

SOS will appoint a new president next week following the resignation of long-time president Nigel Kirby due to work pressures. The community planning lobby group is stepping up new negotiations with the government and other lobbying efforts on a range of issues, mainly focussed on redressing the imbalances in M2030 and reform of VCAT

(A) SOS supports the concept of a planning blueprint for the future sustainable development of Melbourne BUT:

1 A moratorium on M2030 until underlying requirements are in place

M2030 is dead in the water until the govt first addresses community concerns by:
transparently reassessing population trends and formulating a mix of measures to accommodate population increases in rural centres as well as metro Melbourne
introducing prescriptive controls for planning schemes, particularly Rescode amenity standards and overlays - to address some of the most controversial factors where discretion is currently exercised and thus simplify and shorten the council assessment process. In the process, more certainty will be provided - one of the key demands that all parties are asking for
facilitating full community consultation for Structure Plan development that actually incorporates community concerns, not just hears and then ignores them
revising designated activity centres consistent with M2030's own guidelines and sustainability principles, not on the basis of factors such as commercial floor area
developing and allocating full funding for a comprehensive metro-wide fully integrated PT plan to be implemented by a specifically designated authority

2 Reform of VCAT

The Govt must restrict VCAT's planning role to reviewing the integrity of council application assessment processes, which would effectively audit council performance on an ongoing basis and thus strengthen the integrity of council planning functions in an open and accountable way - one of the key missing factors in the planning system. Provision of amended plans should be disallowed at VCAT and only permitted during council assessment, to remove "ambit claims" from the system.

(B) Successes of SOS

Replacement of GDG with Rescode (eg N-facing windows A13 & B20) - but stronger reforms were sabotaged by industry pressure - eg a reversion to equinox parameters for overshadowing guidelines (A14 & B21)

Mandatory height controls offered to councils last Sept - for residential areas R3Z) and neighbourhood centres (small but significant win - some councils already taking up the offer but others warned off by industry lobby)

We successfully lobbied to be an extra voice on the IRG, which Minister Hulls has decreed will continue to advise the govt (and in a less confidential fashion) - but the IRG has become increasingly critical of the govt. over its failure to act on IRG recommendations.

Very little else - other "revisions" eg from the Whitney Report/BDF are just bandaid solutions that only entrench and add to the complexity of existing flaws in the planning regime (eg pre-certification). This only adds to the workload of councils &/or decreases democratic oversight of planning

(C) Future actions

SOS will continue to lobby the State Govt on the above issues as well as undertaking the following actions:

- We have just analysed the effects of recent changes to the PE Act which unfortunately are mostly just more bandaid measures which further increase the complexity of the planning assessment process without increasing certainty for all parties
- Once we have the most recent information, we will also shortly finish analysing the last 4 years of VCAT data which appear to show a significant surge in appeals against the failure of councils to decide applications within the statutory time - and the success rate of failure appeals also seems to be increasing. More and more developers are taking this short-cut to quicker and better results at the expense of residents and against the spirit of recent VCAT reforms.
- SOS intends to liaise more with other community and professional organizations, incl. VLGA, MAV, VCOSS, PIA, RAIA, individual councils, other community planning groups etc
- Finally, we are organising a major forum on planning policy later this year to focus on the future of M2030 and sustainable alternatives to the development boom that can cater for the city's demographic changes but still protect residential amenity

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