

4 March, 2016

Dear WECA Members,

Thanks for the opportunity to let you know where I stand on local issues around the West End Peninsula. I'll spare you the long spiel full of cliched political slogans and simply state that as someone who has lived and worked in the area for my entire adult life, I'm fiercely passionate about preserving our local community.

My driving motivation is to protect our neighbourhood from the negative impacts of gentrification and unsustainable profit-driven development, and to ensure that community and creative culture remain the defining features of 4101.

My responses to WECA's impressively-detailed list of questions are below. I think it's important for candidates to give precise, non-evasive statements about where they stand, and I've tried to be straightforward and concise while still going into detail. For more info on who I am, where I stand and on Greens policy commitments for city council, check out [itsyourbrisbane.com/](http://itsyourbrisbane.com/) and [jonathansri.com](http://jonathansri.com).

Ultimately, there's one fundamental issue underpinning all of our concerns about high-rise development, urban design, traffic congestion and green space – the question of who makes the big decisions, and who is influencing those decision-makers.

It's clear to me that we as residents have lost control over how our neighbourhoods are designed and built. Property developers and lobbyists exert significant influence over our political system. Out of the three major parties, the Greens stand alone in refusing to accept donations from property developers. We have consistently called for a ban on all political donations from property developers and for-profit companies (in New South Wales, developer donations were banned several years ago, however Queensland is yet to follow suit). These entities don't donate thousands of dollars to political parties out of the goodness of their hearts - they do it because they're getting something in return.

It's not enough that individual Labor and LNP candidates claim they aren't accepting donations directly – senior decision-makers within their parties are part of a network of influence

involving a small group of elite developers, lobbyists and political operators, and it's this network that's currently making the big decisions about the future of our city.

The only way to guard against corruption and undemocratic corporate influence is to decentralise power. The more parties and independents there are on council, the easier it will be for ordinary residents to get our voices heard. When only two parties dominate council, there's not enough transparency and accountability. In the long-term, we need to investigate deliberative democracy strategies like participatory budgeting, community design forums and online referenda. But the first step is to elect councillors who will speak up on behalf of residents and challenge the duopoly of the two-party system.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to formally ask WECA what its position is on the Queens Wharf Mega-Casino Development, which has the full support of both the Liberal and Labor Parties. While this project on the CBD riverbank (behind the riverside expressway) is outside the Gabba Ward's geographical boundaries, it's one of the largest and most significant developments in Brisbane's history, and I believe it's important for all city council candidates to clearly state where they stand on this issue.

I believe that an expanded casino will have [significant long-term negative impacts](#) (both socially and on Queensland's economy), and that we don't want this project to be Brisbane's defining landmark. The size and scale of the project is completely inappropriate for its proposed location directly across from South Bank, and I'm concerned that the Queensland government hasn't conducted enough meaningful public consultation with residents regarding the wider impacts of this development. Does WECA have a position on this project? Were WECA members involved in the limited public consultation?

## **Specific Issues and Responses**

### **Parks/ Open/ Green Space**

I support the zoning and gazettement of all seven parks in the South Brisbane Riverside Neighbourhood Plan. I will achieve this by:

1. Pushing for comprehensive revisions of city and neighbourhood plans which ensure the parks are included.

2. Working constructively with fellow councillors so that they see the long-term social and economic value of gazetting these parks in the inner-city.
3. Organising and facilitating more non-profit community events in existing public parks to demonstrate the need for (and value of) more public space.
4. Remaining alert for DA lodgements on the relevant sites, which can trigger the compulsory acquisition of already-gazetted sites.
5. Doorknocking/calling nearby residents to inform them that there's supposed to be a new park in their area and providing them with contact numbers for media outlets and relevant council department heads.
6. Organising broad-based community campaigns that target councillors and state parliamentarians in marginal seats if council fails to act to preserve these parks.

In terms of timelines, I believe December 2017 is a realistic and reasonable target date for the gazetting and zoning of all seven parks. I can't commit with confidence to a target date for actually acquiring and landscaping all seven sites without knowing more about the motivations and values of my fellow city councillors, but I will insist that BCC allocates funds in its 2016/17 budget to acquire these sites.

