

Save Swan View Fruit and Veg Shop community group

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The issue

Major alcohol retailer Liquorland announced its intention to open a liquor store in the space within the Swan View Shopping Centre that was leased by a fruit and vegetable shop in August 2014. Community members were quick to get organised and take action, and were able to successfully prevent the liquor outlet from opening in their community.

Overview of what happened

- Liquorland announced that a liquor store would open in Swan View in place of a fruit and veg shop. The shop was given notice to vacate the premises by the shopping centre management.
- Concerned community members formed a group and started a campaign to oppose the liquor store and retain the fruit and veg shop.
- The community group campaigned very strongly, using a range of advocacy strategies, including creating and maintaining partnerships, using social media (e-advocacy), and working with the media.
- The group actively built support among other community members, the wider Perth community, Members of Parliament, health groups, WA Police and the media.
- Following intense community opposition, Liquorland withdrew its application.

How it all started

Soon after news was released that shopping centre management had agreed with Liquorland to open a liquor outlet in the space leased by the fruit and veg shop, a concerned and active community member started a Facebook page to raise awareness of the problem and mobilise the community into action. An informal community group formed as active, concerned community members came forward after hearing about the proposal.

Why was the community concerned?

Swan View residents identified that there was already a large number of liquor stores in the area, including a Liquorland store close to the proposed site, and that there wasn't a need for another one. Some members were also concerned about existing alcohol-related issues in the area. Given that alcohol was readily available in the area, there was a risk that adding another outlet would be of detriment to the surrounding community.

The community was also concerned that the liquor store would be opened across the road from a childcare centre, and that a high school and a primary school were nearby.

Adding to the concern of the residents was the fact that a small family-run fruit and veg store was to be replaced by a large liquor chain. Healthy fruit and vegetables were to be replaced with alcohol.

Building community support

The news spread quickly throughout the community, and key members of the group worked to effectively turn community concern into action. Each member had a specific focus,

evening meetings were planned and all members organised events and discussed options for going forward. The group had regular discussions about keeping the project manageable and ensuring that everyone was 'singing from the same song sheet'.

They learnt as they went, and members of the group suggested lots of different things that they could do, including people to write to, key themes to cover, activities to maintain community interest and media contacts to call upon.

The petition

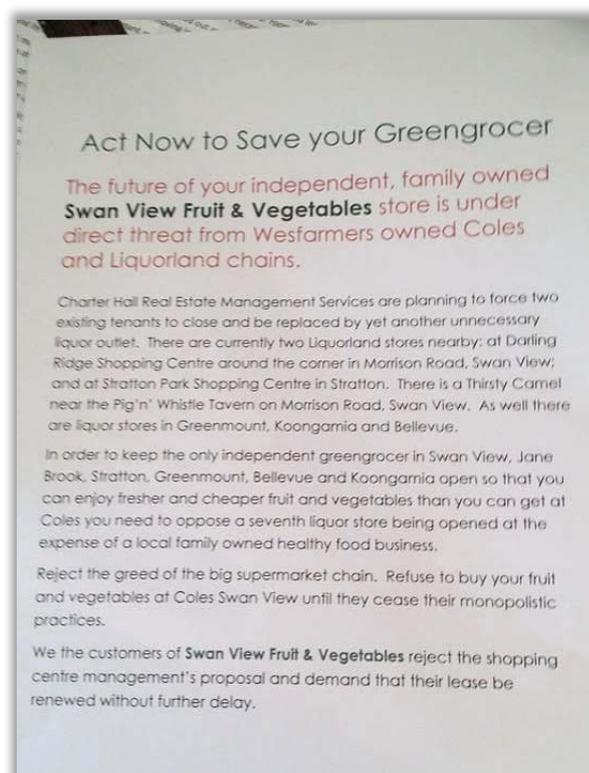
They started to build community support through a petition. The petition (in paper form and online) raised awareness of the issue among the community and let the shopping centre management know the community opposed its decision to allow Liquorland in place of the fruit and veg shop. The petition was distributed widely - at entrances to the shopping centre, within stores and around the area. Community members took turns collecting signatures in shifts over the day. In just four hours, the group collected almost 300 signatures! Over the period of the campaign, over 6,000 signatures were collected.

The petition also encouraged concerned community members to write to the shopping centre management and Wesfarmers Limited (Liquorland's parent company) with their concerns.

The next step in the licensing process was for local government to consider the application, so the group identified the local government as the next target of their campaign. They encouraged others to email the Shire of Mundaring with their concerns and to urge the Councillors to oppose the proposal. The group and its supporters attended a Council meeting in September to voice their disapproval of the application. Those attending the meeting were encouraged to wear green to show their support for the greengrocer. The group invited the local newspaper to the Council meeting.

Media

The initial contact with the local newspapers in August 2014 saw them come on board with great success. On 20 September 2014, the Echo Newspaper reported *Thousands sign liquor petition*: "more than 6,000 signatures have been collected by residents opposing a planning application to open a Liquorland store at



the Swan View shopping centre.” More media interest followed:

- The Hills Gazette/Midland Reporter followed up extensively.
- Echo Newspaper followed the story closely.
- Today Tonight and West TV also had segments on the story.
- Radio interest was high too – 720 ABC and 6PR discussed the issue.



The group were very effective in encouraging media attention, and were able to highlight different angles of public interest. Themes covered by the media included community supporting a local shop, people power against big business, a healthy business being replaced by an unhealthy liquor business, the impact of another liquor outlet on alcohol harms in the area, and concern from local schools. It was important to have spokespeople to talk to the media.

