

# More state money for MPC

JOHN HUGHES

Proponents and opponents of the Tully Multi-Purpose Centre will be given a chance to put their case to the community and, more importantly, the Cassowary Coast Regional Council.

The future of the project hangs by a thread with a majority of the new Council stating there were more urgent works to be undertaken by the financially challenged CCRC.

It is hoped that the State Government will provide greater financial support for the MPC, thus relieving the CCRC of some of the burden it inherited from the former Cardwell Shire Council, which while supporting the project had never placed sufficient funding in reserve for the project.

It was acknowledged that while the CSC was capable of funding its part of the project from within its annual budgets if it had continued, the same case did not apply after the amalgamation with the Johnstone Shire Council.

A lengthy meeting was held last Thursday afternoon between the CCRC and the Tully MPC Project Group.

The meeting was also open to the public and, although not advertised, two members of the public and the *Tully Times* were

said. Division 6 Councillor Bill Horsford said he was "something of a sponge" wanting to take in more information before making a decision.

The two Councillors most familiar with the project, Division 1's Ross Sorbello and Division 2's Carmel Silvestro, were more openly supportive of the project but expressed some reservations.

"I know how desperately we need a hall," Cr Sorbello said. "But I am not really happy where it was decided to go with the hall."

"We have tried for a new hall in the past and those attempts have fallen over."

"If we don't get it at the Tully State High School I believe we will never get it. "The big sticking point is there is only a 20-year contract on the hall. "No-one could support that."

Cr Silvestro outlined her long involvement in trying to have a new hall built at Tully and maintained that support but added she did not want to disadvantage the community.

Costing and affordability had to be taken into consideration, she said during her opening speech to the meeting.

25 foolscap pages of notes during the meeting and space prohibits every word being printed. Committee members both stated their positions and arguments in favour of the MPC and at the same time posed questions of the Councillors and Council officers.

There was a deal of repetition in the statements, questions and responses from both the Councillors and committee members, which means concentrating on the key elements put forward.

Committee members present were Karen Hardy and Christine Boric (community representatives), Phillip Spokes (Parents and Citizens Association president), Peter Newton (P and C representative), Robin Sprott (TSHS principal) and Glyn Jones (TSHS deputy principal).

Ms Sprott said the MPC would provide incredible advantages for the entire community.

"It is the way of the future to build (joint facilities) on government land," she said.

"The idea is to build capacity in the community. "While the MPC would be on EQ land it would be part of the community."

"One advantage of it being on EQ land is that it will have higher use. "This is about linking and making use of facilities

that if only ratepayers within the former CSC contributed it would cost \$456 for every rateable property. Cr Silvestro strenuously opposed this, stating that some people owned more than one rateable property and would therefore have to contribute a number of times (in her own case 10 times).

Mrs Boric said it would be unfair if the cost was not spread across the whole of the CCRC. Committee members questioned whether there would be any greater safeguards if a hall was built on Council lands or within the Tully Showgrounds.

A Council officer replied that in the first case government and in the second the showgrounds were reserved for recreation as Crown Land under perpetuity to the community.

"So where the hall is built is of minute consideration," Cr Silvestro said.

"The important issue is about the 20-year contract (after which the facility's ownership and use would be under review)."

Council officers and committee members were of the firm belief the future state government would offer a further extension of the agreement.

Mr Spokes asked how the CCRC earlier in the day could justify voting to

allocate \$1.3 for the Innisfail Hall.

For the first time Cr Nolan entered the debate stating the decision was to provide more office room at the building's Basement level for Council staff and the funds (held in reserve) had already been allocated out of the money given to the former JSC following Cyclone Larry.

"You are asking us to take money out of capital funding of our first Budget," Cr Nolan said.

"Yesterday at El Arish we were told by the people there that they wanted a hall in Tully but not at the high school."

## A CHANGE OF APPROACH

Ms Sprott made a commitment to write a letter to the state government seeking a greater financial contribution from them, even though she believed the government's commitment was capped.

Cr Horsford "stating the obvious" said the only way the high school option would go ahead was for the state government to provide more money.

Cr Ian Rule said he had come to Tully earlier in the day for the CCRC meeting prepared to vote against the \$1.3 million for the Innisfail Hall.

"When the situation was explained I support

it," he said. "But I can't support this (the Tully MPC). "We don't have the money."

Show me where the money is and I will support it."

