



PLANNING DEMOCRACY

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CONVENOR'S REPORT No. 18 - NOVEMBER 8, 2022

PLANNING DEMOCRACY ELECTION QUESTIONNAIRES

Since my last Report, a number of other Parties and candidates have provided responses to our Victorian Election Planning and Heritage Questionnaire. I attached the full Questionnaire to Report No. 17. The story so far is as follows –

The Greens and the Sustainable Australia Party agreed with every concern we raised about the current planning system, and every suggestion we put forward for reform. So too have Sally Gibson, an Independent candidate for the seat of Brighton, Brandon Hoult (Sustainable Australia Party candidate for the South-East Metropolitan Region), and Lynnette Saloumi, an Independent candidate for the seat of Ashwood. Lynnette cited a decision by the Monash Council and the State Government concerning the North East Link as an example of how current arrangements are disenfranchising residents and stakeholders.

The Liberal Party Opposition agreed with every concern we raised about the current system, except for “making development and infrastructure adhere to planning scheme aims and controls”, where they ticked the “more information needed” box. Their Shadow Minister for Planning and Heritage, Mr Ryan Smith, also agreed with every suggestion we put forward for reform, except for the “ban developer donations” box, where he replied that “Private donations have been significantly limited by legislation”.

The Animal Justice Party agreed with every concern we raised about the current system, and every suggestion we put forward for reform, except for the “ban developer donations” box, where they ticked “More information needed”. In additional comments, the Party’s Convenor Bronwyn Currie said that “While built heritage is not a core focus of the Animal Justice Party....we fully support empowering communities to have a greater say in planning processes and spreading out the incredible power of the Minister for Planning”. Their candidates fully support a further Parliamentary Inquiry into the Victorian Planning Scheme in the next Parliament.

The Reason Party candidate for Brunswick, Shea Evans, agreed with our proposals for reform, except for our proposal to ban developer campaign contributions. He thought that the planning framework was achieving its objectives concerning protecting built heritage, but not its objectives of protecting agricultural land, achieving ecologically sustainable development, conserving urban tree cover, sustaining the influence of residents in decision making, and making development and infrastructure adhere to planning scheme aims and controls. He ticked the “More Information Needed” box re the Act’s effectiveness concerning protecting natural heritage, discouraging urban land uses in Green Wedges, promoting affordable housing, and penalties and enforcement.



The Government and other parties have not responded to the Questionnaire so far. However, as you can see, the responses we have received have been very positive.

LIGHTING IN PARKS

Bea McNicholas reports that the “safety” argument for increased lighting at night can be dangerous and misleading. Scientific research shows that artificial lighting at night makes you “feel” safer, but it can actually mean you are less safe. At the same time scientific evidence shows that artificial light at night (ALAN) has negative effects on nature, trees, health, humans and wildlife.

An article in the Inner City News, August-September 2022, titled “Lighting upgrades take shape at Fitzroy gardens, but experts say it may not improve safety”, provides more detail about this issue.

LIKE-MINDED GROUPS CAMPAIGNING

The Australian Heritage Advocacy Alliance has sent out a detailed questionnaire concerning heritage protection in Victoria to candidates for the Victorian election. To see the detail of the questions they asked, as well as the responses they have received, go to the Australian Heritage Advocacy Alliance website.

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria has written to its members and to like-minded groups urging them to approach their candidates and MPs, with the ask that they commit to resuming the Inquiry into the protections within the Victorian Planning Framework, with public hearings, as a first priority in the next Parliament.

The National Trust of Australia, Victoria, is calling on all candidates to support a full inquiry into the issues raised in the Legislative Council Inquiry into the protections within the Victorian Planning Framework. It says the Interim Report “paints a damning picture of the gaps in our planning system which are leading to the destruction of our heritage and green infrastructure, to the detriment of current and future generations”.

It calls on candidates to reinstate Government support for local heritage, by establishing a dedicated heritage planning unit within the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP). It calls for a similar legislative mechanism to the UK Localism Act 2011 to enable communities to nominate places of social significance on their local planning authority’s register of assets of community value. This would help protect places like the Curtin Hotel.

Finally, it calls for renewed funding for the Conservation of Significant Places, through the Living Heritage Grants Program.

