

People uniting to try to ensure that our government respects
and enhances our quality of living

Residents' Voice

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SOS response to the new Liberal party planning policy

You may have noticed in the media that SOS has been quoted as supporting the new Liberal party planning policy (released on the 2/5/06).

That is partly correct. As a community lobby group, we publicly support any planning policy put forward by any political party or organization if it meets SOS aims and objectives (see website).

We support some parts of the new Liberal draft planning policy, have difficulties with other parts, and the remainder are in areas that are better commented on by other organizations.

Looking at each part of the policy in turn.

A full-time Minister

- *The Planning portfolio will be assigned to a full-time Planning Minister.*
- *Any other responsibilities will be held by the Planning Minister only if they are in allied areas.*

We agree with this, planning has so many problems it should have the Minister's undivided attention!

Withdrawal of the flawed strategy 'Melbourne 2030'

- *Withdrawing the Ministerial Directions which give priority to M2030,*
- *Withdrawing Clause 12 of the Victorian Planning Provisions,*
- *Placing a moratorium on m2030, as a reference document pending development of a new Metropolitan Growth Strategy,*
- *Directing councils and tribunals to place priority on Municipal Strategic Statements and long standing Victorian Planning Provisions.*

SOS still supports many of the principles underlying Melbourne 2030, but the current strategy has simply encouraged inappropriate development (see SOS critique of M2030, on our website). The balance of controls theoretically available under M2030 is virtually ignored, and it is simply being interpreted as 'anything goes' in Activity Centres. Some of the major centres have been inappropriately selected, apparently for the economic benefit of existing large-scale retailers rather than improved mixed use development and proximity to mass transit public transport routes. Higher density anywhere seems to get approval!

We need a proper plan for the future of Melbourne, and M2030 in its current form isn't it!

Development of a Metropolitan Growth Strategy that has the confidence and support of all

A Liberal Government will establish a revised strategy under which inappropriate high-rise, high-density development will no longer be imposed on our suburbs. We will ensure all parties will have far greater certainty about what is and what is not permitted.

Although this is a very general 'motherhood' statement, it is what SOS has been asking for, and what should have happened with the original implementation of Melbourne 2030.

The Liberals have promised an independent, statutory review board that will report directly to parliament over a two year period.

Local decision making

A Liberal Government will reinforce the significance of Municipal Strategic Statements (MSS) and emphasise the role of local policy and local decision making.

We support many of the items in this section. It is SOS policy that the responsibility for decision making should be returned to local councils, with the role of VCAT modified to an oversight function to guarantee that proper council process is followed. At present, the Tribunal simply takes over the role of the council and often gives more weight to general urban consolidation policies than site-specific local planning scheme controls. *A reduced role for the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) and a fair go for councils*

While we agree with the overall statement, we do NOT agree with the details as outlined in the policy (see comments on previous point). However, there is some confusion on exactly what the Liberal policy is on this issue, as what was publicly stated on radio did not agree with what is in the written policy.

Restoration of long-standing designated Growth Areas

Investment in the protection and upgrading of Green Wedges and Public Open Space;

While agreeing with some elements in

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these sections, we have concerns about others. We are currently getting feedback from both the Green Wedges Coalition and Protectors of Public Land.

A more accountable, integrated and consistent system of Heritage protection

We are waiting for a response from Heritage Victoria

Check the SOS website for updates on our responses to planning policies from all the political parties as this year's election campaign builds up.

President's Address

Dear Member



It's been a busy time for SOS, and I'd like to apologise for this newsletter taking so long to come out. So much has been happening, but we intend to do better for the rest of the year.

We have been keeping the web site up to date, so please regularly go to www.sos.asn.au to read about what is going on. In addition, if we have your correct email address, you will be receiving 'mini newsletters' from us on a more frequent basis than the printed newsletter. If you haven't been getting them, send your correct email address to us at members@sos.asn.au.

So what has been going on?

- We ran a highly successful Planning Forum late last year, where many members attended to listen and ask questions on planning issues. One of the most popular speakers was Paul Mees, who explained why the Victorian Planning system was different (and worse) than most other planning systems in the world. This was so well-received that we have put an audio copy of his presentation on our web site, and the transcript. If you didn't get there on the day, have a listen!
- We have been involved in lobbying on a number of strategic planning cases

around Melbourne, particularly large projects involving the Priority Development Panel (see page 3), such as the Banco project on Smith St in Collingwood (which the Planning Minister approved!), and the Victoria Gardens development on Victoria St in Richmond.

- The council elections in 2005 put many new councillors into local government and we have been specifically supporting a number of them who have been tackling planning problems in their area.
- We have been improving liaison between SOS and other organizations to work more effectively in the same general direction on planning reform!
- We have increased our efforts to involve the media in getting our message out.
- We have been involved with the 'Streamlining the Planning System' process, which should really have been called 'Weakening the Planning System'.