Mr Spokes said he feared the state government "might think badly of us and might not support funding in the future" if the MPC project was dropped.

"The problem is of their making," Cr Shannon responded.

Those at the meeting increasingly spoke of the need to pursue the state government to provide a larger share of the MPC's costs and to take the whole matter back through community consultation.

Mrs Boric expressed the view, supported by others, that Council should place either advertisements or features with local media fully explaining the position.

There was general agreement among the Councillors that they would vote at their next meeting to extend the "pens down" on the design work by a further 30 days, while a representative for the consultants said if Council made a decision to put a permanent pens down there would be no financial penalty.

Consensus was reached that the Project Group

write the Yes case "subject to vetting" but it would not be acceptable they also write the No case.

Another unspecified individual or group would provide the No case.

Acting Chief Executive Officer said Council staff could take responsibility to get feedback via a survey and to do so quickly.

Although somewhat vague on the exact details a decision was made to, in the words of Cr Shannon, "move forward with all haste".

The *Times* believes the Yes and No cases will appear in the media next week.

Details of a possible survey will also be published, if known.

The *Times* apologises to those hoping for a more thorough and in-depth coverage of last Thursday's meeting.

It also apologises for not placing this story on either page 1 (it would never beat coverage of Anzac Day) or page 3 (not enough space for the story to remain on the one page).

The comments made during the meeting by a member of the public, Dominic Mobbs, have been left out, partly due to space constraints and partly because the *Times* fully expects Mr Mobbs to (forcefully) put his own case next week.

Mayor Bill Shannon said he stood on a platform of open government which was why, for the first time a meeting involving the Project Group was open.

The overwhelming consensus of opinion was that Tully needed a much better public hall but from there severe differences of opinion arose as to the location of the facility, its ownership, its construction cost, who should pay for the construction and who should pay the ongoing repairs and maintenance.

The meeting was the first time that some Councillors had to deal with the issue and the three northern Divisional representatives admitted the project had not figured in their election campaigns.

Councillors were asked to introduce themselves and put their positions, and members of the Project Group were also asked to introduce themselves, as were Council officers and other official representatives.

Division 3 Councillor Jennifer Downs said she was still evaluating the project. Division 4 Councillor Mark Nolan said it would have to sit in a wish list and he foreshadowed there would be projects with higher priority, including the need to fix Innisfail's sewerage problems.

Division 5's Ian Rule said Tully needed a new hall "but in all honesty, why is it on Education Queensland land?"

"We (the CCRC) are cash strapped and infrastructure will get my vote before a new hall," he

Mayor Shannon said he was in favour of the high school having a decent facility, referring to the present one as inferior.

"I have been very outspoken about the process that started five years ago," he said.

"I support giving some (Council) money to the school and for Education Queensland to build their hall.

"The community can then use the school hall on very rare occasions."

Councillor Shannon saw his role as getting the State Government to put in more money for a project that was, at present, beyond the financial means of the CCRC.

He said the MPC was not an issue in Innisfail and in his own estimation the majority of residents were not in favour of its location.

The Mayor renewed a previous call that the State Government were "freeloaders" who needed to contribute more money.

Other options had not been considered and an earlier request to the former mayor of the Cardwell Shire Council to "put everything on the table" was not met.

"I very much need you (the Project Group) to convince me that I am wrong," he said.

"I (as one of seven) won't have a problem making a decision when the time comes."

## COMMITTEE'S RESPONSE

The *Tully Times* took

ties.

"This facility is absolutely marquee."

Mr Spokes said the demise of the project would be a direct result of the Cardwell and Johnstone Shires being amalgamated into the CCRC.

He reiterated use of the facility would not be restricted and its use would be totally negotiable.

Mr Spokes said he could not think of anything worse than the suggestion to revamp the Igloo as an alternative to the school project.

Mr Jones said the hall would be available to the community for the 11 weeks of the year when the school was in recess.

He said proponents of the school option had fought tooth and nail for it and he also questioned the Mayor's claim about a lack of support for the MPC on school grounds.

"I think there is far more support for it than you think," he said.

"Robin and I work there but we also live in the community and we are passionate about this."

Mr Jones also said he did not expect Council to make a decision right then to which Cr Shannon agreed, adding a decision had to be made soon.

Discussion turned to who from within the Casloway Coast Region would contribute to the project.

It was pointed out that the Cardwell Shire Council had not placed any funds in reserve for the project, which meant funding would become a 2008-09 Budget item.

An estimate was given