



PLANNING DEMOCRACY



The Hon. **KELVIN THOMSON** - Convenor Email: pleasant123@me.com

CONVENOR'S REPORT No. 45 - NOVEMBER 17, 2024



It is unfortunate that the issue of climate change has increasingly occupied the headspace of environmental groups, the media, and policy makers, at the expense of biodiversity. All the evidence about biodiversity is that it is in relentless decline, with more birds, animals and plants becoming endangered all the time.

However, it is equally clear that our efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are just not working, and that climate change is now coming, ready or not. Extreme weather events are happening with greater frequency and more devastating impact than before. I started talking about greenhouse emissions and climate change over 25 years ago, and the Kyoto Protocol dates back to 1996, but the global picture on emissions during that time is clear.

Global population since 2000 has risen by 31%, and global emissions have risen by 40%. We now have more people - many more people - than we did at the turn of the century, and the carbon footprint of each of us has, on average, increased. All the global negotiations and technological breakthroughs have been unable to shake this picture. Greenhouse emissions continue to rise, and I cannot see how they are going to stop rising.

If I am right, it is imperative that we do a lot more to prepare for climate change than we have been doing so far. On the planning front, it means not building in flood prone areas, such as the Frankston foreshore, or bushfire prone areas. And one of the things Planning Democracy has most actively promoted for the past 3 years has been the importance of tree canopy cover.

A key impact of climate change on Melbourne and beyond will be more heat waves and heat related deaths. The most cost effective way of keeping our city cool is by planting trees, and by keeping the trees we have. We need to demand that Federal, State and local authorities have strong tree canopy cover targets on both public and private land - the planet doesn't discriminate - and regularly monitor vegetation cover to ensure the targets are being met.

COUNCIL ELECTION RESULTS

The results are now in around Melbourne. Council Watch has referred to a "massive changing of the guard". Quite a few Greens, Labor, Liberal and independent Councillors have been defeated. Each contest has its own dynamics, but I suspect there has been a lot of underlying dissatisfaction with Councils. A considerable part of this arises from Councils being too corporate friendly and property developer friendly. Hopefully the new Councillors will have picked this up from their campaigning and listen more to residents.

In the City of Melbourne Nick Reece was (re) elected as Lord Mayor, and Rafael Camillo from the resident action group Residents 3000 and Mark Scott from Queen Vic. Market were elected as Councillors. Congratulations to them. The Friends of Royal Park and Protectors of Public Lands have noted that Nick Reece made some substantial commitments concerning the future of Royal Park. He committed to no new developments, maintaining Royal Park as a "place of respite" from the hustle and bustle of the city, protecting the park's surrounds from overdevelopment, supporting a "darkness strategy" for the park, and to ongoing consultation with residents and community groups about the park.

B. Mc Nicholas has drawn attention to the undemocratic and unfair practice of giving businesses in the City of Melbourne 2 votes each. It doesn't happen in any other city in Australia, and it shouldn't happen here. It mightn't have mattered much when few people lived in the CBD, but those days are long gone. B. also thinks that candidates ought to be able to stand both as Mayor and for Council - this would increase the Councillor talent pool and give voters more choice. It's a fair point, and not that hard for the Electoral Commission to design a voting system to take account of the change.

Council Watch has made a number of suggestions for new Councillors to better represent ratepayers. One that appeals to me is banning consultancies of over \$100,000 without an express Council resolution. It says it is time for "the golden age of consultants with the snout in the trough" to stop. "Councils pay staff well, their job is to do the job, not outsource it to ideological thinkers who have no skin in the local game".



HIGH RISE CENTRE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The State Government has made a number of announcements concerning High Rise Centres, which it calls "Activity Centres". The Herald Sun reported on October 20 that "Developments are likely to be up to 20 storeys high and would pave the way for thousands of extra apartments in suburbs including Oakleigh, Hampton, Brighton, Armadale, West Footscray and Mitcham. Approvals would be fast tracked in some areas, stripping councils of planning powers in property hotspots that have access to existing schools and open space". Thanks to Angela Walker for the article.

