



The Hon. **KELVIN THOMSON** - Convenor

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NEW HIGH RISE CENTRES ANNOUNCEMENT

The Victorian Government announced over the weekend revised plans for its high rise "activity centres". The news was greeted differently by different media outlets, with some representing the announcement as a backflip, and others as the Government determinedly pressing on with its agenda.

The Herald-Sun emphasized the latter. Under the heading "Premier warns councils they will lose powers if they fail to revamp planning rules for building blitz", it said "Councils will lose their planning powers if they fail to overhaul their processes so 2.24 million new homes can be built in Melbourne's suburbs". It said, "in an unprecedented show of force, councils are being ordered to detail exactly how they will revamp their planning schemes to enable the building blitz". Premier Jacinta Allan warned "It's simple, work with us to unlock space for more homes or we'll do it for you... It's time to shake things up".

On the other hand, The Age emphasized changes to last year's announcement. Its headline read "Labor's targets for extra housing scaled back across Melbourne". It reported that "The state government has wound back housing targets for Melbourne council areas by almost a quarter of a million homes, and some areas have been told to plan for almost half as many dwellings as they were ordered to eight months ago". "It has now lowered the approval targets for all metropolitan councils from a collective 2 million extra homes by 2051 to 1.78 million". "A state government spokeswoman said the government was not wavering in its statewide target of 2.24 million new homes by 2051, and that targets announced last year were only ambit draft targets and had excess built into them in the knowledge they would need to be scaled back". (If true, this is very odd – a State Government going around making ambit claims).

The Government has released new maps for the 10 original Activity Centres – Broadmeadows, Camberwell, Chadstone, Epping, Frankston, Moorabbin, North Essendon, Niddrie, Preston and Ringwood. "Instead of green-lighting six storey apartment blocks across 'walkable catchments' – jargon for suburban neighbourhoods within a 10 minute walk of a train station – the government has reduced the maximum height to either three or four storeys in some areas, although six storeys will be allowed on blocks of more than 1000 square metres".

Some Councils have had a significant drop in the number of extra dwellings they are required to provide – Nillumbik dropped from 12,000 to 6500, Hobson Bay's target has dropped by 27%, Manningham's target also by 27% to an extra 38,500, Mornington Peninsula by 7000 dwellings (23%) and Hume by 19,000 (19%). Other Councils had 1 or 2% reductions.



REACTION TO THE ANNOUNCEMENT

YIMBY Melbourne said it was disappointed with the announcement. The Property Council said the construction would not happen at this scale unless property taxes were cut. Doug Klein from the Highett Progress Association said the changes would not lead to more affordable housing.

Liveable Moonee Valley said some progress had been made, and that reductions in the number of storeys in the catchment were welcome. Deemed to comply provisions will only apply to the core Activity Centre and not the catchment. Professor Michael Buxton has expressed concern that the new "Housing Choice and Transport Zone" for the "catchment areas" may be open to abuse. For lots over 1000 sq metres, heights of 4 and 6 storeys are permitted. Many developers are now purchasing multiple lots and consolidating them into larger sites. He notes that 3,4 or 6 storey development on a mass scale will destroy the heritage housing of affected suburbs.

It seems to me worth observing that the changes reflect the impact of lobbying efforts by residents and resident action groups. This is not to suggest for a moment that they go far enough. But it is important to note that we are not fighting a hopeless battle against an all-powerful juggernaut, in which resistance is futile. Together we can have an impact.

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FORUM PLANNING DEMOCRACY

Sixty-plus supporters and speakers attended the Planning Democracy Forum on February 8. We heard excellent speakers from resident groups across Melbourne and ideas to answer the Forum's question, 'What is to be Done?'

Actions suggested by the forum that could be effective in local campaigns:

- Demand that developers act on the existing crop of approved planning permits. There's no shortage of identified sites and permits for new housing but they haven't been acted on.
- Copy the model on-line petition to protest the Activity Centre proposal for Box Hill.
- Demand local targets for social and affordable homes. (Victoria has the lowest rate of social housing in the nation at 2.8%)
- Demand that Heritage listings be respected.
- Investigate how heritage listings could protect additional streetscapes, buildings and natural features.
- Respond to current Government announcements about Activity Centres, 'walkable catchments' and Suburban Rail Loop Precinct Plans.
- Find and support candidates with Planning Democracy-friendly policies for State and Federal elections
- Question election candidates.
- Follow a five-step plan for effective lobbying
 1. Identify the right decision-makers and understand the system they work in.
 2. Influence through established relationships.
 3. Describe the change you seek and show how the change would result in a better outcome.
 4. Build a base of credibility - the public needs to care about the issue. Publicise something that heightens awareness.
 5. Mobilise external pressure when required.