We aren't trying to fight every inappropriate planning application — not only don't we have the resources, it would also mean that nobody would be lobbying to fix the underlying problems.

We are trying to do that by focusing on four main areas.

- Directly lobbying the State Government and opposition parties for planning reform.
- Supporting local resident action groups, with advice and access to information.
- Supporting Councillors or Councils who want to do Planning better.
- Becoming involved, where possible, in strategically significant Planning cases.

Initiatives in a number of these areas will be announced in the next newsletter.

Lastly, you have probably noticed there is a State Election in November this year. In fact, even if you hadn't been told you may have noticed your local state representative suddenly turning up to meetings and making comments in the local press — both things that you probably haven't seen since 2002.

We will be analyzing each party's planning policies as they are released. The recently released Liberal Party Planning policy contained a range of issues that we either agreed with, didn't agree with, or are seeking comments from other groups (see the article on page 1).

This doesn't mean SOS is supporting one political party over another; we will be commenting on the planning policies of every party.

Though I will give the Liberals one other compliment (apart from our positive analysis of a fair bit of their policy) — it's

good for the community that it was released six months before the election. I hope other parties will follow this lead and release their policies soon as well, so that they can be properly analysed and discussed well before the election.

You may have also noticed in the media that I will be standing for the lower house seat of Richmond in November. SOS is not a political party so I am standing as an independent (having never belonged to any political party) but with the support of the SOS committee and any of our members who want to help me raise planning as an issue of political significance. The reason for this strategy is simple — election time is when political parties are

most sensitive to community concerns. Richmond is now a swinging seat which is likely to be a close contest between Labour and the Greens. Both parties will be clamoring for preferences from all the other party and independent candidates. That gives us a rare opportunity to gain publicity for planning issues and perhaps to win more concessions on planning reform from the Government.

If you would like to help — either with letterboxing or handing out how to vote cards on the day, or in any other way — please contact me at <election2006@sos.asn.au>

Ian Quick, President, Save Our Suburbs

Why should we accept consolidation/densification ?

(These views do not necessarily represent those of SOS)

Urban consolidation/densification doesn't necessarily mean congested housing and congested daily living, but that is exactly what is happening. There are many examples of sensibly-planned urban consolidation that create good living conditions. However, until the government demands intelligent design instead of simple jamming together, we won't get it and we will suffer.

In all aspects of our daily lives we consider close living to be undesirable, frustrating and time wasting. Crowded roads, public transport, beaches, supermarkets, airports etc. with the time wasting results such as queuing at the bank, waiting for a table at a restaurant, long waiting times to see a doctor or getting in line to have 'elective' surgery in hospital.

We don't like it, and we don't see many examples to convince us that we will ever like it!

Councils sell off 'pocket parks' and our government gives developers public parkland to build close-together houses of dubious architectural merit for the price giving Commonwealth Games athletes and officials a few week's accommodation.

Airport runways and terminals have to be bigger to accommodate bigger and

more fuel-efficient jet liners, and our government even wants to alter the ecology of our Bay so as we can accommodate the new and bigger super cargo ships that have not even been built yet! We are told these works are needed to reduce congestion.

Why then are we supposed to believe that more congested housing conditions by way of urban consolidation/densification policies will make our lives better and not worse?

The effect of unplanned urban consolidation forces more people onto existing public transport, cars onto roads, etc, etc. This does not reduce congestion, it increases it.

When our politicians and senior public servants design new offices for themselves do they move into smaller ones or bigger ones?

We have legislation that sets minimum workspace requirements for office workers as it is recognised that congested working conditions reduce productivity.

It would be interesting to conduct a survey to see how many of our senior politicians, DSE public servants and VCAT members live in detached houses with gardens. Any guesses?

Heinz Reitmeier, Langwarrin

Traffic congestion is worsening because the basic intent of M2030 hasn't even been legislated or budgeted for! There are no comprehensive integrated metro-wide public transport system upgrades, no choice of activity centres based on mass transit nodes, and there were no structure plans in place to control development before M2030 was introduced.

'Streamlining' the planning process

— or weakening the planning system?

Planning Minister Rob Hulls announced late last year that he wanted to remove permit requirements for items such as 'cubby houses' so as to free up planning resources at councils and save residents the frustration of having to apply for a permit for such minor construction. He established a committee (which SOS is on) and a working group to review suggestions and report back to him by June 2006.

While SOS agrees that streamlining the planning process is a good idea, doing it by simply abolishing planning permits for some applications is clearly the wrong approach.

Not only would this fail to address the underlying problems that are straining council resources, in many cases it would create a range of negative impacts that would cause further distress in the community.

Most of the items brought to the committee so far fall into either of two categories.

1. Mainly harmless to remove permit requirements, but irrelevant as only a handful are applied for each year across the whole of Victoria.

