



Now we're official !

The Strathewen Community Renewal Association Inc. was registered as an incorporated association on 10 July 2009, when Consumer Affairs Victoria approved the constitution and rules of the Association, endorsed at our inaugural meeting held back in May.

This means that our association is now officially established under the *Associations Incorporation Act 1981 (Vic)*. This allows us to acquire funds and undertake activities on behalf of the community, but also requires that we implement a set of good management practices in the interests of all our members and those of the general public.

Our Certificate of Incorporation is now proudly displayed in the new Strathewen Community Centre, and the committee has already taken a number of decisions directed at ensuring that we conduct our affairs properly at all times.

The committee has now met on four occasions in three weeks and has established several sub-committees. If you would like to be involved in one of these groups, working on practical activities on behalf of the community then simply call the convenor to register your interest.

Rebuilding homes

Callum Donoghue is leading this group with Karl Apted and Peter Jenkinson. The group will focus on practical issues of rebuilding including getting started with design, materials, permits, BAL Bushfire Attack Level, maximising our buying power, a register of trades and so on. Our sub-committee will work closely with the St Andrews rebuilding group to maximise

the mutual benefits. Contact Karl Apted on 0418 350 345 if you are interested in helping with the working group, or if you can offer a source of expertise or recommend a reliable, competent, caring tradesperson or design professional.

Supporting each other

Mary Avola, Peter McLennan and Georgina Robertson Stecher have begun working with a number of community members to organise small events where Strathewen people can come together, build morale and support each other. Immediate activities include a social gathering on Thursday evening over a bowl of soup, and a Friday evening watching the footy on a wide screen, both located at the new Strathewen Community Centre on the Park's land. An SMS message will alert you to upcoming events.

The working group is liaising with the DHS and Nillumbik officers to ensure that everyone who needs a hand is receiving whatever they need – let us know directly if you are concerned that anyone is falling through a gap in the current support arrangements.

Anyone interested in joining the working group or wanting to speak with us, please contact Mary Avola on 0418 315 810.

Raising funds

David Brown, Georgina Robertson Stecher and Malcolm Hackett are working on how the association can best secure funds and material support from the numerous organisations that have expressed their desire to directly assist our community.

A great reservoir of goodwill exists towards Strathewen, and we intend to ensure that it is put to work for the community.

We would welcome assistance from anyone with ideas and enthusiasm (in particular marketing expertise) to assist with our campaign ! Contact David Brown on 0408 251 183.

Strathewen Community Centre

We would like to acknowledge the generosity of Faye and Malcolm Park in allowing the new community facility to be located on their property near the bottom of School Ridge Road. Denis Spooner has worked tirelessly liaising with DHS and Nillumbik Council to make this centre a reality since initially stirring the pot with the Premier on talk back radio. The facility was officially opened last week with a visit by Lisa Neville, Minister for Mental Health, Community Services and Senior Victorians. The Strathewen Community Centre will provide us with a valuable social hub and meeting room pending the re-building of more permanent facilities. In the coming week the services which have been located at "the white house" will relocate to the new facility. We would also like to thank Bronwyn and Eric South for the generous use of their property for meetings and as a recovery centre during the past six months.

Generosity from Australand

One of our first tasks as a Committee was for representatives Peter, Mathew Dennis and Malcolm to attend a meeting with officers of Nillumbik Council, Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV), DHS, VBRRA and the building company Australand. Staff from Australand were keen to see their company contribute in a major way to the rebuilding of a fire ravaged community and have identified Strathewen as the recipient of their donation. They are willing to design and construct a facility using their expertise and the materials and labour pledged by their suppliers from across Australia. The value of Australand's contribution could be as high

\$700,000. SRV have also allocated \$100,000 each to the cricket and tennis clubs. They await the outcome of our community consultations before any further decisions are taken. Copies of the concept and costings Australand staff used to gain support from their managers along with a report written by Denis are available at the Community Centre. Please note that the plans in this document were used to arrive at a costing they are not a proposed design.

The future for our community – ensure that your view is heard

The committee wants to ensure that our community shapes its own future. Well intentioned agencies, philanthropic organisations and generous private companies have all expressed their desire to provide assistance in rebuilding our community infrastructure.

The association intends to play a key role in representing the community's wishes so that any facilities that are built actually meet what we see as our needs, and are located and constructed in sympathy with the community's preferences.