To ensure a high-quality public realm for the existing resident community and future residents, I will push for significant amendments to the *Public Land and Council Assets Local Law 2014* to make it easier for residents to use public spaces and to organise smaller community and cultural events without jumping through endless regulatory hoops. (This will include advocating that BCC repeal existing offences which criminalise homeless people for sleeping on public benches)

If elected, I will enthusiastically promote further greening of our streets. Planting trees in the inner-city is one of the most effective ways to clean the air, keep the city cool, prevent topsoil erosion and improve general quality of life. This also requires ensuring that BCC adequately budgets for the maintenance and upkeep of existing vegetation. Fallen branches and trip-hazard roots must be dealt with promptly.

I will push for a citywide financial audit of all our vegetation assets to highlight the economic value of trees in Brisbane. While personally I don't believe it's helpful or accurate to reduce

everything to dollar values, some demographics in our society struggle to understand the many benefits of trees unless they're expressed in economic terms.

I will also work to strengthen the protection of existing trees by amending the *Natural Assets Local Law 2003* to make it easier to nominate trees for protection. Most importantly, I will encourage BCC to engage in more public education about the value of trees/vegetation. Simply increasing fines and council enforcement mechanisms for damaging protected vegetation isn't sufficient to catalyse cultural change. Rather than just punishing those who cut down valuable trees, we need to educate more residents so they will actively choose to protect and preserve them.

### **Green Space Strategy:**

I wholeheartedly endorse the principles, elements and strategic approach of the 4101 [green space strategy](#), subject to detailed planning by council. I will push for BCC to fund research into a broader green space strategy that includes Woolloongabba, Dutton Park, East Brisbane and Kangaroo Point.

### **Thomas Street Park:**

I commend WECA and the many West End residents who gave their time and energy to the community design process for the Thomas Street Park. I acknowledge that BCC engaged in no meaningful consultation with residents over the design of this park, and I will work towards ensuring that widespread council consultation regarding key public spaces becomes the norm in Brisbane. I will definitely ensure that the community is involved in the next detailed design stage

Along with a dozen or so other residents, I attended the small public meeting that Councillor Abrahams organised in the park last year. I was struck by how many possibilities there are for the Thomas Street park, and that even now, a lot of residents are unaware it exists.

The site has amazing potential as a civic and community hub for West End. As such I would ideally like to build upon the previous community consultation with 350 residents, and create more opportunities for even more residents to give their input into the future of the park (particularly younger residents and those from marginalised demographics). I love the plans and ideas that have been proposed so far, and if it turns out that we can't engage or consult with more residents, I will happily endorse and work to implement the results of the 350-person community

design process. However, West End has a total population of at least 10 000 people (and growing!), so as Gabba Ward councillor I will use the resources of my office to help involve even more people in the decision-making process for the Thomas Street Park. Either way, I will push for the funding and building/landscaping of the Thomas Street Park within the next financial year.

I will push for a universal access self-cleaning toilet block in the park, and would like to organise further community consultation around the provision of two public shower cubicles for the benefit of homeless residents and for cyclist commuters who need somewhere to get changed after riding into West End from other suburbs.

I am pleased to endorse retaining and renovating the existing kiosk and toilet block in People's Park on Boundary Street. Over the years I've organised a wide range of community events in People's Park, from large music nights and pop-up art galleries to political discussion forums about rent controls and high-rise development. Although the kiosk has been under-utilised in the last few years, I take the view that its current street-facing orientation is of immense community value and must be retained. It's not necessary to demolish the current structure (which, while very dirty and in need of renovation, is still structurally sound). We should allocate some money towards renovating and repairing the kiosk/toilet block, and direct the funds that would've been spent on building a new toilet block towards other local infrastructure projects in the neighbourhood.

## **Development**

*The Local Area Plan calls for sites over 10,000m<sup>2</sup> to provide a minimum of 20% to be publically accessible. How would you undertake to ensure that Council enforces the Local Plan? What actions will you take to help support housing affordability in the area?*

I believe that not only should sites over 10 000m<sup>2</sup> include a minimum of 20% publically accessible land, but ideally, such land should also be publicly owned. The acquisition of this land should be funded through higher infrastructure charges on property developers. If higher charges mean that some developments become financially unprofitable for developers, land values will fall, making it easier for the community to acquire this land and use it for other purposes.

