

# AMBULANCE DEPOT UPSET

FURTHER concerns have been raised over Maroondah Council's proposal to spend approximately \$70,000 to build an ambulance depot on council owned land in North Ringwood.

As reported in the Post last week, Maroondah Council has called for tenders for the design and construction of the ambulance depot proposed to be built on vacant land adjoining the maternal and child health centre at 127-129 Oban Rd.

The site was one of two investigated by council, with the other at

Norwood Reserve considered inappropriate due to traffic congestion on Warrandyte Rd and the topography of the land.

However, residents living near the Oban Rd site voted at a recent public meeting to "totally reject" council's proposal, citing concerns over the impact on local traffic, noise problems posed by sirens and the negative impact it may have on local property values.

A resident spokesperson, Ian Watkins, said an ambulance depot was not suitable for a residential area

and called on council to locate it on "more appropriate" industrial zoned council land, such as the Croydon depot site in Lincoln Rd.

"There is approximately double the area available and easy access to Ringwood and Croydon, as well as quick access to Warrandyte via Plymouth and Wonga Roads," Mr Watkins said.

"Croydon depot also has an SES centre and would enable opportunities for closer links between emergency services," he said.

Former Ringwood councillor,

Sylvia Phillips, told the Post not only was it inappropriate for the ambulance depot to be built in a residential area, she also questioned why council was paying for the project.

She said the original Ringwood ambulance depot in Pitt St was sold at auction on April 15 this year for around \$112,000, without the Metropolitan Ambulance Service (MAS) finding and funding a new location in Maroondah City.

As previously reported in the Post, furore erupted soon after the sale when the MAS entered into negotia-

tions to relocate the ambulance depot to Mitcham Private Hospital. Ambulance Employees Association (AEA) members threatened to conduct a temporary local ambulance service from a central Ringwood carpark if the move went ahead.

However, a last minute reprieve by Health Minister Marie Tehan saw the ambulance depot relocated to the amenities block of the former Ringwood Council depot on Maroondah Hwy, where it currently remains.

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# Residents set to fight new ambulance site

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Mrs Phillips said "it was outrageous for Maroondah City commissioners to allocate \$70,000 of ratepayers' money in the budget to build a new ambulance depot on council - ratepayers' - land".

"What sort of return on any lease agreement would council need to put in place to recoup its \$70,000 outlay and the interest Maroondah ratepayers could have earned on investing the money?," Mrs Phillips said.

She said council was "setting a dangerous precedent" by funding what she claimed was a State Government responsibility, similar to the police and fire brigade.

"It becomes very dangerous when councils start nibbling around the edges of what should be State Government

responsibilities. We could find ourselves in a position where some municipalities could afford to provide better services than others," Mrs Phillips said.

"This ambulance depot should be paid for by the MAS - it's tantamount to blackmail for the people of Maroondah to be told if you want an ambulance service you have to pay for it," she said.

Maroondah Council commissioner John Nathan denied any claims of misuse of council funds, saying "the arrangement with the MAS was strictly commercial and not a donation".

"This is a commercial proposition between the MAS and Maroondah Council. The land and building will be leased to the MAS over a 10 year period during which council should gain

income for the municipality," Mr Nathan said.

"The only reason we have gone into this agreement was to ensure that an ambulance service remains in Maroondah. Everything is being done strictly in accordance with the book," he said.

Warrandyte MP Phil Honeywood lent his support to the proposal this week, saying "while I can understand some legitimate concerns by local residents, at the end of the day the whole Ringwood, Croydon community want the best possible ambulance service for the municipality".

"Having lived in Oban Rd myself, I'm well aware that located close as it is to other key roads, such as Warrandyte-Ringwood Rd, it is a location that can provide quick access to most areas of the municipality," Mr Honeywood said.

# AAT STOPS AMBULANCE

8-5-96

part P1

OBJECTORS to Maroondah Council's plans to build an ambulance station at 127-129 Oban Rd, North Ringwood, have claimed a "win for the little person", after the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) announced last Wednesday it would uphold their appeal and halt the proposal.