2. Extremely dangerous to remove, primarily because lack of legal definition of terms would allow more than was intended. What is a 'storage shed' and how big can it be? The lack of a specific definition could allow such a shed to be internally divided into rooms.

The items to be exempt from permit requirements will either be put into a group for which councils can still require a permit by using a local planning policy, or a group that councils will be unable to require a permit for at all.

Both of these options are worrying

- If the items CAN be included in a local policy, will councils be given the time required to develop the policy and have it approved by the minister (typically several years) before the items are taken out of the state framework?

- If the items CAN'T be included, what powers will councils have to control 'over-enthusiastic' development by developers interpreting the exemption to the extreme?

SOS finds it extremely worrying that the Minister and his department seem to believe that 'improving' the planning process simply consists of removing

requirements for a permit! It would be much more constructive to look at the underlying problems, for example by introducing more certainty into planning by changing the entire 'optional' nature of the current planning system and making amenity standards and overlay controls mandatory. This would streamline the process by simplifying and reducing council workloads and the number of VCAT appeals while actually improving the quality of planning outcomes.

For more detail, see our web site at www.sos.asn.au/streamlining.htm.

Ian Quick, SOS President

**What is a cubby house?
Could someone build something without a permit that has a bathroom, a kitchen and a large room and call it a cubby house? If they did, to whom could a neighbour complain and what could be done about it?**

What is the Priority Development Panel, and what does a Priority Development Zone do?

By Ian Quick

You may have heard of the term 'Priority Development Panel' (PDP) being used in planning discussions, closely followed by the term Priority Development Zone. What are they?

According to the Department website (<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/planning/prioritydevelopment>)

The Priority Development Panel is an advisory committee established by the Minister for Planning under section 151 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987. The Priority Development Panel provides advice on matters referred to it by the Minister for Planning and regulates its own proceedings.

So a PDP is a group of people with some professional planning background that the Planning Minister can send a proposal to. They will evaluate it, and then give a recommendation back to the Minister.

But why is it called the Priority Development Panel? You guessed it; they are heavily biased towards giving development the priority — this has been confirmed not only by the decisions they have made to date, but by the process they follow, and by direct statements of Panel

members and senior DSE staff.

Not only that, but residents don't have the same rights as at VCAT, i.e. you can't ask questions of the developers' "experts" unless you get permission from the PDP! It is also as resource intensive as VCAT — i.e. lawyers and planning consultants are the main players.

What advantage is there to residents in having the PDP review their planning issue instead of VCAT?

Almost none, except that political pressure applied to the Planning Minister may influence the eventual outcome, as he makes the final decision, not the PDP which only has an advisory role.

SOS is opposed to the PDP concept — development proposals should be assessed against all the planning policies applicable to the site, including those relating to existing residential amenity. Only where a site has demonstrated state significance (as determined by parliament) should planning controls be subject to any exercise of discretion by the Minister.

What is a PDZ?

A PDZ is a Priority Development Zone, and it's a special type of planning zone that a developer can request be applied to a development site.

The PDZ has two main characteristics

- The developer gets broad approval to develop something which 'generally conforms' to a un-detailed overview plan, without any further requirements for permits.

- If further permits are required, residents have no appeal rights, although the developer retains theirs. This means if the council knocks back a permit application, the developer can take them to VCAT, but if they approve it residents can't take it to VCAT.

SOS is opposed to the PDZ. Why should developers receive a broad licence to do what they want while residents lose their appeal rights?

A number of people have commented to SOS that we need the exact opposite of the PDP and PDZ — i.e. a Residential Protection Panel, and an Amenity Protection Zone.

VCAT undermining state ESD policy

Dear Justice Morris,

The SOS Committee would appreciate your response to the following comments on the issue of Environmentally Sustainable Development.

Australian and overseas experience in sustainable urban design has shown that ESD principles like passive solar design need to be incorporated right from the start to ensure that ESD principles and techniques are integrated into the design as cost effectively as possible. There are significant limitations on how well ESD goals can be met by only considering building materials and fittings.

In *Taras Nominees v Yarra CC* [2003] VCAT 1952 you stated:

If environmentally sustainable design is to be incorporated into buildings, this should be required by the building regulation system and not be principally required by the town planning system. The reason for this is that, if environmentally sustainable design is important, as I believe it is, it ought be incorporated in all buildings, regardless whether those buildings require a planning permit or not. The vast majority of buildings which are erected in Victoria each year do not require a planning permit. Hence the principal approach for ensuring environmentally sustainable development must be by way of the building control system.

Your approach does, as you say, guarantee that most buildings will incorporate some degree of ESD, but it ignores the major gains in building performance that can only be made by optimising the basic ESD principles of passive solar design.

These have to be incorporated via the orientation and layout of building envelopes, including floor plans, elevations, location of open space, window placement and orientation, etc.

By definition, passive solar design cannot be efficiently addressed at the building stage (e.g. by just using minor 'add-ons' like thicker insulation or double-glazing).

