

HUNGARIAN GOLDEN VILLAGE AND CULTURAL CENTRE — RETIREMENT VILLAGE

Grievance

MR P. ABETZ (Southern River) [9.34 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Planning and relates to the seeming inability of the government to make available to the Hungarian Golden Village and Cultural Centre Inc a suitable site for its retirement village project. The Hungarian and Eastern European migrant communities are very aware of the need for appropriate aged-care housing for their senior members, who often revert to their mother tongue in old age. They have wanted to build a retirement village for some years. Representations made to government for over five years to try to secure land for such a project have so far not borne fruit. Perhaps I could give a bit of background for the benefit of members. In 2011 the Hungarian community formed an association, the Hungarian Golden Village and Cultural Centre, for the purpose of establishing a retirement village and cultural centre for persons of Hungarian and Eastern European background. One of the members of the Hungarian community was willing to make a large site available in Wanneroo, but due to their land having been deemed an environmental corridor, the association was informed that the land could not be used for residential development.

The association held consultations with the Department of Housing and was advised that before the government made land available, it would need to present a business case. The association commissioned a very comprehensive feasibility study, which was completed in 2013 and has been provided to the Department of Housing. The study indicates strong demand and viability. Over 80 Hungarian and Eastern European individuals and couples have indicated that they would want to buy into the village in the first phase. The Bethanie Group—the Churches of Christ Care seniors homes organisation—has agreed to project manage the construction of the village. The former CEO of Bethanie, Stephen Becsi, has also offered to provide his expertise for the project. Legal firm Jackson McDonald has agreed to do the legal work around the development pro bono. As the chairperson of the association, Ms Iren Hunyadi, who is a constituent of mine, sought my assistance to help her locate a suitable site after the Department of Housing declined to make available a suitable site identified in the City of Swan. I identified a suitable site in my electorate at 110 Balfour Street, Huntingdale, which is owned by the Western Australian Planning Commission. It is an ideal location, with the 517 bus service passing the property, giving direct access to both Murdoch and Thornlie railway stations. A small shopping centre, which includes a medical practice and pharmacy, is located just 500 metres from the site. The site has sat idle for over a decade after the government purchased it.

The Hungarian Golden Village and Cultural Centre association wanted to initiate a process to purchase the site, but has been told in a letter from the Minister for Planning on 30 September 2014 that —

The environmental remediation of the site is expected to take in the order of 18 months and, consequently, the site will not be available for sale in the short term.

Once the site has been remediated, the Western Australian Planning Commission (WAPC) will be in a position to assess its disposal options, including the sale of the property on the open market. The WAPC is open to conducting negotiations with the Association and will contact the Chair when the remediation process is complete.

The association discovered that the WAPC had commissioned a contamination study report on the site—a former chicken farm—completed by Parsons Brinckerhoff in 2010. The study showed high nutrient levels in the soil, which by now would have been washed away by rainfall, and small pieces of asbestos sheet pieces in the soil where the house stood. The chook sheds did not contain any asbestos building materials; and there are still a few soakwells in the ground.

In my view, the delay to enter into negotiations with the Hungarian Golden Village and Cultural Centre on the grounds that such minor contamination would take 18 months to remediate was an appalling example of a bureaucratic stalling tactic on the part of the WAPC. As the government is keen to sell surplus land, this delay, in my view, is unacceptable. I wrote to the Minister for Lands on 30 March 2015 asking for assistance in facilitating the purchase of the site by the association, as I understood that the department was responsible for selling surplus government land. On 2 June this year I received a reply saying that the land is not available because it is needed for some other government proposal that is yet to go to cabinet but that the department has been instructed to help identify other suitable sites. Despite reminders, nothing has been forthcoming to assist in identifying other potential sites. We took up the matter with the Premier's office and received a letter dated 24 July this year advising that cabinet had decided that the land be transferred to the Housing Authority as part of considerations for the joint state and commonwealth's strategic assessment of the Perth and Peel regions. What troubles me is that we have a government-owned site sitting idle. We identified it as an ideal location for a retirement village, which is a form of high-density housing, and now it seems that the government bodies that have to make decisions on the sale have decided that they want to keep it for their own use. If we identify another site, will that happen again? Until a definite piece of land is made available at a known price the

association is not really in a position to solicit substantial donations to raise the funds or to get interest-free loans. The association members feel that they have been stonewalled by the Department of Housing and the Western Australian Planning Commission. Everyone they have talked to over the years, including the Minister for Seniors and Volunteering and various housing ministers, agrees that the project is a good one. The City of Gosnells has indicated its support for the village and considers the site to be very well suited for that purpose, but it seems that no government department is willing to lift a finger to help make it happen. Minister, the need for this project is becoming more and more urgent. Five years have been wasted and these people are getting older. The type of village planned will save the government millions of dollars over the years as the village design will allow people to stay in their units until the end of life. The association needs an answer. Will the government continue to give it the run-around? If so, it may as well disband, or is the government genuinely interested in facilitating this project, which will not cost the state one cent?

MR J.H.D. DAY (Kalamunda — Minister for Planning) [9.41 am]: I acknowledge the concerns raised by the member for Southern River and I thank him for providing the background regarding the desire for a site to be identified for a retirement village to be constructed for Hungarian and Eastern European migrants. I am aware of the challenges faced by our ageing population; it is a significant issue for the planning portfolio. I also understand that the need for aged-care accommodation is important, particularly in the metropolitan region.

With regard to the property on Balfour Street in Huntingdale, although the government is supportive of the need to provide more public and private aged-care accommodation, it also has to balance other competing priorities for land to meet the needs of a growing population and a growing city. We also need to sell any government-owned land or assets in an open and transparent manner, including offering land for sale to the open market. The decision of cabinet to retain the subject site in Huntingdale rather than sell it and transfer it to the Housing Authority is part of the considerations of the joint state and commonwealth's strategic assessment of the Perth and Peel regions. The strategic assessment is a priority for the government and is part of a broader policy position that will help to shape our city and our housing and infrastructure requirements as we plan for a metropolitan population of 3.5 million people. In short, because the Housing Authority is unable to develop other land that was previously expected to be developed, there is a need to find other land to develop as essentially a trade-off.

As part of its future planning for the site, when the land is returned to the Housing Authority, it may be prepared to discuss the development of a retirement village with the Hungarian Golden Village and Cultural Centre Inc. However, this would need to be considered in conjunction with the Housing Authority's strategies to deliver more affordable housing places and the need to deploy its land assets in the most appropriate way to meet the targets set by government and to reduce the public housing waiting list.

In the identification of other alternative sites, the government asset sales program to reduce state net debt is also a priority, as we just heard from the Minister for Lands. In the event that alternative sites are considered suitable, any sale of government land would need to be properly advertised and marketed so that all groups, including the Hungarian association, have an equal opportunity to acquire the property. I am sure that the Western Australian Planning Commission, the Department of Lands and the Housing Authority will be happy to continue engaging with the association about what opportunities may arise for the land in Huntingdale or other sites that may be of interest. It is also possible that suitable land may become available from the private sector for the association to acquire and develop. However, I note that the association may have some financial constraints in competing for residential-zoned land with other land developers. Another option may be for the association to partner with a private sector retirement or aged-care service provider or developer to jointly deliver the desired housing.

In summary, I encourage the association to continue engaging with the relevant government authorities, to keep alert to what may be available through the private sector, and to consider possibly partnering with a private sector aged-care provider to see what could be provided for the needs of the Hungarian association and community.