SUBURBAN RAIL LOOP

I attended the Surrey Hills and Mont Albert Progress Association Forum on the Suburban Rail Loop on 20 October. It was very well attended, and addressed by Prof Michael Buxton and Marianne Richards from the Town and Country Planning Association. Among the points Michael Buxton makes are that the SRL will only have 15 stations across its 90 km length, and that SRL north and east trips will be only 1.55% of all Melbourne trips in 2056. There will be a net gain of 230,000 trips per day via public transport due to the SRL.

Given that the Government intends to have Melbourne’s population increase to 8.8 million people by 2050, which would require an extra 10.4 million trips per day, this is a miniscule amount. The Victorian Parliamentary Budget Office has now estimated the total cost of the project at \$200 billion.

The Surrey Hills and Mont Albert Association put out a Media Release after the Forum, which I have attached. As you can see, it expresses concerns about the business case, about the project taking away power over planning decisions from local residents, and about undue secrecy, with Councillors and Council officers required to sign confidentiality agreements.

SYDNEY, MELBOURNE \$530 BILLION JUNK INFRASTRUCTURE SCANDAL

John Menadue was Australia’s top bureaucrat – Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet – under both Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser. To say he is heavy duty is masterly understatement. He now writes a Public Policy Journal called Pearls and Irritations. His recent article on infrastructure projects in Sydney and Melbourne finds that, in the last decade, Australia has spent or committed over \$530 billion in highly dubious Sydney and Melbourne transport megaprojects.

He writes that “For over 15 years, a cocktail of ever-cheaper debt, the unchecked influence of our transport infrastructure lobby and a seduced senior bureaucracy underpinned a drunken feast of road and rail megaprojects”. For example, senior Commonwealth and State bureaucrats continue to sit on the board of Infrastructure Australia, which functions as an industry lobby group.

John Menadue notes that even the Victorian Auditor-General has complained that the reporting of the finances of various projects is obscure.

At a time when the focus is on how to repair Government balance sheets and bottom lines, it is time to end the infrastructure extravagance.

MELBOURNE FLOODS - *We need a war on plastic*



The major floods being experienced recently in Victoria and New South Wales highlight the need for sensible, evidence-based planning decisions which take climate change into account. Melbourne was not spared, and the Friends of Maribyrnong Valley and the Maribyrnong River Community Forum are trying to make sure that we don't keep repeating the mistakes of the past, and building in locations that are not suitable for dwellings.

After the floods I rode my bike along the Moonee Ponds Creek, Merri Creek, and the Maribyrnong. Not for the first time, these important and valuable waterways have been literally trashed by debris from upstream. I have attached a couple of photos I took. While the vegetation will melt into the landscape in time, the plastic is another matter altogether. I know Federal and State Governments have been announcing various initiatives in recent years to tackle this problem. However, the situation is not improving, and is probably getting worse.

Readers will know this plastic ends up in Port Phillip Bay, and out in our oceans, where it kills marine life. It is a disgrace that official Government publications concede that by 2050 the weight of plastic in the oceans will exceed the weight of fish!

TREE CANOPY FORUM FOLLOW UP

1. One outcome of our Tree Canopy Cover Forum in Moorabbin in September was that we wrote to the Planning Minister, Lizzie Blandthorn, about the abuse of VicSmart applications for the removal of trees. I am pleased to report that the Minister has replied that the Government's VC224 amendment, 28 October 2022, has implemented changes requested by the City of Whitehorse to prohibit more than 1 VicSmart application for tree removal per property per calendar year.

2. Merri-bek Council held an Urban Forest Strategy Update on 21 October. I have been in touch with Council, pursuing the issue of tree protection on private land, in the context of Council's goal of 29% tree canopy cover on both public and private land by 2050.

3. Ian Hundley had an article published in the Eastsider News detailing serious inadequacies in the tree protection regulations both at a State level and in the City of Boroondara. I have attached it for your information.

VCAT REFUSES MORNINGTON PENINSULA COUNCIL ATTEMPT TO REZONE MOONDAH MANSION

Rosemary West from Green Wedges reports that Mornington Peninsula Shire Council and local residents are very disappointed with the refusal by VCAT to support Council's attempt to rezone the Moondah Mansion. Green Wedges strongly supported rezoning the Moondah Mansion site to GWZ3 at VCAT Hearings and at the planning panel for C270. Further detail about this case, and where we go from here, can be found in the Green Wedges Circular.