The Age reported on October 20 that "Housing in the first 10 zones will vary between 3 and 20 storeys, but it is not yet known what the height limits will be in the 50 new activity centres.... Four activity centres will be added to the Frankston line at Toorak, Hawthorn, Armadale and Malvern stations. The south-eastern suburbs will also host additional activity centres at Carnegie, Murrumbeena, Hughesdale, Oakleigh, Tooronga, Gardiner and Darling stations. .. activity centres will also be established at Glenferrie, Auburn, Blackburn, Nunawading and Mitcham stations. In the west, new activity centres are planned for Middle Footscray, West Footscray and Tottenham stations." Thanks to B. Mc Nicholas for forwarding this.

RESCODE CHANGES

Julie Mulhauser from Camberwell has done a Briefing Paper on the proposed ResCode changes. She says that if a development meets the new deemed-to-comply standards, then Local Councils must issue a permit. Residents cannot ask for a review of the decision at VCAT. Developers retain the right to request VCAT to review a local council decision not to issue a permit. In addition, the removal of neighbourhood character means that context no longer needs to be considered even in existing low rise residential neighbourhoods - where new developments previously responded to, protected and enhanced existing qualities.

Penny Oakman has organised a petition against the ResCode changes, which you can find at <https://chnng.it/jYWMmCPbH6>.

RESPONSES TO THE HIGH RISE CENTRE ANNOUNCEMENTS

PROTECTORS, NOT BLOCKERS

Architect Norman Day wrote in The Age "We have models across the globe to guide us - serving as inspiration and cautionary tales - in this kind of expansion. Do we want to become an unwieldy metropolis like Sao Paulo, Manhattan and most cities of China? Or are the human-scaled streets, city parks and tactile relationships between people and buildings seen in cities such as Paris, London and Copenhagen better?"

Annette Cooper, in a letter to The Age (27/10) supported Norman Day, saying "The so called "catchment zones" will cause four-storey developments to be built adjacent to heritage properties, with the democratic right to appeal being stripped off local residents and councils".

Residents have expressed concern and opposition to the announcements. Some of the comments that have been sent to me include -

"It's not just about housing. Nothing I've read to date addresses basic schooling requirements, infrastructure and healthcare... Streets are heaving with cars.... In regard to the "boomer" narrative I've had a gutful. I'm not a boomer. I'm late Gen X, many of my friends are "millennials". We've worked relentlessly over the past 20 years to be in a position to buy our home with nice trees and a garden for our child to enjoy playing outside. We have never had a sense of entitlement... I'm flabbergasted as to why I've lost any right as a resident to preserve, flourish, and continue to look after my garden and be able to have a democratic say when unrealistic building proposals threaten my home, garden, mental health... (Rahsan Gude)

"The process is inadequate. It is selective, secretive and not transparent... Councils will have little or no right to oppose development that is too high, too bulky, or not well designed". (Penny Oakman).

"What we have in places like Hawthorn and Camberwell and other parts of inner suburban Melbourne is truly on a world class level in terms of architecture and streetscapes". (Christina Branagan).

The Municipal Association of Victoria has responded to proposals by the Business Council of Australia that Councils not meeting housing targets should be "named and shamed" by saying "We're happy to be named and shamed if their companies are named and shamed for not paying their fair share of tax, like I do as an ordinary citizen".

MAV President David Clark went on to say that Councils have approved 74,500 planning permits that have expired or not been acted on in two years.

WRECKERS AND RENT-SEEKERS, NOT BUILDERS.

On the other side of the coin, organisations such as YIMBY Melbourne, the Grattan Institute and KPMG have supported the High Density Centres. KPMG's Terry Rawnsley said the push for greater density in Toorak and Brighton might come as a "bit of a shock" to those residents. He went on to say that the communities of Kensington and Brunswick "now, don't bat an eyelid when these apartment buildings go up". Mr Rawnsley's claim to speak on behalf of Brunswick is rather undermined by the fact that scaleitdown Brunswick put in a massive effort at VCAT to try to block high rise apartments adjacent to parkland, and that the Brunswick Residents Association has consistently opposed high rise on Lygon St.

