

OPINION: State ministers need to learn to admit when they are wrong

By Tom Zaunmayr

OPINION: The state government's stubborn refusal to accept any of its ideas need tweaking is serving only to hurt its own agenda.

New designs for the Perth street circuit, now known as Perth Park

New designs for the \$217 million project on the Burswood foreshore show a green, open and inviting community space.

That 85 per cent of the precinct will be dedicated to urban canopy is exactly what Perth needs, and what voters want.

The business case is less satisfying, however, with unverified data relying on numbers supplied by the government.

It's fair to say the project has come a long way from the motorsport smorgasbord first promoted, and loathed, by local residents.

Let's be clear: Perth Park is not the street circuit promised during the state election.

The main elements are still there, but its focus has shifted entirely.

It is obvious community opposition has led to changes, most noticeably in the amount of space dedicated to urban canopy.

While there were some token trees in the initial artist's impression, the whole precinct has now been marked up with a big green crayon.

It is great to see improvement on paper, but the debate to get to this point has – and continues to be – poor.

The January election commitment announcement very unambiguously read "A re-elected Cook Labor Government will build a MOTORSPORT STREET CIRCUIT."

Yes, it was all caps.

At the time, a press release dropped in time for Perth's Sunday newspaper elaborated on hosting major global motorsports events, multi-day races, and racing under lights.

A lot more plurals were used than one would expect for a supposed single event, and this plan was rejected by those who live in the immediate vicinity.

Early community consultation was a complete farce.

It was a self-flagellating effort in push-polling: asking questions in a manner to get the desired outcome.

A procession of ministers and their offsiders have come out swinging in their criticism of the Town of Victoria Park and opposition members who have spoken against the project.

But you don't have to walk far around Vic Park's streets to see how strong the opposition to this project has been to date.

There are placards and stickers rallying against the precinct everywhere, and it is all over local social media pages.

Labor frontbencher Hannah Beazley would have been in for a real fright had the Liberals, Greens and their voters figured out they were campaigning on the same issues in Victoria Park and preferenced each other in the March state election.

The primary ballot read: parties opposed to the racetrack: 13,579 votes, party for the racetrack: 11,323 votes.

Only a party that wins 100 per cent of the vote has a mandate to progress 100 per cent of its plans.

In all other cases, consultation and engagement are essential.

The council, the Greens, and the Liberals have clearly been echoing the concerns of locals.

At the heart of those concerns was the bitumen and noise pollution caused by motorsport.

Those concerns appear to have been addressed, with emails from the project team acknowledging the recent updates resulted from community feedback.

All the talk now is about community use, public amenity, sport and music.

Oh, and a 'single marquee street race' each year.

This is a different, better project.

Yet Labor's ministers still refuse to admit the initial idea needed to go back to the drawing board.

Instead, they have tried to argue this was the plan all along.

It's mystifying that the state government would be so stubborn on this issue.

All that was needed was a recognition it had listened to feedback and adapted its proposal accordingly.

By behaving this way, all Labor's ministers are doing is basking in opposition to their agenda.

There was plenty of respect for Labor in the early days, when it admitted cancelling School of the Air and introducing a gold tax were bad ideas.

I am happy to admit I was wrong about the park.

Going by the latest designs, it looks a winner.

The state government should admit it was wrong, too.

There is no honour lost in telling the public you listened and learned.