Wins and Good News

Yarra Ranges National Park. The Victorian National Parks Association reports that Planning Minister Lizzie Blandthorn has rejected the majority of the mountain bike tracks proposed for the Yarra Ranges National Park. Well done to the VNPA and everyone else who campaigned against this unnecessary intrusion into a National Park.

City of Melbourne Events Guidelines. Bea McNicholas reports that after lobbying Councillor Rohan Leppert the City of Melbourne has amended its Guidelines for Holding Events in Open Spaces in Melbourne. The amendment reads "These guidelines do not substitute any statutory Heritage or Planning permit or permit exemption process, any Place of Public Entertainment permit process, or any statutory or policy requirements, that may be required to approve certain types of event and structure associated with an event".

Ballarat Council has voted to seek heritage overlay protection for Victory House, after the National Trust urged Councillors to reverse a previous decision not to seek protection for the property. Victory House has strong connections with the Chinese community, but is under threat of demolition and redevelopment.

Heritage Victoria has refused a permit application to build a 25-level office tower above the state heritage listed Land Titles Office on Queen Street.

VCAT has upheld Casey Council's refusal of an application for a school adjacent to Lysterfield Lake Park. Congratulations to the Green Wedge Defenders who successfully campaigned for that result. Unfortunately, the Green Wedges are regularly subject to applications for schools, places of worship and other buildings that seek to get around the intent of having a Green Wedge.

Jackie Watts from the Australian Heritage Advocacy Alliance has pointed out that the Federal Treasurer's Budget Speech refers to the allocation of "\$1.8 billion for environmental and heritage protection". She has written to the Treasurer and the Federal Environment Minister seeking clarification of what amount is intended to be spent on heritage protection, and how it will be spent.

The Labor Federal Member for Makin, South Australian MP Tony Zappia, has given a speech to Parliament pointing out the connection between climate change, environmental degradation, and population growth. Mr Zappia notes that since 1970 humanity has wiped out 2/3rds of animal populations. He says that "to effectively tackle climate change, there must be an equal focus on population growth and the disastrous effect it is having on the earth's natural environment. To date, there is little evidence of governments doing that". He concludes by saying "until global population becomes central to global efforts to limit climate change and environmental losses, our planet's health will continue to deteriorate, and future generations will be burdened with our failures". Always nice to find a statesman among the politicians.

CASTLEMAINE GOLD COMMISSIONER'S CAMP

Alice Matthiesson from Castlemaine informs me that Castlemaine residents are gearing up to fight an inappropriate development proposal that threatens a valuable piece of goldfields heritage.

The Gold Commissioner's Camp 1851-1855 was the place from which the Mount Alexander goldfield was run by martial law under the Gold Commissioner system initiated by Governor LaTrobe. Gold licences were issued from this camp, and the Courthouse was where Sir Redmond Barry gave rulings from 1862-1880. On Agitation Hill, on the periphery of the military parade ground, the traders and miners of the district rose up and protested in 1853. This predates the Eureka Stockade, and is a link in the chain of our Australian democracy story.

Camp Reserve is protected by the local Heritage Overlay HO 668. Alice advises that the Precinct is of State, even National heritage significance. Council intends to place a sporting complex on the site, involving the loss of mature trees, cutting into a site of archaeological significance, and diminishing the heritage overlay.

Castlemaine residents are establishing a "Gold Camp is Castlemaine" group to fight the proposal.

VC224 – "FUTURE HOMES"

The Macedon Ranges Conservation Society have drawn to my attention Clause 51.06 of Planning Amendment VC224, titled "Future Homes". The main purpose of the new clause is to "facilitate apartment developments that increase the density and diversity of housing to respond to Victoria's population growth".

It applies in the General Residential Zone, to applications to construct two or more dwellings on a lot, or to construct a front fence in association with such a construction. The amendment gives a range of apartment applications an exemption from the normal community consultation and review rights which previously applied.

If any group or supporter comes across examples of how this amendment is working in practice, please let me know.

BEACONSFIELD RAILWAY HOUSE UNDER THREAT

The Beaconsfield Station Master's residence at 20 Beaconsfield Avenue dates back to 1888 and has been sensitively restored. It is an important place of heritage significance in Beaconsfield. It is now under threat of demolition by the Level Crossing Removal Project (LXRP). Legislation has been passed meaning the LXRP does not need to apply to demolish a place protected by a Heritage Overlay through the usual process – they can apply directly to the Minister for Planning for approval.