Bernard Keane at Crikey says KPMG's appalling record of facilitating tax dodging means it has no social licence to speak on behalf of anybody, and that the media should not ask for its opinion on anything! (Crikey, "KPMG, the tax dodgers mate, has no place in public policy debate", 18/8/2023).

DEVELOPERS COME UP WITH NEW OBSTACLE

You could be forgiven for assuming that all that was needed was for NIMBYs and blockers to get out of the way, and a new golden era of dwelling construction would take off.

If so, you might be surprised to learn that developers are now saying that high rise apartment construction is not financially viable. Property industry analysts Charter Keck Cramer said in October that existing and new apartment prices will need to rise significantly. They said that building costs have jumped by 30% to 40%, and prices need to rise by 30% compared to pre-pandemic levels, and 15% from what they are now. Property developer Max Shifman said new apartments cost a lot more to build or buy than an equivalent new townhouse or detached house. Developers have warned that there is a large gap between what apartments cost to build and what buyers are willing or able to pay (The Age 22/10/24).

Hold on a moment! I thought the problem was selfish residents, lazy Councils, and outmoded planning rules? Don't tell me the property developers are playing the Government for suckers, increasing the value of their land by getting development permits, then on selling the land at a large profit and not actually building anything?

And haven't we been told that high rise apartments are what young people really want, that they don't really want a house with a yard any more, so we should allow developers to rip up those houses and yards and offer them the choice. But it turns out there is a large gap between the construction price and what buyers want to pay. It turns out that the buyers don't actually want these apartments all that much. Who knew?

SUBURBAN RAIL LOOP

Burwood residents have expressed concern to me that the SRL website contains plans for 10 and 20 storey towers in Burwood. They do not want Burwood to turn into another Box Hill or Docklands.

DEVELOPERS STALKING GOLF COURSES

Rosemary West from the Green Wedges Coalition says property developer Max Shifman always wants more. "In August, Mr Shifman was complaining about Cultural Heritage Management plans, before that it was the windfall gains tax, while the pitch to remove the planning controls designed to keep our city liveable is a constant. What Max Shifman really wants is more golf courses rezoned".

Melbourne University Professor Nick Williams has surveyed 13 south eastern golf courses, including Kingswood. He found their biodiversity is far better than nearby Council nature reserves and front gardens.

facebook

Become a Planning Democracy
friend on Facebook.
Email: pleasant123@me.com

PROPERTY DEVELOPERS CROCODILE TEARS

Attempts to engage in Intergenerational warfare are disgraceful. Property developers are crying crocodile tears about the situation facing young people. They have been relentlessly driving up the price of land in Melbourne with their program of higher density. It is the rising cost of land that makes Melbourne so much less affordable than, say, Swan Hill. They have had it their way for the past 25 years (ie this century) and things have got worse for young people.

I am absolutely on the side of young people concerning housing. I have said for the past decade and a half that I regard housing as an essential, and that no-one cheers when the price of other essentials like water, electricity or petrol goes up, so we shouldn't cheer when the price of housing goes up. The world would be a better place if it didn't.

But why do the property developers want to build in Essendon, or Hampton, or Ringwood, rather than Swan Hill or Colac, where they could get much cheaper land? Because the infrastructure- schools, public transport, sporting facilities, hospitals, parks etc makes this land more valuable and profitable. Who built that infrastructure? Well that would be the rates and taxes of the older people who the property developers are trying to demonise. They essentially want residents in developed suburbs to hand over the products of their decades long hard yakka as a free gift.



I attended the Combined Residents of Whitehorse Action Groups (CROWAG) Forum on Sat 19th October at the Box Hill Community Arts Centre. Nearly 100 attendees heard presentations on the topic of "The Clash - Higher Density Living and a Changing Climate" from Neil Plummer, climatologist, Professor Joe Hurley and Dr Stephen Rowley.

Congratulations to David Morrison and the other CROWAG organisers of the Forum. CROWAG "believes that good planning systems should ensure that publicly agreed social and environmental values are protected from inappropriate development whereas the new "deemed to comply" standards ignore context, neighbourhood character or amenity issues of neighbourhoods and remove rights of appeal for affected residents".