Actions suggested by the forum for coordination by Planning Democracy:

- Developers should be made to stick to a single set of rules rather than getting endless 'bites at the cherry'.
- Demand local targets for social and affordable homes. Victoria has the lowest rate of social housing in the nation at 2.8%.
- Create a Planning Democracy website to share news and ideas and to bring people together.
- Demand that developers act on the existing crop of approved planning permits.
- Demand that Heritage listings be respected.
- Respond to current Government announcements about Activity Centres, 'walkable catchments' and Suburban Rail Loop Precinct Plans.
- Find and support candidates with Planning Democracy-friendly policies for State and Federal elections

Report by Ian Morgans - 0400 872 193 or email him at imorgans999@gmail.com

Resolution

The forum also adopted a resolution moved by Julie Mulhauser to advocate for:

- **SOCIAL & AFFORDABLE HOUSING TARGETS, FUNDING AND IMPLEMENTATION**
- **INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADE FUNDING AND IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS**
- **TRANSPARENT DECISION-MAKING**
- **DEMOCRATIC & CONSULTATIVE DECISION-MAKING**

Some actions which could be campaigned for under these headings are:

- New housing targets to comprise 13.5% social housing and 3% affordable housing.
- Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning as part of upzoning
- Community Housing organisations have first right of refusal on the 45 government-owned sites being sold under the Small Sites Pilot.
- Increase the capital in both the Social Housing Growth Fund & Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF).
- Increase the HAFF timeframe to 10 years.
- Add the provisos that state governments contribute 30% to HAFF grant allocations.
- Make public the 2019 Ministerial Advisory Committee's Planning Mechanisms for Social & Affordable Housing report.
- Make public the 2021 "10 year Strategy for Social & Affordable Housing.
- Make public the impact assessments for the 10 pilot Activity Centres.
- Make public the composition of the 'Housing Affordability Partnership' working group considering a 'new & simplified approach to infrastructure contribution'. (Only the Property Council of Australia, the Urban Development Institute of Australia, the Housing Industry Association, and Master Builders Victoria have been named).
- Make public the 2020 Ministerial Advisory Committee Infrastructure Contributions report.

FORUM PLANNING DEMOCRACY

- Make public the 11 Referral letters to the Standing Committees
- Make public the strategic justifications for Walkable Catchment Areas, changes to ResCode and removal of 'Neighbourhood Character provisions, reducing standards and removing the right of third-party review.
- Make public the minutes of the second CRG meetings for the pilot Activity Centres
- Upload the full 60 minutes of the September online Q&A sessions for the 10 pilot Activity Centres
- Provide answers to all submitted questions to the September online Q&A sessions for the 10 pilot activity Centres
- Genuine broad stake holder consultation to include councils and communities in order to 'bring the community' with the state government and give confidence that the proposals will achieve their stated objectives
- Hold community forums to provide information and answer questions

Many of these ideas are advanced in the Planning Democracy publication, the Liveable Victoria Manifesto (LVM). Read the Manifesto at <https://www.liveablevictoria.com>

Bringing the LVM to the attention of politicians and election candidates is an efficient strategy for influence. Planning Democracy has ready-to-go model letters to MPs and a list of the MPs most likely to listen to what the LVM says.

Call Ian Morgans on 0400 872 193 or email him at imorgans999@gmail.com to find out how to use this strategy.



QUESTIONNAIRE AT THE FORUM

Jill Quirk and Sheila Newman distributed a questionnaire at the Forum in hard copy, and received 34 responses. The findings from the responses were

Time Commitment

Two-thirds of respondents indicated that submission writing consumed much of their time in 2024. Only one third reported that their ideas presented in submissions or objections were acknowledged.

Primary Concerns

Top concerns were democracy, amenity, liveability, heritage, and wildlife habitat/biodiversity.

Experience

Most respondents had been engaged in environmental improvement or opposing damaging development for 5 to 20 years, with a significant group involved for over 20 years. Many had participated in protests and petitions to Parliament.