The Beaconsfield Progress Association opposes the removal of the House, and is developing a campaign against it. I can put anyone who wishes to support the campaign in touch with the Association.



PLANNING DEMOCRACY

Let me know if your group is doing something, or something is happening in your neighbourhood, that we all should be aware of.

Email: pleasant123@me.com

FRANKSTON LINE LEVEL CROSSING REMOVALS

Residents along the Frankston Railway Line are being notified of plans to remove seven railway crossings along the line. Some of the issues raised by the new work include the protection of remnant Banksia woodland on the rail-road reserve on Station Street between Aspendale and Seaford, protection of other vegetation, heritage protection for station buildings, the impact of lighting on wildlife, and crossings for wildlife.

KILMORE UPDATE

Kilmore residents are objecting to yet another application for multiple residential dwellings in Kilmore's Equine Precinct. Vyvienne Whitehurst says the application (PLP099/22 – 33 George St., Kilmore) is inconsistent with Kilmore's Local Planning Policy, inconsistent with neighbourhood character objectives, provides insufficient open space for children to play outdoors, has insufficient off street parking, and not enough trees. The area will heat up, and be a source of conflict between horse owners and new residents. She describes the proposal as an overdevelopment of the site.

HERITAGE PROTECTION IN FOOTSCRAY

I visited the home of Mr Daming He in Stirling St Footscray to discuss his concerns about the reduction of a side setback on his neighbour's home. The street is in the City of Maribyrnong, Neighbourhood Residential Schedule NRZ1, with a Heritage Overlay Schedule 4- HO4. The neighbour has been allowed by Council and VCAT to build an extension at the rear of the building which will reduce the setback to his property by half a metre, effectively doing away with the side setback.

The decision itself will not have much impact on the heritage significance of Stirling Street, but there is always the issue of precedent. In future, others in the street will be free to argue that they are also entitled to reduce their setbacks, and if some of them do so then the character of the street will inevitably change.

MELBOURNE INSTITUTE CALLS FOR OPEN BORDERS

Leith Van Onselen from Macrobusiness has reported that Roger Wilkins, Deputy Director of the Melbourne Institute, has called for "skilled migrant" numbers to be determined by "the market". He has also called for the abolition of the skilled migration occupation list. In other words, employers should be able to bring in as many overseas workers as they please. Open borders. Some people might think that employers can be trusted not to abuse such a system, but the regular parade of exposure of the exploitation of migrant workers, bordering on slavery, suggests otherwise.

In any event, the decision about who comes to Australia must be made by Governments, who are democratically accountable for their actions, and not by "the market", which is not.

MACROBUSINESS CALLS OUT DELOITTE MISINFORMATION

Leith Van Onselen has also called out Deloitte economist David Rumbens for urging Victoria to try to attract more overseas migrants. Mr Rumbens says that the decade before COVID-19 was characterised by Victoria's rate of population growth being much faster than the national average (it was) and claims that this grew "the per capita wealth of Victorians".

Leith Van Onselen says the official ABS annual state accounts show that Victoria's 2.2% per capita growth between the GFC and the COVID 19 pandemic was far and away the worst per capita performance of any State or Territory. The slower growing WA, NT and ACT each recorded per capita growth of over 20%, while the second lowest performer, Queensland, still more than doubled Victoria, with 4.6%.

OFF STREET PARKING PROVISIONS

I was recently made aware of a case where a property owner had applied for a second dwelling at the rear of his property, and the Council gave permission on condition the owner built a garage large enough to provide off street parking for both dwellings.

The owner built the garage and the second dwelling, then left the area and rented out both dwellings. Furthermore, he stored his own belongings in the garage, so the tenants do not have access to off street parking. They park their vehicles in the street. The Council says it can't take back the permit, even though it is apparent that the owner has played them on a break, and is now using the public domain to maximise his rental income.

If anyone has any similar examples of permit conditions for second dwellings being rorted, or of action taken by Councils to combat this, please let me know.