Congratulations also to Yvonne Bowyer and Dianne Tribe, who received awards from CROWAG's Volunteer Award Committee. A formal presentation will be made at the Community Picnic to be held on 24 November at Blackburn Lake.

HIGH RISE NOT SAVING GREEN SPACES

People sometimes think that turning Melbourne into high rise apartments will save green spaces outside the metropolitan area from urban sprawl. It doesn't. Alison Joseph reports that "Macedon Ranges is being asked to increase the population by 35,000 over the coming years. The conflict with the Government's other policies (eg protecting native vegetation, tourism, and Statement of Planning Policy No 8) is obvious. There is a massive development that has just commenced adjoining Rosalynne Reservoir in Gisborne (Rosalia) with over 600 allotments. It is being sold on the basis of the "country charm" it is destroying... Property developers chop up farm land and exit with \$100's million in cash, while the community is left with massive infrastructure shortfalls that the community will eventually have to pay to upgrade... No-one other than the developers benefits from the artificially induced population growth, and everyone's quality of life suffers. So why are we going along with this?"

In similar vein, The Age reported on 23 October that land on Melbourne's fringes will be unlocked for development, paving the way for thousands of homes to be built in Melbourne's outer suburbs. Thanks to Ian Stewart for forwarding this report.



SPEECH TO DEEPDENE U3A

On 30 October I spoke to a large gathering at the Deepdene University of the Third Age in Balwyn about the work of Planning Democracy. Among other things I said " at the risk of sounding alarmist, I believe that our democracy is weaker and more fragile than it has been for over 100 years. In order to survive, it has to be meaningful. All the fine words you might hear about democracy at school or at Citizenship Ceremonies will ring hollow if you have no actual say in the world around you. If people have no genuine say, they become cynical and apathetic about democracy. We need to give people some power over what happens in their world, even if they make mistakes". I have attached my full speech.

HIGH RISE BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH

Research from Bond University reveals that high-density urban environments, such as skyscrapers, increase people's stress levels and heart rates. Academics Oliver Baumann and Briana Brooks-Cederqvist used portable heart monitors and EEG brain activity trackers to monitor the reactions of the same people in two different Gold Coast locations.

In the concrete jungle, heart rates and stress levels went up. In the lower density, quieter areas, heart rates were reduced, and brain activity was more relaxed and creative. The study was reported by Science Media Exchange, 5 June 2023, "Skyscrapers send stress to new heights"; thanks to Monica Kerlin for forwarding it to me.

AUSTRALIANS DON'T WANT TO LIVE IN APARTMENT HIGH RISES

This is the heading of a Macrobusiness report, in which Tarric Brooker quotes Westpac data that 84% of prospective Australian property buyers want freestanding houses or townhouses. It also quotes Victoria's Our Home Choices report of 2023, "which showed just one in five people living in a greenfield suburb would consider an inner-city apartment or townhouse if the price was comparable (which it is not)".

KHALIL GIBRAN

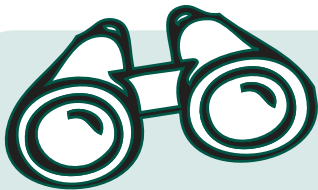
"Safeguarding the rights of others is the most noble and beautiful end of a human being".

INFRASTRUCTURE COMPETES WITH HOUSING

Macrobusiness reports Mirvac saying that "record infrastructure spending over the past few years had led to government mega projects beating housing projects in the race to secure builders... There's just not enough builders to build the homes because they're busy with all the (government infrastructure work)".

NSW Treasurer Daniel Mookhey said big infrastructure projects diverted labour from housing construction, and that the government needed to pare back its infrastructure spending. The NSW Productivity and Equality Commission (PEC) Review of Housing Supply Choices report said "diverting resources from home building to public infrastructure projects" over the past decade is a major reason why so few new homes are being built, making housing more unaffordable.

Strategic Property Group managing director Trent Fleskens has predicted NSW house prices will keep going up for years - "This is a boom fuelled by two things: cost inflation and mass immigration - neither of which are abating to levels our industry can handle any time soon".