Consultation Processes

A majority expressed skepticism about consultation processes, with the largest group saying they did not believe in them at all.

Impact on other activities

Most respondents said their activism did infringe on other activities.

Rewarding Participation

The largest group found their participation "very rewarding", followed by those who said "somewhat rewarding".

Sheila and Jill said it was inspiring to see the level of altruistic endeavour among this small sample of committed activists over many years. "They truly are heroes".

STOP PRESS...

The Government has just released Planning Amendment VC257, along with a replacement for ResCode. Once it is tabled, we understand the Legislative Council has ten sitting days in which to disallow it.

CONSUMER AND PLANNING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (HOUSING STATEMENT REFORM BILL 2044)

Professor Michael Buxton advises that this Bill contains a number of contentious provisions. These include allowing the Minister to run undefined "low impact amendments"; the Minister being able to run with the same amendments Councils have abandoned; a further expansion of Ministerial power; a requirement that a panel must not consider any amendment it considers frivolous, vexatious or irrelevant; the ability of panels to treat like submissions as the one submission, and the entrenchment of the influence of expert witnesses.

I believe the idea of grouping like or similar objections, and treating them as one, is undemocratic and fails to treat residents with respect.



In 2017 Woolworths purchased the ABC site at 10-16 Selwyn Street, Elsternwick. They applied to build 2 residential towers of 15 storeys and 11 storeys on the site. The group Stop the Elsternwick Towers was formed by local residents to fight the development on the grounds of traffic, heritage, visual bulk, loss of residential amenity, and overlooking.

The Glen Eira Council rejected the application and the issue went to VCAT. VCAT approved the development with conditions. Regrettably Woolworths has now gone to the Planning Minister with its original plan, seeking to effectively have the VCAT decision and conditions overturned.

As I have noted previously, Planning Ministers have always refused to overturn any VCAT decisions that have gone against residents. They say this would compromise VCAT's independence. Property developers should not be able to operate under a different set of rules.

HERITAGE MATTERS UPDATE

B McNicholas has provided a Heritage Matters update on 12 February. It raises important issues concerning the Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens, Queen Victoria Market, and Royal Park Master Plan. B has again pointed out the problems associated with artificial light at night, including adverse health impacts on children.

ZHENG CHIN PLANNING DEMOCRACY WEBSITE

Zheng Chin has generously offered to develop a Planning Democracy website.

The idea is to build a public repository with a list of active community action groups. These groups would be displayed on a map with some information (about and contact) for other people to get in touch with them.

Eventually he would like to do profiles of each group, as well as a general guide for others who wish to start a community group themselves.

He would also like to have a running blog, with key issues or ongoing struggles present, like an online community notice board.

If you want to be on the public repository, please contact Zheng at zhengchin.independent@gmail.com.

If you want to help out in any other way, please reach out to him.

RESTRICTIVE COVENANTS

Shiela Newman has been researching legal cases concerning property developer attempts to get rid of restrictive covenants. The covenants have played an important role in preserving Melbourne's neighbourhood character, protecting our quality of life, and safe guarding the local environment.

PLANNING FOR OUR WATERWAYS

Engage Victoria is seeking feedback concerning the Victoria Government's plan for a broad range of metropolitan waterways. To have your say concerning appropriate waterways planning protections, go to engage.vic.gov.au.



ROYAL PARK DRAFT MASTER PLAN

Kaye Oddie, Fiona Bell, B. Mc Nicholas and Ian Hundley have shared their concerns about the draft Royal Park Master Plan.

The Friends of Royal Park, Royal Park Protection Group, Protectors of Public Lands Victoria and Parkville Association have raised a number of issues. These include the proposed intensification and increase in active sports recreation in the park, and more lighting of sports ovals and paths. The environmental and biodiversity aspects need to be better considered as part of any lighting plans.

The alienation of park land for more sports facilities will come at the expense of Royal Park's wildlife and environmental significance. The proposed biolink corridor within the park is inadequate, and the whole of the park should be treated as a biodiversity area. The formation of paved paths through the Grassland Circle and other areas is also problematic.

The Age carried a report about this issue titled "Melbourne's largest park is dark and wild, but a new plan will add sports grounds, paving and lighting."



