

Report to Aro Valley Community Centre

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Community Engagement: Background

AVCC has commissioned a broad engagement on the common spaces of and around the Aro Valley Community Centre. This was intended to inform the architect's brief for the redevelopment of the Aro Valley Community Centre.

The engagement process clarified the scope of the work for this phase – the scope included the community facilities, the hall, the garages, the bunker and the space around these buildings. However it was agreed that having a broader understanding of the surrounding spaces would ensure that:

Throughout the engagement process it was communicated that only some of the spaces would be developed in this Phase of physical works and that by understanding the broader context we would ensure that:

- Community appetite for future development was understood and conversations with partners e.g. WCC were started
- Changes that were made, in this phase, took cognisance of the use of the wider space
- Reflection on the identity of the wider place - and how it was expressed in materials / aesthetics informed the redevelopment of the AVCC
- Any on-going social issues generated by or associated with the hall are explored:
 - due to their impact on people
 - the ability of physical changes to improve social issues

- the likelihood of people to place solving social issues and solving physical works in competition with each other i.e. they would become rallying points that slow down the physical development.

Overview of the Process

The process had two phases:

- Understanding the context and generating ideas
- Making decisions with the community and setting priorities for the design brief

To achieve these, we undertook the following steps:

Scoping with AVCC sub committee (September 2016)

This workshop scoped the intent of the sub committee. Specifically we wanted to know who their *community* was and if there was any context that may affect / drive their engagement and the resultant design process. Through this workshop it became clear that wider concerns e.g. pedestrian / cyclist interface and prior engagement processes would be important issues.

Interviews (Oct-Nov 2016)

The next steps were two types of community-based interviews:

- Interviews with people who have / are active within the Aro Valley community – including those who had been involved in earlier engagement on the hall.
- Interviews with everyday users whilst they were using the site – including hall users, users of the outdoor spaces, preschool users and people in transit through the site.

From these interviews a wide range of ideas and perspectives were generated. It became clear that it was vital to the identity of Aro Valley that:

- There was collective and transparent decision making about the site. Momentum was important, but not at the expense *how* decisions were made. The ownership of the physical spaces would be informed by how people felt about the process.
- Any development must respect vulnerable people who use the wider site – either retaining or improving their lives. The welfare of people who were experiencing homelessness was frequently used as an indicator of whether Aro Valley was on the right track / living its identity in its everyday actions.
- There was a repeat of issues raised by the AVCC sub-committee e.g. circulation through and to the site- and successfully managing diverse users on the site.
- There was also strong understanding that the identity of a place is key to the success of all its people. It became clear during this and later stages that this redevelopment will be judged, by people from Aro Valley, not on the appropriateness of the facilities provided but on whether it retains the *mana* of Aro Valley. There is of course an incumbent issue with an engagement process where

that is the focus of the participants i.e. if the community naturally focuses on the identity then they don't talk about facility. Facility enables identity to be fulfilled so without that pragmatic information the identity may, in time, erode the community at Aro Valley. For that reason we propose these are consistently treated as the same – aka don't ask *what do you need to do 'x' activity*, instead ask *what does Aro Valley need to make 'x' activity thrive*. This way Aro Valley comes up with personalised solutions that support the mana of Aro Valley.

- During the engagement we experienced a group of Aro Valley residents who acted as stewards for Aro Valley's mana. Newer members of the community spoke of their motivation to join Aro Valley as being connected to the work of these longer term residents. We recommend reflecting on the role of stewards for Aro Valley in this project.

Festival of Place (Nov 2016)

The Festival of Place was held at Aro Valley Community Centre and the Preschool. The intention of the festival was to provide opportunities to connect to material about Aro Valley that would:

- Contextualise individuals issues and ideas within physical spaces e.g. using maps, models, historical photos as a prompt to extend discussions and explore solutions/issues in detail.
- Provide opportunities to record ideas / preferences / issues /risks etc in their own words e.g. ideas walls, risk registers, conversation cafe.
- Enable community members to discuss Aro with each other and form a shared understanding of the general over the particular interest e.g. risk register, conversation cafe.

Through this event it became clear that:

- The community centre spaces were working well, but there were certain unmet needs. There is a need for further work around priorities as it depended on who attended a workshop as to which was spoken about most strongly.
- There was significant concern and aspiration for retaining Aro's identity through the facility, governance, operations – and the design e.g. circulation/bumping spaces for a diverse community, materiality and aesthetics. This included permissions to design beyond the engagement of design professionals e.g. design by desire, remembrance of past events and the built in flexibility for the on-going renewal of the spaces with temporary interventions e.g. murals.
- There are a range of outstanding well-being and safety issues, which may have physical or social/community development solutions. These are causing serious concern to the neighbours of the site, women who transited the area during darkness and families managing interactions between children and people with mental ill-health. Acknowledging and working towards resolution of these would improve the lives of these people significantly. N.B. resolution that impacts negatively on other vulnerable site user would not be acceptable e.g. people experiencing homelessness.