If the Government is serious about improving Victoria's water and energy conservation performance, we suggest that all development applications should undergo a basic ESD assessment to determine any significant siting and layout issues that need to be resolved.

This will encourage developers to start taking ESD seriously, whereas currently the great majority of building designs are still driven by the maximisation of short-term financial return, not long-term environmental performance.

Ian Wood, SOS Vice-President

Last year, SOS asked Justice Stuart Morris for a response to the letter reprinted at left concerning the need for Environmentally Sustainable Design to be incorporated into new developments. We received no reply. As the letter explains, SOS believes that ESD is a vital issue which the government and VCAT need to address more consistently

SOS Comment

Basic ESD principles of passive solar design are already being recognised in recent changes to many municipal planning schemes, e.g. the City of Yarra:

Clause 22.10-3.5 Environmental Sustainability

Design Objectives include

To ensure that new development is environmentally sustainable.

To minimise the use of energy and natural resources in the construction and operation of buildings ...

Design Guidelines include

New development should be sited and orientated to maximise solar energy use.

New development should:

- *Include an appropriate level of openable windows to allow effective natural ventilation of internal spaces;*
- *Locate doors and openable windows to allow effective cross ventilation to occur;*
- *Incorporate measures to protect occupants from harsh weather conditions, western sun, strong winds and to provide summer shading and winter sunlight to windows;*
- *Maximise the retention and re-use of existing materials;*
- *Consider the use of on-site electricity generation systems;*
- *Ensure that floors, walls and ceilings are well insulated;*

- *Provide outdoor clothes drying for accommodation uses;*
- *Use energy efficient fixtures and fittings;*
- *Minimise the need for artificial lighting during daylight hours; and*
- *Avoid the need for mechanical heating and cooling.*

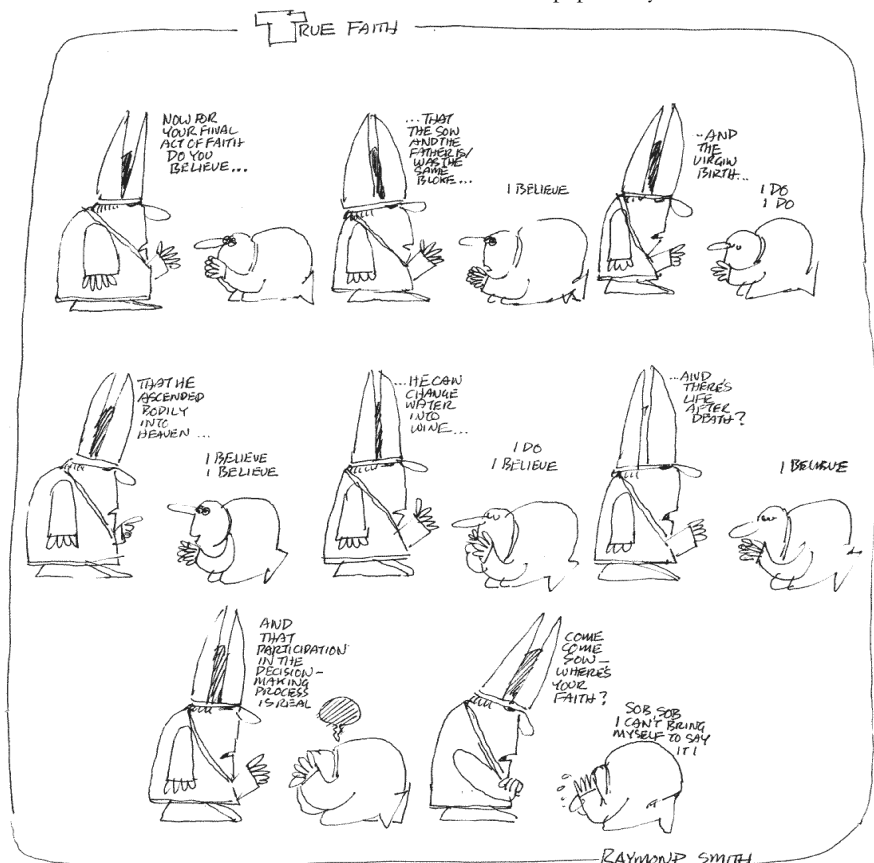
This Built Form policy was approved by the Department of Sustainability and the Planning Minister and yet the Morris/VCAT approach to implementing ESD flies in the face of these new planning measures now incorporated into many local planning schemes. Whose agenda is VCAT following?

The extra resources involved in requiring all development applications to undergo an ESD assessment can be provided by a simple stroke of the ministerial pen to make Rescode amenity standards and planning scheme zone and overlay provisions mandatory.

This would cut out a large amount of the time-consuming exercise of discretion involved in ALL development applications and reduce the number of VCAT appeals by providing much of the greater degree of certainty that councils, residents AND most developers have already said they want.