BIG CITIES ARE ENGINES OF INEQUALITY

This is the conclusion of University of Sydney researchers, who have found that as cities grow, inequality increases. For example, growing cities have more expensive housing markets. Households on lower and moderate incomes then spend an increasing proportion of their incomes on housing. They also get increasingly priced out of more desirable locations. They face rising transport costs, longer commutes, and poorer educational outcomes for their children. The researchers singled out Sydney and Melbourne as cities where the highest income earners have access to the best services and infrastructure, while poorer people face being pushed out.

A report in the New Scientist has found the same outcomes in the United States – large US cities have more segregation between rich and poor than smaller cities and towns. The US Federal Reserve has also found that economic inequality is much more pronounced in large cities.

FOX HUNTING IN MACEDON RANGES

Macedon Ranges Council has received planning application PLN/2021/457 from Oaklands Hunt Club for a "restricted recreation facility (hunt club) and two dwellings" at Baynton East. The application includes a clubroom, stables, and kennels for 60 hounds. The Macedon Ranges Conservation Society believes it sets a precedent for an urban use in this area. It is presently grazing land in a high quality agricultural area, in a drinking water catchment, and in a significant landscape – the McHarg Ranges and granitic uplands. Objections to the proposal can be made to the Council at mrsc@mrsc.vic.gov.au.

COMING EVENTS

Thursday 10 November

6 – 8.30 pm

Residents 3000 Voter Awareness Workshop, about how voting works.

Ross House, 247-251 Flinders Lane. To book a place, email info@residents3000.com.au

Saturday 12 November

10am – 3pm

Join Royal Society of Victoria, Geography Victoria, and the Sandringham Foreshore Association to explore Melbourne's dynamic coastline.

\$15 per person,

with Rob Gell and other expert presenters.

Go to the Royal Society website to register.

Sunday 13 November

2 – 4pm

Move the Train Yard and Kingston Residents Association have invited candidates to a Clarinda Electorate Election Forum.

Heatherton Dingley Uniting Church, 186 Old Dandenong Rd Heatherton. To attend, RSVP via this link: <https://forms.gle/EsU5M4soJhMrhy267>.

Thursday 17 November

7pm

Port Phillip Conservation Council Inc. AGM,
Longbeach Place, Chelsea
Community Centre, 15 Chelsea Rd Chelsea.
Guest Speaker Dr Kathy McInnes CSIRO.

Saturday 19 November

2pm

Protectors of Public Lands Annual General Meeting,
Walmsley House, 161 Gatehouse Street Parkville,
and via Zoom.

**Guest Speaker The Hon. Kelvin Thomson
(I hear he's excellent).**

Saturday 26 November

9.30am-1pm

Moonee Valley Sustainability Forum

Makers Market. Dwell, 79

St Leonard's Road, Ascot Vale.

For more information about Moonee Valley Sustainability Forum, visit their website.

CLIMATE SCIENTISTS WARN OF IRREVERSIBLE CLIMATE BREAKDOWN

Greenhouse gas emissions must fall by about half by 2030 to meet the internationally agreed target to limit heating of the planet to 1.5 degrees. However, they are still rising. Key UN agencies are warning we need to change course. The UN Environment Agency says there is "no credible pathway to 1.5 C in place". The UN's Climate Agency says current pledges for action, even if delivered in full, would mean a rise in global heating of about 2.5 C, leading to catastrophic climate breakdown.

THE GREENEST HOME IS THE ONE ALREADY BUILT

The National Trust of Australia Victoria Spring 2022 Magazine contains conservation tips for heritage home owners. It points out that "the embodied carbon in existing buildings means that their continued maintenance and operation is already contributing to combatting climate change and resource depletion". It says that "the retention of existing built fabric is still more sustainable than the process of demolition and construction".

LACK OF SUPPLY NOT THE CAUSE OF HOUSING UNAFFORDABILITY

The property industry likes to claim that the end of a 'home of your own' as the Great Australian Dream is due to a lack of supply of new dwellings. But in fact, ABS dwelling approvals data show that capital city dwelling approvals hit record levels last decade.

In the decade to June 2021, Australia's capital cities averaged 149,000 dwelling approvals a year, a massive increase from the 106,000 average yearly approvals in the decade to June 2011. It is the Population Ponzi scheme, not a lack of new dwellings, that has seen land prices in the capital cities skyrocket, and led to young people being priced out of the market.

That's all folks, till next time. Keep up the good work!