

CUSTODIAN NEWSLETTER

Welcome to 2023 Edition 9

This edition's topic is "What is involved in establishing a new RV Park?"

Most would be unaware of what is involved in getting a new CMCA RV Park open, but I think it is important to understand the process so that you can understand why sometimes the parks do not have everything you or I would like them to have or why they are located where they are.

Some of the challenges we face include local councils that do not understand the benefit of establishing a low-cost RV Park in their area, council planners who do not understand the model we are using and try to impose a caravan park style development on CMCA, or a supportive council but they have no sites that suit our needs.

Site characteristics

Generally, we are looking for sites with the following characteristics:

- At least 1 hectare of level ground,
- Access to power, water and sewer services,
- Appropriate zoning for an RV Park,
- Likely to get support from the local council for all permits and approvals,
- Good road access for large vehicles,
- Walking distance to a retail centre in a town of at least 1,000 population,
- Nice setting.

Identifying a site

There are many ways that CMCA staff may be made aware of a possible new site for an RV Park. These include:

- Discussions with council staff or councillors at conferences that we attend,
- Cold-calling council staff to enquire about possible land available,
- CMCA members contacting NHQ with possible sites to investigate,
- Businesses contacting NHQ with potential sites,
- CMCA undertaking desktop analysis of an area using Google Maps and then contacting the appropriate council.

Once we have a possible site, or a range of options in a town, staff will then undertake a desktop analysis to determine

how closely a site meets the desired characteristics. Depending on the location, we will then have staff inspect the site or send one of our State Reps, Board members or local CMCA members to have a look at it.

If the site is owned by a council or the Crown, and it is determined to be suitable based on the criteria, CMCA will then lodge a formal expression of interest for use of the site.

Depending on the ownership of the land, the local council may then have to undertake a public expression of interest to determine if there are any other uses for the land or interest from other parties to use it.

If CMCA is considered the preferred tenant of the land, we will then enter into a memorandum of understanding for use of the site, outlining the responsibilities of each party. This then provides the basis for a lease agreement and outlines what CMCA will be responsible for in terms of development and operational costs.

Planning

Local Government (Manufactured Home Estates, Caravan Parks, Camping Grounds and Moveable Dwellings) Regulation 2005

Each state has slightly different planning regulations, but generally CMCA must lodge a development application under the relevant Caravan Park and Camping Regulations of that state or territory. This can be a quite onerous task involving a number of detailed reports including bushfire assessment, traffic impact assessment, social impact assessment, economic impact assessment, and environment impact assessment.

Although we only allow self-contained RVs to stay at our RV Parks, we still need to make submissions as to why we should not be required to include all that a typical caravan park does, namely fire management equipment, toilets and showers, laundry, car parking areas, hard stands for each site, power, and water to each site and sullage connections. I am sure that most would like these things to be provided by us, however the cost of this infrastructure would make the RV Park developments unviable for CMCA and definitely would not allow us to provide low-cost sites.

We have missed out on several sites over the past years when councils have determined that we must include some or all the above infrastructure as part of our consent.

The park layout is based on the site characteristics including lot configuration, street access point, access to power, water and sewer, proximity to residential neighbours, and functionality of the park. Once we have a site plan, we can then seek quotes from local contractors to determine the total cost of the project and whether it is viable to develop.



Figure 1 Site plan for CMCA RV Park Penola

The development application is lodged with the local council, and it is council that then determines the application. Once we have development/planning consent for the park we can then execute a lease agreement with the landowner, engage contractors and commence construction work.



Figure 2 The "horse paddock" at Temora before works commenced

The timeframe from identifying a good site to lodging a development application and then receiving the relevant consents can take between 12 months and 3 years.

Addressing the issue of competition

Many would be aware that the caravan park industry has a strong representation at a state and national level. Industry organisations will fight the development of low-cost camps because it is considered by the caravan park industry to be direct competition to their own businesses.

Many councils will listen to the complaints of caravan park owners when assessing our RV Parks and support the premise that we are competing with caravan parks, however it has been shown through numerous CMCA member surveys that our members do not prefer to use commercial caravan parks and will seek out alternatives where they are available. Local business chambers support more accommodation options in their town because they know it brings in more people and grey nomads will spend more in town if they are not spending it on camping fees.

Once established, it is apparent that our parks do not have an impact on local caravan parks and may increase the

tourist traffic to that town, helping other caravan parks as well.

Construction

Generally, the construction of all infrastructure for a new RV Park will take between 3 and 4 months in total. This depends on the availability of contractors and seasonal conditions.

Services such as water, electricity and sewer are installed first, allowing for trenching before other activities are undertaken. The shelter and slabs are then constructed and finally the internal roads and street crossovers are completed. Signage and landscaping including tree planting and grassing of the site are some of the final activities.



