



PLANNING DEMOCRACY



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HIGH RISE ACTIVITY CENTRES UPDATE

The Victorian Government's High Rise Activity Centres proposals have generated a strong community response. I will try to cover it here, but apologies to those whose actions I may not be aware of or have overlooked.

BAYSIDE COUNCIL – Mayor Cr. Hanna El Mouallem said on 21 November that “the expansion of the activity centre program will allow the Victorian Government to seize control of planning for approximately 47% of Bayside... It also potentially removes the opportunity for the Bayside community to have input on planning decisions that could lead to increased traffic congestion, overshadowing, and the destruction of neighbourhood character, heritage, and open space. (“Victorian Government planning reforms to damage the fabric of Bayside”). Bayside Council is holding a Community Forum on this issue on Wednesday 18 December from 6pm to 8pm at Sandy by the Bay, Trevor Barker Oval, Beach Road, Sandringham.

HOBSON'S BAY COUNCIL – “at present, the Housing Targets cannot be accommodated in Hobson's Bay”.

ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA – The Society Chair Dr Charles Sowerwine has written to members warning that “places will become far less sought after if we forget what makes them desirable in the first place. If we destroy heritage to build housing, Melbourne will become “Hong Kong without the view”, a collection of soulless high-rise buildings”.



CAMBERWELL ACTIVITY CENTRE – Julie Mulhauser from the Camberwell Activity Centre Community Reference Group has written to MPs and others advocating for the retention of third party rights of review, and retention of Neighbourhood Character, in the proposed ResCode changes. She has called for the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) to make public the impact assessments – Drainage Impact, Community Infrastructure Needs, and Transport Infrastructure Needs, for all 35 announced Activity Centres. She has also called for the VPA to make public the submissions it has received, and whether they support, or are against, the Activity Centres. Julie has also pointed out that the VPA's answers to her Questions reveal contradictions, with the VPA saying on the one hand that every suburb is unique, then expressly removing neighbourhood character as a planning consideration. Moreover, the VPA says the changes will take many years, yet is engaging in a rushed process with inadequate consultation. Many residents have no idea these changes are being proposed.



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CHARTER 29 – An experienced and respected group of Melbourne planning and design professionals, led by Michael Buxton, Geoffrey Falk, Jim Holdsworth, Mike Scott, and Steve Thorne, has come together to produce a report “Plan for Victoria and the Planning System Reforms”, which sets out the shortcomings of the reforms, and proposes alternative solutions. “It would overload existing infrastructure and services such as schools, preschools, hospitals and parks, and cause major road traffic congestion”. I have included the report as an Attachment. You can visit their website at www.charter29.com.

LIGHTER FOOTPRINTS – Lighter Footprints is a climate action group in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs. Its submission concerning the Camberwell Junction Activity Centre Plan concluded that “the proposed Camberwell Junction Activity Centre is too large an area, proposing too great a change to the City of Boroondara... It raises significant concerns about the loss of tree canopy, the worsening of the urban heat island effect, and the achievability of council climate and biodiversity targets”.

MEDIA REACTION – The ABC 7.30 Report and Adam Carey in The Age did quite detailed reports on the High Rise Centres. The ABC Report is at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/programs/730>. The Adam Carey report zeroed in on the fact that there are zero targets for public and affordable housing in the Activity Centres and their Catchment Areas (Departmental answer to Questions from Julie Mulhauser). This is indeed remarkable – the express purpose of the Centres is to provide affordable housing, but there are no targets to ensure any of the housing being built is actually affordable.

BOROONDARA – The Boroondara Heritage Group for Advocacy and Protection (BHGA) and the Boroondara Community Group had a deputation to the new Boroondara Council on 25 November. They indicated that they supported Boroondara’s Camberwell Junction Structure and Place Plan. However, they did not support apartment blocks of up to 6 storeys in residential streets, skyscrapers of up to 20 storeys around train stations, changes to zoning which threaten heritage protected streets, or severely curtailing rights for locals to appeal to VCAT. The Boroondara Community Group says the State Government wants to almost double the number of homes in Boroondara from 70,000 to 137,000 by 2051. Development and construction levels would need to be 3 times greater than in the past 10 years to achieve this.

Dr Kate Shaw, Research Fellow at the University of Melbourne School of Geography, writes “We are in an affordable housing crisis... Building more of the expensive dwellings that the market likes to provide is not helping those on low incomes – despite the trickle-down nonsense from the YIMBY crowd”.

Ian Penrose writes “the government plan to densify Melbourne’s middle suburbs conflates two distinct issues, the current housing crisis and projected population growth. Its simplistic single remedy – to promote private multistorey development – is not a way to tackle the current crisis, and will have severe, adverse impacts on city liveability and the environment”.

Hampton residents say their experience of being near a major activity centre is that it is anything but walkable. Their neighbours all have multiple cars per household. Their work, schools and Uni are not on the Sandringham line. Hampton has lost its banks, post office and supermarket, and people now drive to a full supermarket in Moorabbin. “So much for apartments and increased population enlivening the high street”. This is the real world, rather than the make believe YIMBY/property developer world. “We want future generations to enjoy a good quality of life in our beautiful suburbs. The Millennials and Zoomers are our family or the people who have immigrated here to contribute. We care about them. We are very concerned that the Plan for Victoria will produce poor quality buildings that are neither affordable nor liveable”.

NEXT STEPS – CONTACT DETAILS WANTED

A number of people and groups have approached me, either suggesting we have a meeting to discuss ongoing action, or seeking contact details so that they can initiate contact with likeminded groups to develop a broader campaign.

Ian Morgans and Rosemary West and I are looking at holding a meeting in early February 2025 – possibly the Saturday afternoon of February 8, and possibly in the CBD. We will advise you once the details of time and place have been finalized. Our intention is to invite a couple of representatives from each group to attend – it does not need to be a large gathering – and its purpose would be to share actions taken so far, and discuss future actions.

Zheng Chin is working on a website for Planning Democracy. This is intended to include a map of the metropolitan area, with contact details of resident groups for people who wish to become involved in their local area. Please let me know if you are happy for you or your group’s contact details to be included on the Planning Democracy website.

Siobhan Khan has lodged a complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman about the lack of consultation by the Victorian Planning Authority concerning the Metropolitan Activity Centres. She is looking for further information from others who have been part of a Community Reference group, and perhaps for others to do their own complaints. If anyone who has been on a Community Reference Group is able to speak with Siobhan, please let me know, and I will pass on your contact details.

In addition, Tanya Tescher (President of the Whitehorse Ratepayers and Residents Association and Secretary of the Victorian Ratepayers and Residents Association), Siobhan Khan (Boroondara Community Group) and Julie Mulhauser (Camberwell Activity Centre CRG) have each expressed a desire to make contact with other like-minded groups and people. They wish to share information and co-ordinate activities and strategy across Melbourne.

Please let me know if you wish to become involved in one or more of their campaigns, or are happy for me to share your contact details with them.