I've been surprised and disappointed that none of the other council candidates have presented serious local policy solutions to improve housing affordability in the inner-city.

Considering how quickly West End's character is changing as lower-income residents are priced out of the area, housing affordability should be top of the list for every council candidate.

I believe the city plan should be amended to include a requirement that 20% of new developments (or, to be more specific, 20% of bedrooms in new developments) must be affordable housing or public housing. I also support further research and consultation into the introduction of rent controls (both for residences and small businesses) so that landlords can't increase the rent more than once a year, and to cap the maximum percentage increase of rent to an objective standard (e.g. CPI or minimum wage) so rents can't rise sharply from one lease period to the next.

Fundamentally, implementing these policies and ensuring that the local plan is enforced boil down to political questions about how I as a councillor will motivate other councillors to support the needs and wishes of our local community. As a former mediation facilitator, I believe I have the persuasive and diplomatic skills to win support for positive, innovative policy solutions, and to rise above the adversarial us-vs-them negativity that pervades our current two-party system. As someone who's separate from the ongoing Labor-Liberal feud, I'll be well placed to work with whichever party ends up in the majority on council to get positive outcomes for our local area. My independence from the big party machines will also allow me to more effectively pressure and lobby other levels of government on behalf of local residents.

Outside of the sphere of electoral politics, I will also dedicate council office resources towards organising a community tenant-matching service to match up refugees, homeless locals, and young artists and musicians with older owner-occupiers who have spare bedrooms that they're willing to rent out at below-market rates.

### **Public Assets/Land**

Over the last ten years we've seen a strong trend towards privatisation and asset sales by state governments (both Labor and LNP) and at the city council level. The most notable example in our area was the sale of the [Distance Ed site](#). I'm extremely critical of this and will strongly resist further privatisation of public assets. I will work to identify council-owned land within the Gabba Ward which is currently under-utilised, with a view to opening up more of these sites as useable public green space.

### **Former Absoe site (111 Boundary St)**

*If elected will you undertake to ensure that the development at 111 Boundary Street complies with all relevant plans and guidelines? Yes. (Obviously 'ensure' is a loaded word, and city councillors don't have absolute power over these issues, but I'll definitely fight hard on this one. I believe that from a strategic perspective, it might be most effective to focus on pressuring the Queensland Government planning minister to call in this development if city council approves it. Under the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, the Minister for Planning has the power to reject large developments that significantly impact upon state interests)*

- *specifically will you ensure the reinstatement of the park in the Local Area Plan? Yes.*
- *will you ensure that the requirement for 20% public open space that has 24-hr accessibility is delivered to the community? Yes.*
- *will you ensure that the supermarket tenancy is a maximum of 1500m2 as specified in the Local Area Plan? Yes. I will also fight to ensure that retail space is specially zoned so that priority is given to local small businesses over large chain stores.*
- *The developer is seeking a reduced level of assessment regarding heritage and adjoining heritage properties. Will you ensure that the level of assessment for the development is maintained? Yes.*
- *will you require that there is full traffic studies and upgrades in pedestrian infrastructure to ensure safety? Yes.*

### **Former Distance Education site (403 Montague Rd)**

*If elected will you undertake to ensure that the 403 Montague Rd development complies with all relevant plans and guidelines? Yes.*

*Specifically:*

- *will you ensure the reinstatement of the park in the Local Plan? Yes.*
- *will you ensure that the requirement for 20% public open space that has 24 hr accessibility is delivered to the community? Yes.*
- *will you ensure that the supermarket is not granted in compliance with the Local Plan and Lord Mayors undertaking for this precinct?*

I will seek further advice from town planners regarding flexibility in zoning definitions for shops

and supermarkets. While personally I'm opposed to the introduction of a new Woolies/Coles/other large supermarket, it may be necessary to permit more local independent shops in this area so that residents don't have to drive to the other side of the suburb for grocery shopping. The Greens are proposing a green bridge to connect West End to Toowong, so that residents in Montague Road can walk over to the Toowong shops, thus negating demand for a new supermarket on the peninsula.