Together, these planning reforms advocated by SOS will improve assessment efficiency and pressure developers to start taking ESD seriously, in line with other government policies such as Greenhouse.

That might also make local planning controls worth the paper they're written on!



Save The Brickworks Inc. battles on in Brunswick

Save The Brickworks Inc. is a community group dedicated to preserving the historic Hoffman Brickworks site in Dawson Street Brunswick. They are committed to community participation in any decisions affecting the heritage values of the site.

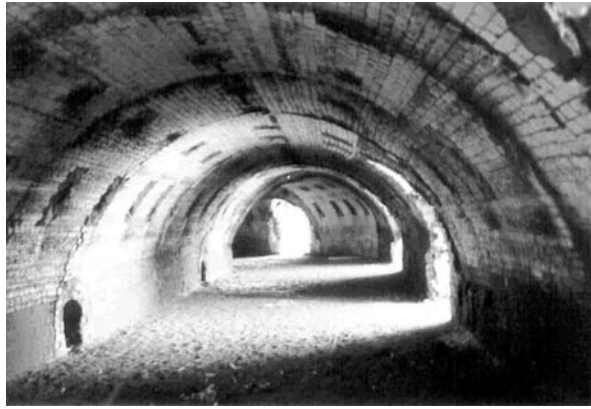
The brickworks should remain accessible to the wider community because the site has always played a central role in the life of Brunswick. The brickworks remain a lone reminder of a time when the brick, tile and pottery industry spread an intricate web across Melbourne's northern clay belt from Brunswick to Northcote and Preston. The clay industry shaped the suburb and its community and in turn, Brunswick bricks helped to build the growing metropolis of Melbourne.

The three chimneys have stood as familiar signposts in the local environment for more than a hundred years. The site's three elliptical Hoffman kilns (2 remaining) are a testament to the entrepreneurs who first imported new European technology to Australia facilitating the industrialization of a national brick making industry. The Hoffman stamp is pressed into the bricks of countless buildings throughout metropolitan Melbourne- famous buildings and workers' houses alike. The National Trust classified the site in 1987.

Operations ceased at the brickworks in 1993. Cyclone wire fencing keeps people out, disconnecting the site from the community that has helped to create it. Two kilns, three chimneys and the brick press shed, containing massive machinery, were saved. Adjoining pottery buildings have been converted for residential.

The development now surrounding the fenced off kilns was originally planned to be mixed use, but it's all housing. Offices have been proposed above the kilns, which would mean covering all of the relevant elements for interpretation of the spaces. The original number of 175 dwellings has leapt to 246. There is inadequate parking because the new streets around the kilns and between the houses are very narrow and with cars parked along them, access is difficult. Garbage trucks sometimes can't squeeze through. Some dwellings have several residents each owning a car. Windows seem to be placed anywhere with no consideration for access to direct sunlight. The designs lack eaves and some dwellings are very narrow three storey "town houses".

The developer, Sungrove/Glenwill/Omni, has a \$1 million bond held by Heritage



In the firing chamber of one of the kilns where once clay bricks would be stacked to be burnt in sections by a fire fuelled by pouring coal dust down through holes in the ceilings.

The developers propose to subdivide and strata title these wonderful spaces.

development (described above).

Moreland City Council over the last few years has been far too amenable to the developer's "whims". Past councils have

Victoria, and Moreland City Council has set aside \$400,000 to be spent on the kilns, but when? The original Development Plan was to be holistic in its approach to the overall design. Currently, the developer is proposing two four-storey buildings — a major change to the original plan. One building is to replace the gatehouse/site manager's office and will obscure the full view of the front kiln on Dawson Street. The other building is now planned to be on a site originally designated as open space, incorporating many services required for the brick-press shed which was to contain an art gallery and interpretation centre.

Save The Brickworks does not support the demolition of the gatehouse because it is integral to the interpretation of the historic core. The developer proposes car-parking spaces between the kilns, breaking the visual impact of these large, fascinating structures. The latest idea is to build a below-ground car park between the kilns to cater for the extra parking needed and the overflow from existing buildings. While there is definitely not enough car parking spaces now, this remedy depends on an approval for even more residential

been passive, careless and ignorant of the international significance and possibilities of this site. They have also blindly followed the pressures of M2030 "medium" density at almost any cost.

The developer says a proportion of the money from the proposed additional dwellings (strata titled) will go towards the complete refurbishment of the heritage area of the site. They claim that this whole development is about heritage and yet this has been left until last — with the possibility of them walking away if they don't get what they want — a major expansion of the amount of development in the original Development Plan.

The new Council (elected last November) has finally refused the developer's request to amend the planning scheme. After Heritage Victoria makes its decision shortly, the developers may either have to scale back their plans or appeal yet again to VCAT — and as we know only too well, developers have an unlimited right of appeal for as many bites at the cherry as they can legally engineer.