The shock AAT ruling reversed council's decision early this year to grant a permit for the \$70,000 station, which it planned to build on vacant council land, at its own expense, next

door to a maternal and child health centre.

Council planned to recoup its outlay by leasing the ambulance station to the Metropolitan Ambulance Service (MAS) over a number of years.

After weeks of deliberation the AAT tribunal decided there were two major issues to be considered in the appeal, "namely whether the site is an appropriate location for the proposed use and whether the proposal will have an adverse impact on the ameni-

ty of adjoining residential properties...It is the Tribunal's view that the proposal fails on both counts".

Speaking on behalf of objectors, Arcadia CI resident Ian Watkins told Post residents felt "vindicated that the independent umpire considered all points of view, all the evidence, and came to the decision that on all counts the ambulance station should not be approved".

"It has been a long struggle, but we finally achieved a result for the little

people. At one stage it looked like we would be railroaded and our opinions flippantly disregarded - this is a warning to council that it should pay heed to its own town planning policies," Mr Watkins said.

He claimed the AAT's decision validated the appeal on all counts, with the use of the site as an ambulance station contradicting some aspects of the Town Planning Act and destroying residents' amenity.

"The site had so many disadvan-

tages - as far as increasing traffic and pedestrian danger, the nearest intersection has three of four directions covered by non-synchronised traffic lights, and there is a pedestrian crossing nearby," Mr Watkins said.

"As for residents' amenity, the MAS and council claimed that ambulances leaving the station would not necessarily turn their lights and sirens on immediately, however, this is required by law.

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## Ambo no go - AAT

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part P3

"Even if ambulance drivers waited until they got to the Oban Rd roundabout before turning lights and sirens on, the noise would still be very intrusive to Arcadia CI residents," he said.

Mr Watkins said objectors have claimed all along that the new fire station, currently being built on the corner of Maroondah Hwy and Mt Dandenong Rd, was "the perfect site" for a co-location of ambulance and fire brigade services.

As previously reported in the Post, Metropolitan Fire Brigade Board (MFBB) spokesperson, Keith Adamson, confirmed the fire brigade had invited the MAS to co-locate with them in the new premises, but the offer had been declined.

At the time, MAS spokesperson Bill Wood told Post the MFBB offer was rejected by the MAS to ensure the service's "flexibility" in the community.

He said MAS policy was not to invest in permanent buildings that lock the service and its capital into a single location, with the Oban Rd lease ensuring the flexibility to move

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"according to changing community needs".

Maroondah Council chief executive officer Mike Marasco said despite the AAT ruling, council would continue to act to ensure a "life saving" ambulance service remained in Ringwood.

"Council of course respects the decision of the AAT and the correct and due process has been fulfilled. However, the decision in no way detracts from council's main motivation to ensure an ambulance service remains in Ringwood. Council has already begun investigating alternative sites within the municipality for the service," Mr Marasco said.

Mr Marasco said council offered the MAS the depot site rent-free after its Pitt St base was sold in April last year and plans were mooted to move the ambulance service to Mitcham.

A MAS spokesperson told Post the service was "committed to an ambulance service based in Maroondah".

"We have no plans to move outside the area and we appreciate council's strong support in helping us find a new location - all options will be considered," the spokesperson said.

# Ambo station go ahead

A PROPOSED ambulance station to be built at 127-129 Oban Rd, North Ringwood, has been given the green light by Maroondah Council, despite attracting 18 letters of objection.

As previously reported the ambulance station is to be built on council owned land next door to a child care centre on Oban Rd, at a cost to council of about \$70,000.

However, a number of nearby residents plan to appeal council's decision to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT).

Arcadia Cl resident, Josie Watkins, told the Post residents were "extremely angry" with council's decision and the way they were dealt with during the consultation process.

She said 82 year old Arcadia Cl resident, Marge Fischer, declined to attend a public meeting called by council on November 28, because she was informed there was no lift access to the first floor meeting room.

"During the year, Mrs Fischer suffered a broken hip and had open heart surgery, but she

very much wanted to express her objections to council," Mrs Watkins said.