YIMBY WATCH (1)

YIMBY Melbourne has told the Allan Government that the inner and northern suburbs, including Collingwood, North Richmond, Prahran and West Richmond, should be the focus for the next 25 High Rise Centres ("Activity Centres") according to The Age. Self-awareness is a wonderful thing. You have to wonder whether they could possibly be so blissfully unaware of the raging contradiction between their name "Yes in MY backyard", and telling policy makers where all the high rise should be built. Their name is false advertising. The ACCC should make them change it to YIYBY (Yes in YOUR Backyard). Thanks to Angela Walker for the article.

YIMBY WATCH (2)

Dr Charles Sowerwine, from the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, has pointed out that YIMBY is an offshoot of the American based Center for New Liberalism. It describes itself as a center left political movement, but then goes in to bat for globalisation, free trade, open immigration, and getting rid of land use restrictions. I can only explain this contradiction in one of two ways. Either it is a front for corporate interests, masquerading as left of centre - it wouldn't be the first. Or there are left of centre people in the US who seriously believe in globalisation, free trade, open immigration, and high rise. If so, it would go a long way towards explaining why millions of working class Americans have deserted the Democratic Party in the last couple of decades. A majority of working class Americans now vote Republican. Bernie Sanders says the Democratic Party has abandoned working Americans, and they have abandoned it in return.

ZHENG CHIN

On a more hopeful note, I recently had meetings with Zheng Chin, a planner who has been involved in the campaign to Save the Preston Market. Zheng is interested in establishing a body of community groups who would fight undemocratic planning decisions, a kind of community planning authority. He wants to work with planners and community groups to try to get this off the ground. I like the idea.

DEREGULATING PLANNING WON'T PROVIDE MORE AFFORDABLE HOMES - ASK CANADA

Ideological and self-serving claims by industry that deregulating planning will give us more affordable homes run into the reality of actual experience. Take the cautionary tale of Vancouver, Canada. Vancouver went nuts on planning, and tripled its housing through high-density infill. Patrick Condon, Chair in Landscape and Liveable Environments at the University of British Columbia's School of Architecture writes "This giant surge of new housing supply did not lead to more affordable housing as we had all hoped. Somehow, confoundingly, the reverse happened. During this period, Vancouver housing prices quadrupled, rising faster and further than in any other North American centre city. Currently, Vancouver home prices are the third-most expensive globally (behind only Hong Kong and Sydney)." Vancouver also has the highest rents in Canada.

INCREASED USE OF MINISTERIAL CALL IN

In a Press Release the Minister for Planning has said that she has used her powers to intervene or fast track homes to approve 10,700 homes in 12 months- a more than 100 per cent increase on previous years. This includes through the Development Facilitation Program. Under this program more than 2000 homes have been fast-tracked since the Housing Statement, including 365 on the site of a former University of Melbourne campus in Hawthorn, and 62 in Frankston.

GRAFFITI AT HISTORIC CHAPEL

Gaye Guest has urged the City of Greater Dandenong and the Uniting Church to do more to protect the historic chapel at 176 Chapel Road Keysborough, which dates back to 1877. Her latest efforts, in a four year campaign to stop the chapel from being demolished by neglect, come after another spate of graffiti vandalism.



BRIGHTER NIGHTS AND DARKER DAYS COULD LEAD TO AN EARLY GRAVE

B. Mc Nicholas has sent through this ominously titled report from Flinders University, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. Co-authors Professor Sean Cain and Associate Professor Andrew Phillips say that exposure to brighter nights and darker days can disrupt our circadian rhythms, and lead to health problems such as diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and mental health issues. Those who were exposed to high levels of light at night had a 21-34% increased risk of death, while those exposed to high levels of daylight had a 17-34% reduction in their risk of death.

The research adds weight to the calls to keep our parks and open spaces dark at night. And if you are reading this after 10pm, stop - go to bed!

WOLLERT WASTE TO ENERGY INCINERATOR

An application has been made to the EPA to construct a Waste-to-Energy incinerator in Wollert. It is known as MERC, (Melbourne Energy and Resource Centre), and will have a capacity to process 380,000 tonnes of waste annually. Residents in Broadford, Wallan, and Kilmore have expressed concern that the project will lead to the release of toxic chemicals and heavy metals. Thanks to Ian Stewart for alerting me to this one.

