for youth. Another \$106,000 is being spent on community social infrastructure.

A good urban renewal project takes into account transport and access issues. It provides strategies for better transport and access for people moving through the suburb on foot, bicycle, car or public transport. However, as well as the big ticket items in urban renewal—transport, public housing, improved recreational spaces and employment opportunities—there are many vital, subsidiary initiatives that involve almost every Government department. For instance, the Education Department may be called in to provide anti-violence and anti-bullying education in the local schools, which is essential in efforts to tackle the early signs of crime. Parental support programs may be initiated to help families overcome behavioural problems before they take root. In fact, this financial year \$200,000 is being spent to provide better social services to school communities. The Community Access Schools program is playing a vital part in the Government's crime prevention and urban renewal initiatives. Schools can be effective starting points for addressing social issues, because they provide safe and supportive environments that help kids to deal with life's challenges. In Garbutt, the Education Department is funding a \$50,000 Community Access Schools pilot. As part of community renewal, links may also be established among Queensland Health, the Police Service and community groups to assess the adequacy of substance abuse prevention measures and treatment programs in the local community.

This community urban renewal program is looking strategically at urban and community renewal on a whole-of-Government basis. It is important to be strategic. I commend the coordinator of this

program over the last nine months, Mr Rob Clark, for the excellent job that he has done in the nine-month period that he has been working with Government departments. It has brought about the invigoration of the Garbutt urban renewal program. It is in stark contrast to the days of the capital works freeze under the Borbidge Government. Community or urban renewal is a concept that recognises the importance of a bottom-up revitalisation process through which people can seize opportunities for themselves. It can help distressed communities to regain their pride and sense of purpose. As the State member for Townsville, I take a great deal of pride in this first year of our Garbutt urban renewal program.

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