Chris Hooper, SOS committee

Convenor, Save The Brickworks Inc

Hoffman site falls prey to the economic short-term imperative

When this development was first proposed, Essential Economics and AT Cocks Consulting did a study for Moreland Council and the original developer to assess the re-use of the Hoffman Brickworks site. To quote:

'The financial analysis indicated that for each of the use scenarios the cost of the building's adaptation exceeded the value of the end product. A stratum titled commercial office development provided the most viable outcome for the site's use and was recommended as the preferred scenario (even though this also resulted in a negative land value).

However, while the preferred scenario would generate a negative land value, the project would be expected to generate economic benefits for the Moreland community by:

- * providing new opportunities for office location and supporting services;*
- * creating opportunities for new employment generation;*
- * achieving the retention and restoration of a significant heritage building and site for the benefit of the community; and*
- * providing public access to an important feature of State and national heritage significance'*

It's a telling indictment of the current state planning regime that it was not able to foster the most appropriate use of this major strategic and historic site. What is the point of detailed state and local planning policies if they can't deliver outcomes in the community interest?

Victoria Gardens 'priority development' debacle

One of the places currently subject to a priority development process is Victoria Gardens in Richmond.

This includes the old Metropolitan Fire Brigade site on the banks of the Yarra, and a 300m strip of land along the northwest side of Burnley Street leading off Victoria Street.

The developer has asked the Planning Minister for a Priority Development Zone (PDZ) to build seven massive towers on the banks of the Yarra river, and a series of four towers down Burnley Street — up to twice the height of the Victoria Gardens shopping centre opposite!

But Yarra Council wants the Planning Minister to implement planning controls based on the Urban Design Framework it developed for the area in 2004.

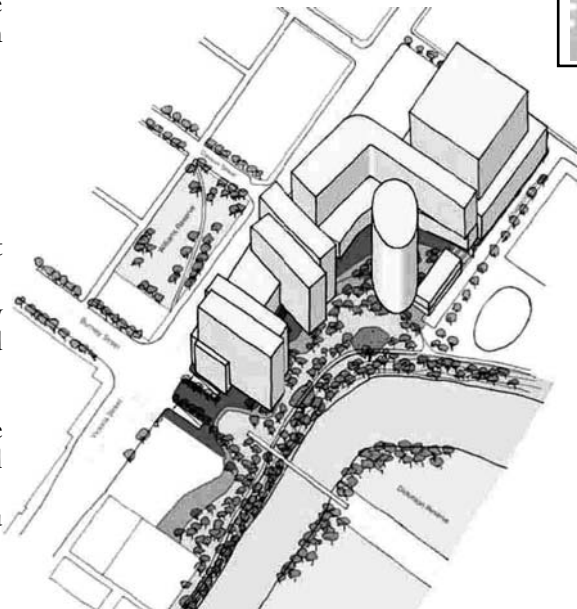
Not only are the developments massively bigger (over twice the size) than envisaged in the design framework, the developer doesn't even own all the land they are requesting to be rezoned! In addition, the land on Burnley Street is currently zoned Residential 1 — is there anywhere in Melbourne that is going to be safe if you can go from what should be the most protected zone straight to the one most

open to overdevelopment?

What has happened to the Government's statements about protecting the Yarra ???

The Victoria Gardens PDZ is yet another example of the failure of Melbourne 2030 to protect existing residential amenity.

For more details on the Victoria Gardens development proposal, go to <http://www.sos.asn.au/news/VicGardens.htm>



Victoria Gardens, Richmond a proposed development by Salta

All these towers are HIGHER than the current MFB building on the site — even though Yarra Council's Urban Design Framework specified that as the maximum height!

The towers going down Burnley St are going to be almost twice as high as Victoria Gardens Shopping centre opposite, and the complex will go hard up against a small lane with houses on the other side. As this is all zoned Residential 1 at the moment!

IRG Activity Centre Thematic Working Group 'Best Practice' cases

Comments by Save Our Suburbs, May 2006

Early this year, Planning Minister Rob Hulls asked the Melbourne 2030 Implementation Reference Group to develop a list of 'Best Practice' examples of M2030 in action. The list has been drawn up largely by the MAV and various industry groups. SOS has made a submission detailing many of the flaws of some of these case studies. Rather than 'Best Practice', we see many of these cases as poor examples of planning process and practice. Below is an extract of the non-confidential part of our submission.