Figure 3 Shed and custodian slabs at Innisfail



Figure 4 New timber fence going up at Gunnedah



Figure 5 Form work for dump point at Gunnedah



Figure 6 Shelter frame up at Port Pirie



Figure 7 Trenching for plumbing works at Port Pirie

Whilst construction is happening, we seek Custodians to take over from the expected opening date and to continue to operate the new park. We also coordinate publicity around the opening, add the park to the CMCA booking

system, website, and app, and prepare an article for *The Wanderer* to promote the town and the RV Park.



Figure 8 Preparations for installation of the dump point at Geeveston



Figure 9 Form work for the shelter slab at Penola

We cannot open the park without coordinating park services such as waste management, power supply, and water supply.

Once this is all done, the park is opened for business with a Custodian on site.

Other RV Park models

You would be aware that we have some new parks on private land now: Humpty Doo and Sundance Farm Batchelor. These have come about from discussions with these landowners, after they have seen the great benefit and success of our RV Parks in other states. In both these cases, the landowners have undertaken the development of the RV parks at their own cost (with some contribution from CMCA) and we have established leases.



Figure 10 CMCA RV Park Humpty Doo from the air



Figure 11 CMCA RV Park Sundance Farm

We will continue to seek out private landowners where we can partner with them, because this option reduces much of the red tape and land procurement process we go through when typically dealing with local councils.

The CMCA Flax Mill Caravan Park at Boyup Brook in WA is the first caravan park CMCA has taken over management of. We are interested in expanding this network because it offers camping options for all our membership rather than just those who are self-contained. This type of caravan park and operational model is very particular because we are not

interested in managing permanent sites nor cabins and we do not want our volunteer Park Custodians to be responsible for the cleaning of amenities.



Figure 12 Powered sites and ensuite at CMCA Flax Mill Caravan Park

Managing existing caravan parks offers opportunities to expand our network of parks for members without the capital outlay, enabling us to offer members discounts on all site types within the park but still provide spaces for self-contained camping at a low cost.



Figure 13 Camp kitchen at CMCA Flax Mill Caravan Park

Custodian Profiles

Steve Smith (N16067)

Steve has had a very mixed and varied working life which has included time in the Navy, car salesman, truck driver and time in the Tasmanian Fire Service. Also, about 20 years as a volunteer firefighter in WA and NSW.

“My wife and I moved into our 1st bus at Christmas 1999. It still had 50 seats in it when we brought it! We spent 6 months on the fit out. I then fitted out another bus in 2016.”

“I am now in my 3rd bus and now travelling with my new little mate.”

“I have been doing Custodian work for about 2 years now and loving it. I have been in the CMCA for 23 years.”



Figure 14 Steve Smith and his travel buddy

Sharon Hayes (V127889)

Sharon started travelling in her converted airport shuttle bus in 2020 which she christened “Dorothy” as she is a bluebird bus traveling Oz.

“I started my working life as a Registered Nurse but a back injury in the mid 90’s put paid to that. When I was back on my feet I went to university and did a degree and 2 post graduate qualifications, but I no longer work. I keep busy making things using new fabric which is destined for landfill before I grabbed it. I also knit beanies as well and these activities help pay the fuel bills for my hungry bus. I sell them when I am travelling around.”

“I feel that I have only just started to discover this country but traveling on my own with my 2 canine companions has occasionally been a challenge, but everyone faces those. Overall, I love what I am doing with no plans to come off the road any time soon. I have lived in 4 states but did not really take the time to explore them properly, that will now change.”

“My first gig as a custodian was in Bundaberg this year in peak season, not a clever move but Pete and Elaine came to give me some time off and a helping hand after the first 3 weeks. Pete was happy for me to refer to him as my side kick but in fact he was my saviour.”

“My next custodian stint is coming up in Gunnedah soon which is a nostalgic place for me as I spent 9 months there as a young child and I want to see it as an adult. I am assured it is NOT as busy as Bundaberg.”



Figure 15 Sharon Hayes (V127889)

Custodian vacancies for 2023 and 2024

If you are thinking of travelling in 2024, check out the RV Park Custodian Calendar on our website or call Emily or Sean to discuss opportunities.

Hopefully, we will open some new RV Parks through 2024 and this will offer new opportunities for locations in several states. Our North QLD, NT and Charleville RV Parks are closing for the summer months shortly and Geeveston TAS is about to reopen.

Ingham QLD: 10 October to 31 October 2023

Penola SA: 30 October to 9 November 2023

Bundaberg QLD: 1 February to 14 April 2024

Railton TAS: 8 February 2024 onwards

Port Pirie SA: 2 April 2024 onwards