Extending Reach: additional interviews (Dec-Mar 2016/17)

A review of the process raised a concern for all involved that AVCC's natural reach did not reflect the diversity of the surrounding areas. It was decided to address this by:

- The preparation of an on-line and paper questionnaire, based on the scope and emergent issues raised by the process to date.
- AVCC circulating a paper and on-line questionnaire through out shops, businesses and events in Aro Valley.
- Individuals from AVCC undertaking interviews with people they found harder to reach. This would build a direct sustainable connection between the centre and these people. The questionnaire would also be circulated via new connects made in these communities.
- For AVCC staff to undertake a social media and communication campaign prior to the next workshop – using the material and images produced during the workshops.
- AVCC would be more obvious 'hosts' at future workshops – to enable the community to build a relationship to them.

This intention to undertake interviews revealed that AVCC has very limited capacity. It emphasised the challenge faced by volunteers leading a capital project. This is especially acute as this community has previously had high levels of volunteerism aka the community expects a lot of its leaders. It is worth noting that past community leaders spoke of the fatigue and ill-health caused by their previous volunteerism. This issue is a silent risk to the process and our recommendations will address how this is managed going forward.

The process also started to generate a significant number of repeated ideas / issues / solutions. This indicates that shared understanding and decision making is viable.

Our Place, Our Plan (April 2017)

This workshop was intended to:

- Initiate shared understanding and decision making about the upcoming developments
- Respect and include all contributions to date – made by a far wider community
- Prepare priorities for the brief
- Assess any additional steps needed to bridge to the architect starting their role.

The key outcomes from this process were:

- Identification of specific physical areas and facilities that need development
- Specific issues that remain outstanding and may impact on the process

Recommendations.

1. Design Charrette

A charrette is an intensive planning session where citizens, designers and others collaborate on a design. It provides a forum for ideas and offers the advantage of clear dialogue between a designer and teams of users. We recommend this as the most appropriate next step. This workshop would accelerate the process as the architects can provide a reverse brief from the workshop.

We recommend this due to :

- People know what they need. We also have a clear scope, and a clear sense of specific priority facilities (see Appendix 1)
- The nuance of the identity needs to inform how facilities are provided. The dialogue during a charrette would enable the designers to further grasp the intangible cultural elements, in a way a written brief may not. There will be an emphasis on how do we *'do 'x' the Aro Valley way'*.
- Trust and transparency are valued – so interrogating issues in teams would reflect a good cultural fit for Aro Valley. External technical experts could also provide more informed dialogue, if required.
- It is suggested that people book onto these workshops. An open invitation is important, but also approaching people who have been an advocate for a particular facility.

2. Communication Plan

We recommend AVCC continue to develop clear and consistent communications. We recommend that there a communication plan that is reviewed in AVCC meetings and kept upto date. This plan needs to balance aspirations for reach, with the well-being and time availability of volunteers/ AVCC staff team / design team. For this reason it has become vital to develop an achievable communication plan for the capital project. We believe this would reduce some of the challenges to date with unclear messaging and inconsistent marketing of events. A simple communication plan would lay out:

- Key people / communities – including their areas of interest in the project.
- Key Communication Channels for reaching them and examples of e.g. tone / tactics for using those communication channels e.g. how to use facebook well.
- Key resources that can be used at workshops e.g. diagram and information on governance and roles, scope, report on history to date.
- Key risks
- AVCC staff responsibilities and volunteer responsibilities in communicating – including considering if additional resource is needed.
- N.B. this is separate to mediation which is detailed below.

3. Mediator

We propose that there is a Mediator that works alongside the process. The history of engagement in Aro Valley and its aspiration to include by navigating complex issues with a diverse range of people means that engagement processes and communication channels are not going to suit all, all the time. This will mean that individuals and groups will, at times, feel uncomfortable, confused or concerned. This discomfort will, of course, lead to issues being raised. It may or may not be immediately clear what the underlying issue is. If it is clear then rational negotiation is manageable. If not then mediation is more likely to clear the issue – preventing it escalating, factions forming and fatigue amongst the volunteer leadership team, WCC and architects. Lack of mediation can also sour a good design, in the eyes of a community. Negotiation to gain immediate consent for a design / process may also be a temporary win, unmediated issues can then undermine a process in unpredictable ways.

4. Governance

This engagement issue has raised a number of issues that AVCC were previously unaware of, in particular issues pertaining to public safety on the site. There is also a general request that governance continues to develop through the process. To achieve this we suggest two first steps:

- Governance structure:

The current governance structure is communicated at each workshop and is available on the AVCC website / in the office. Terms of Reference for all committees and sub-committees are available and contacts for specific areas are identified. Developing clear communication and FAQs around this could be done as part of the Communications Planning.

- 2. Public Well-being Forum:

The most consistent social issues raised relate to public well-being on the site. It is likely that not addressing these problems directly will lead to them being raised repeatedly during the design process. This will become frustrating and time consuming for all those involved. Some may have partial / whole spatial solutions, but others will not be achievable within the site and scope of works.

We recommend a cross-disciplinary group is convened to explore these issues. This would include members of the community and local agency staff e.g. police, university representation, advocates for e.g. women and people with poor mental health. Their work would include an initial workshop to ask the community what they should work on first.

This forum could take a number of forms: either be a one-off forum, an on-going group, a series of conversations or a student-led research project. The format needs to reflect the realistic capacity of those involved.