### **Traffic, transport and mobility**

*If elected will you undertake to ensure that an Integrated Traffic Management Plan is created and implemented here? Yes.*

To encourage and support the use of more active transport, and help ease congestion and parking problems from commuter traffic, I will support:

- reducing speed limits on residential streets, around schools, and around civic hubs like Boundary Street
- barrier-separated bike lanes on major roads in West End and Highgate Hill (priorities: Vulture Street, Montague Road, Stanley Street, Grey Street, Hardgrave Road, Hoogley Street, Jane Street, Melbourne Street, Merivale Street, Mollison Street, Russell Street, Stephens Road, Dornoch Terrace, Gladstone Road and Gloucester Street,)
- more pedestrian crossings, [pedestrian detectors](#) at key intersections, and traffic lights that don't make pedestrians wait too long
- extending no parking zones around narrow corners to make intersections safer
- [cheaper public transport](#)
- more late-night and weekend public transport services
- a green bridge connecting West End to Toowong
- floating bus stops so cyclists and buses don't need to cross paths
- better enforcement, stronger regulations and higher fees to discourage private construction companies from blocking footpaths
- more benches, public drinking fountains and shade trees along key pedestrian routes

(Please also see the attachment regarding my proposals for Montague Road.)



Will you work to:

- *Require developer and construction organisations to provide their own parking that does not impact on neighbouring areas?* Yes.
- *Reduce speed limits in small streets and around the schools?* Yes. I support 30km/h and 40km/h speed limits on all residential streets.
- *Reengineer streets for increased safety and provide traffic calming solutions?* Yes.

## **Events**

Currently community events are treated the same as commercial or construction organisations when streets are closed. Would you undertake to waive the street closing fees of community-organised events? Additionally allow the community to use our own volunteers to close the street?

Yes. I will also fight to relax council's insurance requirements for non-profit community events.

*Our local Councillor has been a consistent and generous supporter of local festivals and events by WECA including the Kurilpa Derby, the West End Festival and the West End Film Festival. If elected will you continue to financially support these events?*

Yes. I intend to engage in a more democratic electorate-wide participatory budgeting process to allow broader community input into how I spend my discretionary local budget allocation.

## **Local Commercial Retail**

To support a sustainable thriving independent business community in West End, I will:

- use my office resources to assist local independent businesses to connect and collaborate through decentralised, non-hierarchical local traders networks that can advocate strongly for their own interests
- take the time to listen to small business owners and employees and follow their guidance as to what changes they'd like me to pursue
- promote traffic and pedestrian infrastructure that supports walkable neighbourhoods, where

residents feel safe/comfortable walking and cycling around local commercial areas like Boundary Street. This creates a vibrant streetscape with high foot traffic, generating more local commerce.

- fight to relax council regulations so that small, local, independent business owners can more easily operate from their place of residence (as long as the business is quiet, low-impact and won't exacerbate traffic/parking problems in residential areas)
- start an electorate-wide conversation about implementing commercial rent controls (we need further research and discussion into what specific model of rent controls might be most appropriate for our area). Evidence from other cities shows that commercial rent controls can help stop small businesses from closing down due to rapidly rising rents, and will help preserve a diverse local commercial ecosystem where residents can buy basic goods and services in their local area without depending on big supermarkets and chain stores.
- use rates incentives to encourage commercial landlords to lower their rents rather than leaving shops sitting empty
- lobby for a relaxation of council rules regarding the style and appearance of restaurant and cafe seating – businesses should be free to make these decisions for themselves
- push for a flexible, community-driven, evidence-based approach to venue zoning and licensing rather than a one-size-fits-all blanket system that treats small independent music venues the same as large mega-clubs

I'm extremely passionate about preserving Boundary Street's character as a local commercial hub, and believe that while nightlife/cafe culture is valuable and important, it's even more important to ensure that local fruit shops, bakeries and basic services can remain in business on the main street.

Urban design is about more than just building heights and zoning. It's about culture and community. Geez that was a long letter. Top points if you read this far. My email address is [jonathan.sri@qld.greens.org.au](mailto:jonathan.sri@qld.greens.org.au) if you have any more questions. Enjoy your weekend!

Warm regards,

Jonathan Sri

Greens Candidate for the Gabba Ward