"When we arrived for the meeting we found there was a lift and it was working. Council has since apologised, but it's not good enough, she should have been given her say," she said.

"Council has been very casual and off-hand towards residents - it may be an every day process for them, but for us it means a great deal.

"What council must understand is that the former ambulance station

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was in Pitt St for around 20 years and when people moved into the area they knew what to expect. When we moved into this area, after careful consideration, we had no reason to suspect an ambulance station would be built nearby," she said.

"Yes, there is an electricity substation opposite our street, but it is hidden by trees, doesn't have lights and sirens blaring and doesn't have the potential to run over little kiddies."

Residents now have 28 days to lodge an appeal with the AAT.

mail ps 19-12-95

## Residents object to no avail

by CHARISSE WOOLCOCK

RINGWOOD residents will fight a council decision to construct the Ringwood Ambulance Station in Oban Rd.

Maroondah City Council last week passed controversial plans for the Ringwood Ambulance Station despite intense objections.

Seventeen residents objected to the plans to house the ambulances at 127-129 Oban Rd, North Ringwood.

They met with commissioners last month to discuss concerns about excessive noise, safety and traffic problems and the financial impact on their properties.

They said an ambulance station in a Residential C zone was inappropriate, especially because it was beside an Infant Welfare Centre.

Residents also said they were concerned the council had allocated \$70,000 to fund construction of the station, which was a State Government responsibility.

Arcadia Close resident Josie Watkins said she was very disappointed with the council's decision and the residents would appeal.

She said they felt the council had not addressed areas of concern and had not considered the implications for residents or mothers using the Maternal and Child Health Centre.

"We feel we have been treated rather poorly about this," she said.

But the council said it had not been substantiated to them that the station would cause a detrimental or intolerable situation for nearby residential properties.

However, in passing the application it imposed strict conditions on the station to reduce the affect on the surrounding area.

The building must include acoustic fences, dense landscape to act as a buffer and a screen fence between the Infant Welfare Centre and the station.

Strategic development corporate manager Scott Chapman said Metropolitan Ambulance Service figures showed that the station would receive an average of only seven calls a day.

He said the MAS had told the council many of those calls occurred while the ambulance was on the road attending other accidents, potentially limiting the number of times an ambulance returned to its base.

"It should be noted that the Ambulance Service is concerned regarding the impact on nearby residential properties and would make every attempt to only use sirens when entering or leaving the roundabout," he said.

Chief commissioner Morton Browne said the council had never received complaints about noise from residents surrounding the old ambulance station in Pitt St. The Pitt St location was also in a Residential C zone.

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# Thumbs down for ambulance

THE Administrative Appeals Tribunal has refused to grant the Maroondah City Council a town planning permit to build an ambulance station at North Ringwood.

The AAT delivered its verdict on the development plan on April 30, saying the site at 127-129 Oban Rd, North Ringwood, was an inappropriate location and the development would adversely affect local residents.

More than 20 North Ringwood residents have been fighting the plan since last year, taking the matter to the AAT on April 3 after the council decided to proceed with the development.

Resident spokesman Ian Watkins said the verdict was a win for the little person. "I hate to say we told you so, but I am glad the AAT has seen it our way," he said.

"The residents feel vindicated that the independent umpire considered all points of view and evidence and came to the decision that, on all counts, the ambulance station should not be approved," Mr Watkins said.

He said the residents were disappointed with the "flippant attitude of the council — it just

would not listen to our concerns".

"We think an ambulance station would be better positioned at the new fire station site at the corner of Maroondah Highway and Mt Dandenong Rd," Mr Watkins said.

He said residents opposed the Oban Rd site because there would be high noise levels from sirens, impact on school crossings in the area and would lower the value of properties.

"We were upset and concerned by what the council was planning. We still think the ambulance station can stay in the area, but at a more appropriate site," Mr Watkins said.

## Ideal site

The Oban Rd ambulance station was to comprise an 11-square weatherboard house with a carport containing possibly two ambulances.

