



Item 4.2 Renaming of Newton Court, St Kilda

A Petition containing 97 signatures was received from residents.

The Petition was received along with the following email: -

"Ernie Smith died earlier this year but in 1993 he published a short biography where he described his sense of mission to the local community and ministering to its members while "meeting them at the level of their gift"; see Miracles do Happen: a priest called Smith (Minuteman Press 1993 republished 1994, 2010). He was appointed parish priest for the St Kilda West parish in 1982. As the Sacred Heart parish priest, he ministered to the needs of members of the local community which included the de-institutionalised, marginalised and homeless while respecting the dignity and individuality of each. As part of this mission, he established the Sacred Heart Mission which provided and continues to provide care, shelter, sustenance and support for the frail and elderly, disabled, abused women, street workers, drug addicts, HIV/AIDs sufferers and the homeless. The establishment of the Sacred Heart Hostel was part of this provision of care and support. The current upgrade of the Hostel continues Smith's initiative by endeavouring to meet the ever-increasing needs of a growing audience of need in the wider society.

Apart from this mission of care, the Sacred Heart Mission, with its hostels, outreach services, health clinic, women's house and daily provision of meals to the needy, has created and continues to create significant employment as well as employment and training opportunities within the local community and beyond, with all the economic benefits that this entails

The site of the Newton Court Reserve is close to the centre of Ernie Smith's activities while he was the parish priest in St Kilda. The Reserve is near the Mission Sacred Heart Church and Hall. The church bell tower is an icon dominating the Reserve.

Ernie Smith died earlier this year. It would therefore be timely to recognise his good works and achievements especially on a site close to the heart of his community activities. That recognition could embrace naming the Reserve the Ernie Smith Memorial Reserve and include a bench in the timber bench area (number 5 in the diagram of the CoPP brochure) sculptured by a local artist from reclaimed timber such as the memorial to the homeless in the Peanut farm in St Kilda. Art in the community was one of the many initiatives undertaken by Ernie Smith.

The Petition states the following: -

"We the undersigned support the public recognition and commemoration of the good works of Ernie Smith undertaken on behalf of members of the local community and society generally, each of whom he treated with respect and dignity.

***As part of that recognition, we support –
the renaming of the Newton Court Reserve as the Ernie Smith Reserve; and
the dedication of a timber bench in the reserve to his memory."***



OFFICER COMMENT

Background

Fr Ernie Smith played a major role in establishing Sacred Heart Mission, which aids Melbourne's homeless and vulnerable, in 1982 when he was the parish priest at St Kilda West.

In January 2018 the Archdiocese of Melbourne notified Sacred Heart Mission that complaints had been made against Fr Ernie Smith under the Melbourne Response. The Melbourne Response assists people who have been abused sexually, physically or emotionally. Complaints of sexual and other abuse by priests, religious and lay persons under the control of the Archbishop of Melbourne are made to and investigated by the Independent Commissioner, Mr Jeff Gleeson QC.

The Archdiocese upheld the complaints and stated, "that while Fr Smith is still technically a priest entitled to be called Father, they have adopted legal advice that he "no longer be considered a priest in good standing and his faculties to exercise public ministry be withdrawn".

The Sacred Heart Mission released a public response in February 2018, a copy of their statement is attached to this report.

Assessment

Officers have assessed the requests contained within the Petition against the Naming Rules for places in Victoria – the State's Statutory requirements for naming roads, features and localities, and Council's Memorials and Monuments Policy 2008.

Principle (H) of the Naming Rules - Using Commemorative Names, requires that if something is proposed to be named after a person, naming authorities should consider the person's relevant history and association to the area, and that person be held in strong regard by the community.

In applying this principle, Council would need to satisfy themselves that Fr Smith was held in strong regard by all parts or a significant majority of the community. An initial assessment by officers has determined that the progression of this naming proposal to community consultation is not recommended because it does not comply with this Principle (H) - Using Commemorative Names.

This assessment was determined based on the conflicting information that was made available to officers, and very different and strong views held by different parts of the community.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Receives and notes the Petition.
2. Does not progress the proposal to rename Newton Court Reserve the 'Ernie Smith Memorial Reserve'.
3. Thanks the Petitioner for their request, and notifies them of this resolution.

TRIM FILE NO: F18/1

ATTACHMENTS Sacred Heart Mission Statement February 2018