

POOL BACKFLIP

White Box Rise gets nod as council rejects Stanley Street option

By DI THOMAS

WODONGA Council will build its multi-million-dollar aquatics and leisure facility at a greenfield site at White Box Rise after last night overturning an officers' recommendation it select the Elgin Boulevard-Stanley Street option.

Council voted 4-2 against the recommendation, instead choosing to build the development on a site which will be part of the new housing estate now taking shape on the former army land between Pearce Street and Beechworth Road.

The decision resulted from four councillors — Brian Wicks, John de Kruiff, John Mahony and Lisa Mahood — reflecting on previous council rulings which had seen city facilities, including the Wodonga Sports and Leisure Centre, stymied by lack of space for further expansion and car parking.

Wodonga Mayor Rod Wangman, who voted in favour of the Elgin Boulevard-Stanley Street option with his deputy, Anna Speedie, said the majority of the council felt the White Box Rise option, as a greenfield site, held no such limitations.

"In the end we had two premium sites which were very similar in terms of cost but different in terms of their potential for growth," Cr Wangman said.

The council heard cost estimates for both options were similar with the first stage of building a 50m outdoor heated pool with amenities and club rooms costing \$11.7•million at the Elgin-Stanley site and \$11.8•million at White Box Rise, including the cost of land purchase at the second site.

The second stage of development was predicted to cost \$23•million at Elgin-Stanley and \$21.1•million at White Box Rise, with the increased cost at Stanley Street because the nature of the site would give rise to an elongated building with an extended perimeter.

The council also heard financial modelling for the project found cumulative discounted cash flows over a 20-year period predicted construction costs, net operating positions, financing costs and opportunities for land sales and acquisition costs would total \$65•million for White Box Rise and \$67•million for Elgin-Stanley.

"I'd like to acknowledge again that the previous council considered this for 18 months to two years and we came to the task at our first meeting," Cr Wangman said.

"It has now taken nearly four years but I don't apologise for that.

"The majority supported the increased visibility of the White Box Rise option and held concerns that the Stanley Street site will become landlocked.

"White Box Rise also has a stronger link with our growth corridors to the east and south."

A detailed design and planning process of stages one and two will be undertaken immediately to accommodate a stage one construction period between this November and September next year.

Cr Wangman said he was confident of getting \$2•million from the State Government to support money budgeted by the council for the first stage.

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