We all have our different reasons for living here, and we will all have a view on what Strathewen should be like as a place to live in the future.

The committee believes that it is very important for the **whole** community to contribute to a shared view of what we want Strathewen to be like as a place to live in 2020.

We want to understand:

- what it was about Strathewen, before the fires that made it special to you ?
- what would have made Strathewen a still better place to live ?

- how you would describe a successful outcome for our community in 2020 ?

At present we want to understand what it is that you really **value** about Strathewen as a place to live, so that we can keep this at the forefront of our minds when working to develop proposals for a community infrastructure plan¹, or when representing the community in meetings with various government agencies about matters that have the potential to impact directly on the interests of the community.

You are invited to attend one of a number of workshops that the committee is organising within the next three weeks. These are being arranged for several different venues, in recognition of how widely dispersed we are at present, and details will be advised to you by post, e-mail and SMS this week.

The workshops will be structured so that everyone is able to reflect privately and contribute their ideas without the worry of having to publicly defend their opinions – there are no ‘right’ answers, and you may be pleasantly surprised by how many other people share your hopes and expectations.

Please do your best to attend one of these meetings and ensure that your views on the future for our community are properly reflected.

Community infrastructure

The committee intends to develop proposals for a community infrastructure plan, and in due course these will be the subject of a structured consultation process involving the whole community. Once finalised, such a plan will provide the committee with a very strong foundation for negotiating a successful outcome with all the external parties who are likely to be involved in making decisions about funding and replacing Strathewen’s infrastructure.

Thinking about Building Forum Wednesday 29 July 7.30 – 9.30pm St Andrews Hall

The first co-operative venture between the Strathewen and St Andrews Rebuilding groups will be a forum for people who are in the early stages of thinking about rebuilding. The forum will consist of a short talk about the importance of design and then the opportunity to speak in small round table groups with local specialists in the field including; an architect, experienced builders, surveyor, design draughtsman, sustainable design consultant and civil engineer.

Tool Library & Fencing Trailer

For some months now Strathewen Landcare has been attempting to raise \$10,000 financial support for a fencing trailer which could be used by residents and volunteer groups assisting with the replacement of fences. The trailer would be equipped with a powered steel post driver, electric jack hammer for mega-post strainer assemblies, powered post hole auger, generator, powered wood drill and hand tools. After going through several loops the proposal ended up back with a meeting held at the Hurstbridge Hub and was finally backed by the Diamond Creek Rotary club who are eager to make it happen.

The same meeting considered the Habitat for Humanity and Lions (Whittlesea Branch) donation of a storage container, insurance and upkeep of a \$30,000 tool library to be located in Strathewen and shared with St Andrews. These generous initiatives will get underway in the coming weeks.

Community Services Forum

Last week Georgina, Dennis and Malcolm attended a forum of agencies and non-government groups working in Nillumbik. We listened to presenters from DHS, VBRR, Nillumbik Shire and Nillumbik Community Health and then Ian Flack from the St Andrews Recovery Committee

and Malcolm had an opportunity to address the forum. We came away feeling positive about the agencies efforts to support our communities and their desire to improve the way they co-operate and co-ordinate what they are doing. The Community Services Hub and our Renewal Committee's feedback to the agencies will be important in making this happen. After the presentations we were flooded with offers of help including funding for projects. The text of Malcolm's address is included here so you can know what is being said in the name of the Association.

Address to the Nillumbik Community Services Forum by Malcolm Hackett on behalf of the Strathewen Community Renewal Association 14 July 2009

The nature of the destruction and grief in Strathewen needs to be understood by the agencies and individuals who work with us. Evidence given at the Royal Commission has pretty clearly shown that before, during and after the fire Strathewen (and St Andrews) struggled to find a place in the media and the strategic thinking of government agencies. Many in our community felt (and still do) that the loss of life and devastation at Strathewen was overshadowed by a focus on Kinglake and Marysville. Most of us are used to the question - "Strathewen where's that?" but five months on from the fire it's unforgivable to be asked that by a DHS (Department of Health and Community Services) or NGO (Non Government Organisation) worker. I urge everyone here who hasn't been into Strathewen or St Andrews to take the time to visit so you have a proper understanding of what we have faced and the tasks ahead.