Best practice in urban planning and development requires the results of a project to satisfy or meet the needs of all parties involved — not only the developer and the Responsible Authority but also the consumers of the project and local residents affected by its amenity impacts. As well as unit purchasers, these include the local community, particularly since the responsible authority is responsible under the Act for ensuring that developments meet the criteria in the Planning Scheme in the interests of the municipality. All the developments being considered by the IRG should be judged accordingly

It is appropriate for the Minister to promote examples of best practice in relation to 'selling' a government policy, but it is even more necessary for any failings of that policy to be addressed. And M2030 is perceived

by most of the public (and many planning professionals) to be deficient in the following key respects (among others):

- the expanded and integrated metro-wide mass-transit public transport system it was predicated on has not been properly planned yet, let alone budgeted for or implemented. Instead, a tokenistic number of minor 'band-aid projects' have been funded while major PT developments that had been on the drawing board (e.g. the South Morang rail extension) have actually been shelved
- a number of key activity centres have not been chosen for the key criterion of proximity to PT nodes but apparently on other parameters (such as retail floor space and pressure from major developers/site owners), making a mockery of the activity centre concept in relation to transport policy
- no extra protection against inappropriate infill development has been instituted for existing residential areas (except the offer of mandatory R3Z height controls which many councils have been advised by industry not to implement). Mandatory height controls are currently not being allowed for activity centres on the direct advice of the Minister.

IRG agendas should provide for objective, critical on-the-ground feedback to put before the Minister and the Department. It is clear from SOS discussions with the Minister and the Department that neither has an adequate

appreciation of the negative aspects of M2030 in practice.

With respect to these issues outlined above, SOS believes that:

1. there should be a moratorium on M2030 until all structure plans are in place and until the expanded and integrated mass transit public transport system that the whole strategy is predicated on is at least planned and budgeted for as an urgent priority.
2. all activity centres should be revised to ensure that they are located at mass transit nodes and not just included because of the amount of pre-existing retail floor space.
3. assessment of development applications should be streamlined by a ministerial directive and/or planning act amendments as soon as possible to make Rescode amenity standards and zone and overlay controls mandatory. This, after all, is what the planning instruments were supposed to achieve, particularly from the point of view of long-suffering ratepayers who foot the bill for strategic planning work and expect their council to have some control over their own planning scheme.

If such 'controls' can be varied at will, there is little point in councils putting much time and effort into developing them.

Ian Wood, SOS Vice President

Report from the Urban Growth Boundaries

By Heinz Reitmeier, Langwarrin.

Reports from the Coalface

Reports from residents affected by inappropriate development. These views do not necessarily represent those of SOS



Lexton Drive Langwarrin. The urban growth boundary is at the rear fences of the houses pictured. Bushland just outside the UGB has been treated so insensitively with this 'sand mine' — a euphemism for the removal of one of the deepest and richest lodes of topsoil in Victoria which will probably be profitably converted into a ground-water-poisoning tip.

Melbourne 2030 espouses the virtues of compact living and we are expected to swallow the line that this will provide us with affordable housing, economic sustainability and numerous environmental benefits. However, instead, the implementation of Melbourne 2030 has produced practically no affordable housing and our environment is demonstrably worse. The present housing boom may have saved the Government from economic free-fall, but what will be the long term effects of huge houses on smaller blocks when the housing bubble bursts?

As with most consumer products the more you buy the less you pay per item. Land is no exception. In the Melbourne outer southern and south-eastern areas, fully serviced blocks sell for about \$300 per sq/m for blocks 400sq/m and smaller, and down to \$200 per sq/m for blocks 600sq/m and over. In between, prices follow a near linear scale. A 400 sq/m block would cost about \$120,000 and a 600 sq/m block down the road would also cost \$120,000. Yes correct, this is where the scales intersect. Sounds silly doesn't it? No affordability there. And by creating an urban growth boundary around a city and effectively limiting land supply, skyrocketing land prices have resulted.

If everybody had their regulation 40 sq/m of private open space, including the regulation 25 sq/m of secluded open space that the Government's current town planning 'consultants' tell us is acceptable for the average family, then the traditional

family-home-servicing businesses will be negatively affected, such as the swimming pool, instant turf, landscape contractors, plant nurseries, garden suppliers, lawn mowing, mower repair shops, garden irrigation suppliers, shed manufacturers, bulb and plant and seed suppliers, swing and slide makers, trampoline manufacturers even private tennis court contractors will either down size or shut down altogether.

...developers, town planners, estate agents ... are still making massive profits from government sanctioned densification policies

The people who decided that 25 sq/m of secluded space was all that you and your dog needed to stay sane — that is, the developers, town planners, estate agents — made and are still making massive profits from government sanctioned densification policies. It is ironic that so many of these people have holiday houses on the beach, in the bush and in the ski fields. If the average punter could retreat to these places every Friday night they might not care as much about densification policies and their workday neighbourhoods. A hobby farm, horse stud even a boutique winery, yep, who gives a damn about that silly little house in the suburbs? Will those who created the traffic gridlock, increased pollution levels and ugly, low quality crammed housing estates be the only ones able to afford fresh air in the year 2030? Are the proponents and profiteers of Melbourne 2030 telling us to 'Live as we say, and not as we do?'