Metropolitan Ambulance Service eastern region team leader Nigel Longman said in an earlier *Mail* article that the Oban Rd location was ideal be-

cause it would ensure sufficient response times to local emergencies.

Mr Longman said sirens would not be activated each time an ambulance left the station, but flashing lights would. Sirens depended on the traffic.

In the middle of last year, the Ringwood ambulance service was threatened when its Pitt St location was sold, and there was talk of relocating it to the Mitcham Hospital.

After negotiations between the ambulance service, the State Government and the city council, the service was relocated temporarily to the council's works depot on Maroondah Highway, Ringwood, rent-free.

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# Ambo 'site' a playground

by CHARISSE WOOLCOCK

RESIDENTS surrounding the proposed Ringwood ambulance station in Oban Rd say the site was originally given to the city to use as a playground.

One of the oldest Oban Rd residents believes Ron Dickson gave the council land to build a Maternal and Child Health Centre and develop a children's playground.

The centre was built but the extra land has only ever been used by mothers as a car park.

Residents surrounding the land, who don't want the 24-hour station built in their neighborhood, now believe the council is giving the land away.

They voiced their views at a public meeting with Maroondah commissioners and officers last Tuesday.

The Municipal Ambulance Service sold its Ringwood Depot in Pitt St earlier this year. It is temporarily based at the former Ringwood council depot.

After fears the station would be moved to Mitcham Maroondah commissioners and local MPs Gordon Ashley and Phil

Honeywood intervened.

The Oban Rd site was chosen over two other possible sites at Norwood Reserve at the old Pitt St depot.

Chief commissioner Morton Browne said Oban Rd was deemed the most appropriate by council officers.

But he denied there was ever any intention to build a playground on the Oban Rd site.

He said the council bought the land to build a Maternal and Child Health centre and that purpose had been fulfilled.

At the meeting resident Josie Watkins said the station was "inappropriate" for the area and noise and safety would be affected.

Mr Browne said all concerns would be addressed before the application was passed.

He said the council had never received any complaints about noise from residents surrounding the old ambulance station in Pitt St.

He said Tuesday's meeting was called to ensure resident's views were heard by the council before a decision was made.

But Mr Browne said the council could only answer

relevant town planning complaints. "They must be addressed in the statutory process," he said.

Mrs Watkins said residents were also concerned about how quickly the proposal was being pushed through.

She said the tender document for the station was lodged before residents had met to discuss concerns in October.

Mr Browne said council officers would present a report to commissioners for consideration.

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# Depot move for ambulance

THE RINGWOOD Ambulance service will move to the former Ringwood council depot on Maroondah Highway until a permanent home is found in Ringwood.

Maroondah City commissioners announced the move late yesterday afternoon ending months of speculation about the future of the service.

The 10-man crew will move to the disused depot next Monday. The move was forced by the sale of the Pitt St ambulance depot on April 15.

Metropolitan Ambulance

Service eastern regional business manager Mr Gary Bartram said the depot met all the ambulance service's needs, including fast exit and access points.

Mr Bartram stressed the depot move was an interim measure. A permanent site would definitely be found within Ringwood, he said.

A MAS proposal to move to Mitcham sparked intervention by the council and local MP's Gordon Ashley and Phil Honeywood.

The Ambulance Employees Association also protested, threatening to set up

office in the street.

Officers had earlier rejected an option to move to the Mobile Intensive Care Ambulance station at Maroondah Hospital.

Association spokesman Mr Rod Morris was unable to comment about the latest plan because he had not been informed of developments.

Maroondah City commissioner Mr John Nathan said an interim permit had been granted to allow the ambulance service to operate from the depot.

# Smooth change for ambulance

THE Ringwood Ambulance Service has reported few teething problems since moving into temporary premises at the former Ringwood Council depot.

Team manager Mick Lewis said the service had plenty of room.

"The facilities for parking and cleaning the ambulances are excellent and we have easy access to Maroondah Highway," he said.

The ambulance service moved two months ago ending months of speculation over its

future. The station was forced to move after its Pitt St depot was sold earlier this year.

At one stage during the controversy it appeared the service would be forced to relocate to Mitcham.