To understand the enormity of the renewal task facing our small community

a good starting point is the bare statistics. In the days following the fire our Landcare group's president recorded 85 homes destroyed out of 130. That's more than 2 in 3 and if homes in the catchment closer to Arthurs Creek and St Andrews are excluded the proportion increases. The primary school, community hall, tennis courts and cricket pavilion were destroyed and the only public infrastructure to survive was the newly erected CFA shed. Twenty seven people died in Strathewen. (and that number rises if you include people who lived close by and had strong social connections with the place). In a population of 200 it is an appalling toll (the highest ratio of any location). Working in and with Strathewen requires understanding and sensitivity.

The Strathewen Renewal Association began with a small gathering of residents in the month after the fire concerned that unless the community was organised and represented it would miss opportunities and suffer from well meaning actions out of sync with our interests and wishes. We also were conscious of the need for an organisation to attract, receive and manage the generous public and commercial philanthropy.

We were acutely aware that council, government agencies, not for profits and a generous public would be confronted by a wide range of perspectives and answers to questions depending on who they consulted. The aim was to establish a recognised community organisation which could speak with authority.

Council Officers (Ben Pollard and Suzi Kerr) assisted with a series of public meetings to outline the proposal to establish a community association. After

acceptance of the idea a steering committee of interested residents began work. It's a testament to the strength of community spirit that thirty residents nominated to join the steering committee and it says something about our desire for inclusion and broad representation that the whole group then went on to draft the terms of reference and constitution for the Renewal Association.

Inclusion and consultation have been the hallmarks of our work to date. Three well-attended community meetings provided a strong foundation for the establishment of the Association. Membership, including voting rights, is open to non-residents who identify strongly with Strathewen; this includes neighbours with strong social connections, past residents and the family members of those who died at Strathewen. Twenty residents nominated for the Committee of twelve and a postal ballot was held over two weeks.

The Renewal Association Committee will hold it's third meeting tonight . We have agreed to meet weekly for the foreseeable future and to join at least one sub-committee which will also meet frequently.

The Committee will focus its initial work on two areas:

- *Representation and Co-ordination: involving much needed liaison with government and other agencies*
- *Community Vision : developing an infrastructure plan with and supported by our community.*

We have established seven sub-committees which will draw on community skills and interests. Remember we need to rebuild virtually all the community and private infrastructure while attempting to hold together the social fabric of a community which is grieving and now quite widely dispersed.

Our sub-committees provide a strong indication of our priorities at this stage:

- *Communications and Engagement : improving information flow and community participation*
- Resident support – wellbeing and building community morale.
- *Fund raising and Grants : channelling financial goodwill toward our community*
- *Disbursement of Funds : developing principles and processes for allocation of funds*
- *Building Facilitation : practical and advocacy support for the rebuilding process*
- *Operations and community maintenance – practical contributions to running our community facilities*
- *Natural resource management - co-ordination of projects and support for landholders.*

We see the Committee as the public voice of Strathewen and the conduit for making decisions about its' renewal. We already see huge need for co-ordination of government, council, and NGO resources and initiatives. Our experience to date shows that decisions will be made on our behalf and that funds will be expended (perhaps unwisely) in our name unless we take a central role. We expect Strathewen to be consulted.

Committee contacts:

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Denis Spooner (Secretary)	0419311603	denis_spooner@hotmail.com

Calender of events:

Tuesday 21 July	SCRA Committee Meeting	Community Centre 7.30pm
Wednesday 22 July	Resident Support & Wellbeing	Eltham at Georgina's 7.30pm
Thursday 23 July	Strathewen Rebuilding Group	Community Centre 7.30pm
Thursday 23 July	Soup Night	Community Centre 6.00pm
Friday 24 July	Footy Night on the big screen	Community Centre 6.30pm
Monday 27 July	Joint Rebuilding Committees	St Andrews 8.00pm
Monday 27 July	Fundraisng Sub-committee	Eltham at Georgina's 7.00pm
Tuesday 28 July	SCRA Committee Meeting	Community Centre 7.30pm
Wednesday 29 July	Thinking About Building Forum	St Andrews Hall 7.30pm-9.30
Saturday 6 August	Big Fun Night	Arthurs Creek Hall 6.00pm

Newsletter compiled by David Brown and Malcolm Hackett