Developers don't worry about buying Australian made products to help the economy

A recent visit to a 'prestige' housing display village revealed back yards containing a small timber deck, a postage stamp sized lawn containing Californian grass, four glazed pots made in Vietnam containing Mexican Yucca trees, a garden bench made from imported rainforest timber, Taiwanese garden lighting, a water feature made from Italian tiles with a Chinese fountain and pump. Great for dinner parties and gold fish, not so good for growing kids and local businesses.

This so called environment friendly 30 square, fully heated and air-conditioned house with no eaves was filled with imported power and water efficient appliances. And yes, there was a rainwater tank around the side! Just as well there was a two-car garage because you would need the patience and stamina of Sherpa Tensing Norgay to walk to the nearest public transport. Move in now, pay nothing until next year, increase the size of your loan to \$400,000 and we will give you 'free' curtains, carpet and a Korean plasma TV as well!

Medium density housing, urban consolidation, densification, call it what you like, a combination of an antiquated public transport system, longer working hours, security concerns and busy lifestyles, until the supply of oil becomes prohibitively expensive well before 2030, will force us to use our cars on already over-congested roads. Pollution will increase. All this, and illogical government policies that encourage rapid population growth — what hope do we have?

We Melbournians are extremely fussy about the quality of water we drink and we are proud of the world's cleanest city water supply. We would never drink or bathe in polluted water and yet we are expected to accept government policies that will fill the lungs of our children and grandchildren with ever increasing levels of filth.

At least in the year 2030 the long since retired politicians, town planners and developers who created this mess will have to breathe the same air as the rest of us. Thank you Grandpa, I am so grateful for what you did in 2006, what are cars and what was petrol, why do we have such long roads, can we take the horse and buggy to visit the tree museum today? Grandma, why was Victoria called the garden state in the olden days?

Anger builds in Collingwood

The Banco Group's green light to develop a historic site has raised questions about urban planning in Melbourne, writes Mark Phillips.

The Save Our Suburbs lobby group has called for the redrafting of the Melbourne 2030 planning framework after a residential, office and retail complex of up to seven storeys was approved in Smith Street in inner-city Collingwood.

Planning Minister Rob Hulls yesterday approved the development of the heritage site by the Blanco Group, infuriating SOS and local residents.

The approved plans have reduced the scale of the project and its impact on the surrounding streetscape.

The project at 132-172 Smith Street has been viewed as a litmus test of the planning strategy's attitude towards major property development in established neighbourhood shopping centres.

"This is an absolute disaster," SOS president Ian Quick said.

"It was very clear from the start that the panel were going to recommend it go ahead"

It just shows a clear signal that the state government is going to approve just about anything"

Mr Hulls said he had accepted the advice of a priority development panel to allow the project to go ahead, subject to a Further reduction of its height and bulk.

The recommendations of the panel, which sat late last year, included reducing the height of three buildings along the Smith Street frontage by one storey to a new maximum of seven levels.

Blanco must also reconstruct the historic facades of two buildings on Smith Street that were originally planned for demolition, and reduce the height of buildings at the rear of the site on Little Oxford Street.

The final plans approved by Mr Hulls have scaled back the number of apartments in the development from 245 to 161.

The project will also include a shopping mall and office space.

The development was originally valued at \$300 million, when it included three nine-storey towers on Smith Street.

Mr Hulls said the mixed-use project was

"entirely consistent" with the intentions of Melbourne 2030, which encourages built-up development of suburban activity centres.

But he said the newly appointed state architect, John Denton, would review the final design specifications for the development including the choice and application of materials.

"The panel found that with some modifications, the proposed redevelopment responds to the historic and built form context of Smith Street" Mr Hulls said.

"They also found that the substantial redevelopment of a site within a major activity centre that is well serviced by public transport is consistent with the planning policies at both state and local level.

"I am satisfied that this redevelopment, subject to some design improvements, will transform this key inner-city site while maintaining the streetscape's special inner urban character and appeal"

Mr Quick said the approval was a blow to residents who had been campaigning for almost two years against the project on the grounds that it was inappropriate for the neighbourhood.

But he said the decision came as no surprise as the panel had been established to fast-track the development not to stop it

"It was very clear from the start that the panel were going to recommend it go ahead." Mr Quick said.

He said the approval of the Banco project would set a precedent for other neighbourhood centres.

"It's a clear indication that Melbourne 2030 should be discontinued immediately and completely reviewed because it's absolutely not appropriate that we put these scale developments in shopping strips which currently have nothing like it" Mr Quick said.

"If they put this on Smith Street, which is basically two storey buildings with the odd three [storey] and they're quite happy to actually whack up those towers.

"If they're happy to do that on Smith Street which is basically low-rise and smallish shops, they're happy to do that anywhere".

Approval of the Banco project will also put pressure on the state MP for Richmond, Richard Wynne, who faces a strong challenge in his seat at this year's election from the Greens and Mr Quick, who will run as an independent.

Banco did not return a call asking for comment.

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Municipal representatives needed in Darebin and Frankston. If you can help, please contact Cheryl Forge at 9509 6290.

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