Spokespeople included the local shop owner,

Matt; the local school principals; and the WA Police Commissioner. Activities organised by the group also provided different angles for the media, as well as photo opportunities (read below about Green Balloon Day).

Newspapers and TV stations love photo opportunities and this was a story that had plenty – including Matt and other community members inside the shop among the lovely fresh fruit and veg, green balloons displayed proudly on the residents’ properties and a school principal and children showing their opposition to the proposal.

Gaining support from relevant groups and politicians

The group was very active in seeking support from other relevant groups and politicians.

They contacted and met with a number of key politicians, including Michelle Roberts MLA – the local member for Midland and the Shadow Minister for Police, Road Safety, Crime Prevention, and Culture and the Arts. Michelle wrote to Wesfarmers Limited management, asking them to reconsider the decision to open a liquor store in the area. Michelle also wrote to the Shire of Mundaring Councillors urging them to decline the proposal for the liquor store. “It is paramount that the shire listen to their community and vote down and reject this proposal outright,” she wrote.

The group contacted relevant health organisations, including the McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth, who also wrote to Wesfarmers Limited urging them to reconsider



the proposed liquor store in Swan View. The McCusker Centre expressed concern about the store’s proximity to schools; the potential for increased harm associated with the increased availability of alcohol in an area which already has a very large number of licensed outlets; and the potential impact of increasing the availability of cheap alcohol.

Support was rallied from local churches, the Swan View Community Association, WA Police and schools in the area. Swan View Primary School and the local childcare centre were vocal against the proposal and provided comment to the Hills Gazette which ran a story on the impact another liquor store would have on the schools near the shopping centre.



Using Facebook to create change

The Facebook page was invaluable. It allowed everyone to post information, ask questions and share thoughts. It was carefully monitored by the group and all posts had to be approved. They regularly posted on the Facebook page to inform the members of their activities and encourage other members to participate. To engage the Facebook members, the group created a competition to design a logo for the campaign.

A member of the Facebook group suggested a balloon day. Belle advertised the Green Balloon Day via Facebook and printed thousands of flyers for local letterboxes. Jen and Belle rallied Facebook page members to help spread balloons and flyers. The group canvassed local businesses and spread balloons/flyers along the local streets. Green Balloon Day photos were posted on the Coles Facebook page and the event attracted media attention. The group contacted 6PR and 720 on ABC, and the Police Commissioner contributed to community discussion.



Turning attention to Wesfarmers and the Councillors

The Shire of Mundaring Planning Department provided a report which suggested acceptance of the Change of Use for the premise. In response, Mario posted to Facebook to share this news and encourage members to take action. The Coles Facebook page (also owned by Wesfarmers Limited) was a target, and group members were encouraged to post on the page to question Wesfarmers’ lack of public consultation about adding another liquor outlet to Swan View. This took the story beyond the boundary of Swan View and sent it Australia-wide, and informed Wesfarmers management that this proposal caused shoppers to turn away.

Their attention also turned to the Shire of Mundaring Councillors who would vote on the “change of use” for the space. The group believed the Shire would allow the change of use, based on their public comments and decision to allow two new liquor outlets in Mundaring in the previous year. The group encouraged all members to urge the Councillors to reject the proposal.

The group hoped that Wesfarmers would withdraw their application before the Councillors voted.

The win

On the eve of the Council meeting when Councillors were to vote, the group received the news that Liquorland had withdrawn the application. Elation and disbelief would be the best way to describe their reaction. The group members reflected that it was beautiful to be able to explain to community members that their support had the power to make a difference for the community.



The community efforts were recognised at the Action on Alcohol Awards in 2015, with a well-deserved win in the *Community in Action* category.

Key factors contributing to their success

The group may not have been experienced advocates, but they drew on a number of effective advocacy strategies in their campaign.

Create and maintain partnerships

The group quickly learnt about the importance of coalitions and partnerships. Creating robust partnerships with like-minded people and organisations early helped strengthen the base of support and spread the work load. Support from a wide range of groups, including MPs, health experts and others ensured that a wide range of voices were calling for the same thing and helped focus the campaign.

Make the issue local and relevant

The nature of the campaign meant that the issue was already local, making it more relevant to community members. The local angle of the campaign increased the chances of public support and meant that community members were more likely to take action.

Be passionate and persistent

Campaigning can be challenging. It is important to have passion and persistence to make sure your voice is heard and you stick with it however long it takes. The Swan View community group’s passion lent energy to their movement and helped sway undecided people; their persistence kept the issue in the public eye and they maintained pressure until the issue was resolved.



Sing from the same song sheet

Having a consistent message was essential to the success of the campaign.

Work with the media

The community group successfully generated unpaid media due to their willingness to contact the media and the local angle of the story. It meant the community newspapers which covered the Swan View area would be interested as they wanted stories about local issues affecting the local community.

Using e-advocacy

Creating and maintaining a Facebook page with up-to-date information was useful in various ways, including to quickly and easily update all members on progress and for calls to action to be distributed very quickly to interested people.

**Ready to act**

The group hopes that Wesfarmers management have learned from this experience and will give greater consideration to community concerns in the future. But just in case they haven't, the group remains ready to act and will continue to monitor the situation.

The community members are well-aware that there is still a risk that another liquor store may open in the area, and should this be the case, the group will be ready to re-activate their partnerships and networks and call for action once again.

Community action can be effective

Lynda says, "We didn't have an organisation. It was merely a small group of people who worked together in an effort to prevent Liquorland from adding another liquor outlet to Swan View."

"It was a "David and Goliath" battle, fruit and veg vs alcohol. To many of us it was an easy answer. More health, less booze...but it grabbed the attention of many people. It was irresistible."