But last-minute talks between local politicians, Maroondah Council representatives, Metropolitan Ambulance Service (MAS) officials and the Health Ministry kept the service in Maroondah.

Mr Lewis said the service had two ambu-

lances, 11 staff and a paramedic with a response vehicle on site at the depot.

"We replied to 230 emergency calls and 15 non-emergency calls in the last month, which is about our normal workload," he said.

MAS group operations manager Rob Birch said it was only a temporary location.

"We are investigating a number of suitable sites for a permanent home for the service in Ringwood in conjunction with Maroondah Council," he said.

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NEWS

# Station plan slammed

by ANDREW MEATH

MORE than 20 North Ringwood residents have slammed Maroondah City Council's plans to build an ambulance station in Oban Rd.

At a public meeting last week, the council was accused of trying to "hide the development plans from the public".

The residents also demanded a meeting with commissioners to air their concerns.

Under the proposal, the station would be built at 127-129 Oban Rd.

Nearby residents fear it would create high noise levels (sirens), impact on school crossings in the area and lower the value of properties. They also believe the site is inappropriate because of traffic congestion in Oban Rd.

One resident, Mr Ian Watkins, told the meeting at the North Ringwood Maternal and Child Health Centre that other sites in the municipality were better suited for the ambulance station.

He said the former Croydon City Council depot in Lincoln Rd and an industrial estate on Heatherdale Rd were two options.

The Metropolitan Ambulance Service is operating temporarily out of the former Ringwood City Council works depot on Maroondah Highway.

Maroondah Council's building works project manager Russell McIntosh said Oban Rd was the best available site for the station.

He said it would consist of an 11-square weatherboard house with a carport containing one ambulance, possibly two.

Residents opposed the weatherboard house idea, saying "the shack" would lower values of their predominantly brick homes.

MAS eastern region team leader Nigel

Longman said Oban Rd was an ideal location to ensure sufficient response times to local emergencies.

Mr Longman said sirens would not be activated each time an ambulance left the station, but flashing lights would. Sirens depended on the traffic.

The residents said sirens would be needed because the proposed site was close to a busy roundabout.

## Criticise

One man at the meeting criticised the residents for taking the "not in my back yard approach".

"You would be the first to complain if your kids died because the ambulance was 10 minutes late," he said.

The man, who said he was in the fire brigade for 35 years, stressed Oban Rd was an ideal location for the station.

The residents criticised the council for setting the meeting at an inconvenient time (4pm) and at short notice. Nearby residents were informed of the meeting through a letter drop four days earlier.

Mr McIntosh said the meeting was originally planned to inform maternal and child health nurses of the proposed station on land adjoining their centre.

He said inviting residents was "an afterthought".

Warrandyte MP Phil Honeywood also criticised the council for not inviting him to the meeting.

Mr Honeywood said Oban Rd was a busy street, but added the proposed site was strategically ideal.

"As a former resident of Oban Rd myself I can understand that local residents have legitimate concerns about the location, nonetheless pending further investigation I would not rule it out because it would be located close to major roads," Mr Honeywood said.

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# Ambulance has home

by JEFF JONES

THE Ringwood branch of the Metropolitan Ambulance Service has finally found a permanent home in Grey St, Ringwood.

The 10-man crew moved into the recently renovated house opposite Maroondah Hospital on September 5, ending an 18-month search for a suitable site.

The Ringwood ambulance service began the search for new accommodation when its original headquarters in Pitt St, Ringwood, was closed on April 15, 1995.

The MAS said the old Pitt St ambulance branch was sold because it was no longer appropriate for its officers' needs or the needs of the community.

"It was poorly sited against a railway line with a narrow bridge and a level crossing limited access to the areas of greatest demand," an ambulance spokesperson said.

After negotiations between the ambulance service, the State Government and Maroondah Council the service was relocated temporarily to the former Ringwood works depot on Maroondah Hwy, rent-free.

And it has been there ever since, despite a bid by the council to build an ambulance station at 127-129 Oban Rd, North Ringwood, earlier this year.

