

Notes on recent meeting with ARQRV residents committee group

This Zoom meeting on 1/11/23 was one of an ongoing series offered to subscribers to the ARQRV Help Desk for residents in retirement villages who already have, or who are in the process of setting up, a residents committee. My initial thought on subscribing to this service on behalf of Somerset was that this would be useful while we are in the process of setting up a committee, and that a single year's subscription (\$70) would be sufficient. As a result of joining the recent meeting however I think that there would be value in an ongoing subscription, but this will obviously be a matter for the incoming Somerset residents committee to consider in due course.

The meeting was attended by Judy Mayfield the President and two staff of ARQRV, Russell Morgan and two other officers from the State Government Depts of Housing and Regulatory Services, Danielle Lim, a solicitor who advises ARQRV and representatives of 17 other retirement villages.

Key report back / discussion points

- Changes to Retirement Villages Act. Russell Morgan reported that the consultation period for the proposed changes to the Act had recently closed and that the feedback from residents' groups and operators is now being considered. Changes to the Act are being drafted for consideration by the Minister. It was possible that this would all be concluded and enacted before Christmas, but sometime next year seems more likely.

Most of the discussion was around the requirements for improved financial reporting and greater transparency and accountability by the operators and the potential costs that this might incur. Daniel Lim reported that several operators were already meeting the expected new requirements.

- Quantity Surveyors Reports. Judy Mayfield reported some work she had recently undertaken together with the professional association of quantity surveyors to try to make their reports on retirement villages more easily comprehensible by residents.
- Emergency Plans. It would seem that there is variable compliance by operators with the requirement to have well defined and regularly tested emergency plans. The key messages included:
 - The wide variation in both the circumstances and experiences and needs of different villages across the state, eg : Cyclones in Townsville, Bushfires on the Sunshine Coast and evacuating a 19-storey tower block in Newstead.
 - The striking differences between practice fire drills and reality – especially when reality strikes at weekends. This was apparent at one village where it sounds as though the outcome could have been much worse had the fire been substantial. This should be an agenda item for discussion with management by the incoming Somerset residents committee.
 - The need to consider the predictable decline in energy and capacities of resident volunteer groups. This was apparent at a Townsville village that had originally won an award for its cyclone preparedness. This was the result of an active group of ex-services personnel residents who had designed and implemented the plan but who

were no longer willing / able to act in this role. This had resulted in growing village anxieties about risk management. Contact with local SES and Rural Fire Brigade services had been found to be useful in some localities.

Fiona Lim said that she would provide a few notes about operator obligations and other aspects of emergency planning in the next ARQRV newsletter.

- Miscellaneous Several other topics specific to the needs and problems of individual villages were raised including: determination of resale prices, website publication of village comparison documents, processes for raising complaints about operator actions or inactions etc. These were mostly of local significance only but may evolve into topics of wider interest in later meetings.

It was noteworthy that both Fiona Lim and the representatives from State Government departments expressed concerns about how often residents who raised issues and complaints with them seemed to be unaware of the basic stipulations of both the contracts they had signed and of the Retirement Villages Act.

Another useful agenda item for any incoming Somerset residents committee could therefore be consideration of some educational presentations or other learning opportunities.

Mike Ward

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