MARIBYRNONG RIVER FLOOD REVIEW

Maelor Himbury from the Friends of Maribyrnong Valley has passed on Melbourne Water's 12 month update on the Maribyrnong River Flood Review. Melbourne Water accepted the 15 recommendations of the Independent Panel inquiry into the 2022 flood.

It says it has met or embedded 6 of the recommendations, and the remaining 9 are on track for completion. This includes working with local Councils to translate the latest Maribyrnong River flood information into planning scheme controls.

PROPOSED DESTRUCTION OF EDINBURGH GARDENS MATURE ELMS

Fitzroy resident Greg Spark, and the Protectors of Public Lands, are expressing concern about plans to cut down seven English elms in the Edinburgh Gardens. Greg says the Gardens have had to fight off numerous attempts over the years to appropriate the public open space, and that the redevelopment of the Brunswick Oval, grandstand and tennis club is just the latest of these. He says the Brunswick Oval redevelopment proposal needs to be thoroughly reviewed and reworked into a version 3 retaining all mature trees and original paths.



BUILDER BANKRUPTCIES ARE COSTING HOMEOWNERS

Sheila Newman has drawn my attention to University of New South Wales research that builder bankruptcies are costing Australian homeowners millions of dollars. Professor Peter Swan and Dr Bradley Hastings say "Protection for consumer deposits in Australia's construction sector is vital as insolvencies rise, threatening the stability of the home building industry".

TWELVE APOSTLES VIEWING PLATFORM

Marion Manifold from the Protectors of Public Lands has prepared a report on the stability of the cliffs at the 12 Apostles "diving board" viewing platform. She says Parks Victoria photos show a small cliff collapse on the eastern side while drilling, and there is undercutting (caverns) beneath the viewing platform site. Parks Victoria signs say the cliffs are unstable, but the viewing platform places visitors over the cliff edge. World renowned coastal geomorphologist Dr Eric Bird wrote "it is hazardous to build structures, particularly large buildings, near the cliffs and caverns because of the risk of damage resulting from their collapse".



*Artist's impression of new viewing platform.
(Image – Parks Victoria)*

COMING EVENTS

**Saturday 23 November
11am**

National Trust of Australia (Victoria) AGM.
Warders Residence Pentridge Prison,
1 Champ St Coburg.
RSVP by Friday 15 November to RSVP@nattrust.com.au.

Saturday 23 November

Victorian National Parks Association
Bushwalk Mornington Peninsula, and

Friday 29 November

VNPA Bushwalk, Four Brothers Rock, Bunyip State Park.
Full details on VNPA website.

**Sunday 24 November
1.30 – 3.30pm**

Defenders of the South East Green Wedge
Annual General Meeting.
Springvale Community Centre
5 Hillcrest Grove Springvale.

Guest Speaker Emeritus Professor Michael Buxton
from the Centre for Urban Research, RMIT.

**Saturday 23 and Sunday 24 November
10 am – 3.30pm**

National Trust Traditional Trades Expo.
An annual knowledge sharing forum
bringing together some of Victoria's finest traditional
trade practitioners.
Labassa Mansion,
2 Manor Grove Caulfield North.
Tickets \$30 for adults,
\$20 for National Trust members;
purchase from National Trust website.

**Wednesday 27 November
6.30pm – 8pm**

Free Webinar for Renters about State Government
changes to energy standards re insulation,
heating, cooling, etc.
Online, register via Moonee Valley Sustainability event webpage.

**Thursday 28 November
4.15pm.**

Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) AGM, via zoom.

**Thursday 28 November
7.00pm**

Port Phillip Conservation Council Inc. AGM
Longbeach Place,
15 Chelsea Road, Chelsea
(behind Chelsea Library)

**Friday 13 December
10am**

200th Anniversary of the Hume and Hovell trek through Kilmore.
Unveiling of brass plaque at Monument on Monument Hill, Kilmore.



Thanks as always for your support. You can opt out of receiving these Reports by replying to this email and typing STOP in the subject line.

**That's all folks, till next time. Keep up the good work!
PLANNING DEMOCRACY Email: pleasant123@me.com /**

facebook