That proposal outraged residents who claimed it would create high noise levels, impact on school crossings and lower the value of properties in the area.

The Administrative Appeals Tribunal agreed and knocked back council's permit application on April 30, 1996.

According to Ringwood ambulance officers, John Leermakeris and Bruce Nicol, an MAS representative found the new premises at 8 Grey St, Ringwood, when he was visiting

Ringwood's MICA ambulance team, a few doors up.

Mr Nicol said the new depot was ideally located.

"It is a very central site which gives us a decided advantage when responding to calls," he said.

Mr Leermakeris said there were no objections to the depot site from residents.

"Even the resident possum isn't worried," he said.

The house was previously used as doctor's consulting rooms and the MAS will spend \$11,000 renovating the house and building a carport at the rear.

Group manager 3 Greg Sassella said the MAS had signed a three year lease on the property with an option for a further three years.

He said an official opening would be held in the next few weeks.

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## Service offered new base

A DERELICT Mitcham house could be the new base of the Ringwood Ambulance Station, according to union representatives.

The Metropolitan Ambulance Service has offered the house to Ringwood officers to replace the Pitt St depot which has been sold.

Officers had earlier rejected a service suggestion to relocate to the MICA 8 depot at Maroondah Hospital.

Ambulance Employees Association spokesman, Rod Morris, said the MICA 8 location was unsuitable because an emergency ambulance was already there.

And the community would suffer from increased response times if the Mitcham move occurred.

He said Ringwood's work occurred within a kilometre radius of the Eastland Shopping Centre.

Officers may take their protest against the moves to the streets, setting up a makeshift office at the Eastland shopping centre, he said.

## Ludicrous move

Ringwood ambulance officer Peter Kilgour said the Mitcham move was ludicrous. Mitcham was too close to the Nunawading ambulance station which was just a kilometre away, Mr Kilgour said.

An offer by the new owner of the former Pitt St ambulance depot to lease the house back to the ambulance service had been rejected by the service, he said.

Metropolitan Ambulance Service spokesman Mr Gary Bartram said Pitt St was not suitable because of difficult entries and exits.

Mr Bartram confirmed the Mitcham location did need some work but promised the Mitcham Hospital-owned house would be upgraded.

Mr Morris said the Mitcham house was derelict and had been used as a storeroom.

He said pressure was being put on the service to open a station in Doncaster/Templestowe and that either the Ringwood, Nunawading or Montrose ambulance stations would close in order for a new station to open.

"The service is about doing it on the cheap, it should have used the money from the sale of the Pitt St depot to find the Ringwood branch a new location," he said.

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# Ambulance shock

by LEONORA ELLIOTT-BRUCE

**R**INGWOOD ambulance officers have begun an industrial campaign protesting against the closure of the Pitt St ambulance headquarters.

Spokesman for the officers, Mr Rod Morris, said plans to move the headquarters to Grey St, East Ringwood, opposite Maroondah Hospital, would downgrade the service and increase response times.

The service will be housed with the Mobile Intensive Care Ambulance (MICA 8).

"Ambulance officers were shocked when they came to work (last week) and found that there was a for sale sign on their workplace," Mr Morris said.

The situation was outrageous and the move would further reduce ambulance emergency cover to Ringwood, he said.

"There is no evidence that Ringwood is over-supplied with ambulance resources, nor is there evidence that supports that the branch should be closed down or relocated elsewhere," Mr Morris said.

The union said its industrial campaign would include a community education program.

Mr Morris called for a public debate of the issue with State Member for Bayswater, Mr Gordon Ashley.

But Mr Ashley would not debate the issue; he said it was a futile exercise.

"This really typifies the special pleading being done by the ambulance union not on behalf of the clientele but on the basis of camaraderie among workers and a reluctance to accept change. This is a rear-guard action which is out of sync with reality," Mr Ashley said.

The present site in Pitt St was difficult to enter and exit, he said. "How can they justify response times will be lengthened by the move when getting caught up under that bridge (Warrandyte Rd) would increase response times?" he said.

The Grey St location was more accessible, Mr Ashley said.