DRAFT RINGWOOD ACTIVITY PLAN

The Heatherdale Community Action Group has provided me with their submission on the Draft Ringwood Activity Plan. They support the City of Whitehorse resolution for removal of the catchment area in Whitehorse from the Ringwood Plan. They also support the City of Maroondah submission on the Draft Ringwood Activity Plan.

The Community Action Group notes that much of the proposed catchment area is in very environmentally sensitive areas. The Mullum Mullum Creek serves as a valuable wild life corridor. They also note that local streets simply do not have enough capacity for large volumes of parked cars.

HOW A LACK OF TREES IN YOUR SUBURB COULD AFFECT YOUR HEALTH

This is the heading of a report in The Age, February 14, by Bianca Hall. Scientists have found that a 10% increase in tree canopy cover is linked to reduced risks of mortality, cardiovascular disease and fatal or non-fatal heart attacks. Tree shade is often lacking in outer suburban corridors. Satellite imagery shows there are also some troubling heat islands in inner city and formerly industrial suburbs like Richmond, Collingwood, Brunswick and Prahran. Experts say developers are "moonscaping" natural landscapes to remove waterways, farms and vegetation for new housing developments. The ever-increasing sea of black roofs and treeless landscapes is building in heat retention.

Thanks to Ian Stewart for passing on this report.



Traders at Queen Victoria Market face a jump in costs as they try to cope with disruption from building works. Traders are being hit with site utility costs for electricity, water and waste management previously covered by their rents.

Meanwhile Lendlease has published the Final Public Environment Report of the Queen Victoria Market, Southern Development Project, as required by the Federal EPBC Act (EPBC 2024/09860). The Final Report can be viewed on-line until Tuesday 25 March at gurrowapl.com.au. It is now up to the Federal Environment Minister. A final decision will be made in a 40 business day statutory time frame.



DEMOLITION OF HERITAGE

Annette Cooper has recorded the demolition of a lovely 1930's house in Camberwell. It was sensitively renovated and fitted in perfectly with the surrounding 1930's streetscape. She says the 1930's house was well built, picturesque, and environmentally friendly. She describes the constant noise and disruption, and the replacement of solid brick and wood with polystyrene, which is already breaking up and littering the area, as infuriating.



FLOODING AND KINGSWOOD

The Victorian Government has accepted nearly all the recommendations of the Inquiry into Melbourne's 2022 floods. For example, flood modelling is to be reviewed and updated every 5 to 10 years. It is clearly imperative that we don't build new dwellings on flood prone land.

The Save Kingswood Group has produced a highly researched 50 page file on flood issues at the Kingswood Golf Course at Dingley Village. For them, it makes no sense to allow 915 micro units to be built on flood prone land.

They are holding a Village Meeting on March 7 at 7.30pm in the Dingley Village Harold Box Hall. For further information, go to www.savedingley.com. Thanks to Kevin Poulter for this update.

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.

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FERNSIDE DRIVE, BANGHOLME

Nina Earl has lodged an objection to Greater Dandenong Council to the industrial use of rural land at 114 Fernside Drive, Bangholme. She says that the location is within the South East Green Wedge Zone, and should be rejected to maintain green wedge values. The South East Green Wedge provides cooling for people and nature, holds water in the landscape, supplies local food and is a visual respite from density.



DESTRUCTION OF COAST BANKSIA IN ASPENDALE

Local environmentalists have been shattered to learn that the last remnant of the endangered Coast Banksia Woodland on a conservation reserve in Aspendale has been cut down to make way for a shared use path and services associated with the Aspendale level crossing removal.

The Mordialloc Beaumaris Conservation League, Kingston Conservation and Environment Coalition, Kingston Residents Association and Environment Victoria (South Eastern) have all sought to save the 31 mature Banksias, some estimated to be over 70 years old.

Thanks to Jenny Warfe, Nina Earl, and Rosemary West for this information.



JUDY INGRAM MEMORIAL

The late Judy Ingram was a great environmentalist and campaigner for the Maribyrnong River.

Maribyrnong Council has provided two picnic tables and chairs as a permanent memorial to Judy at Burndap Park on the Maribyrnong River.

MANDATORY RESIDENTIAL RENTAL STANDARDS

The Victorian Government has announced that it will improve minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties. Proposed standards include a minimum level of insulation, draught sealing, hot water cylinders, cooling and an updated heating standard. **More information is available on the Energy Victoria Energy Efficiency for Rental Properties website.**



GREAT OCEAN ROAD TOURISM

The Great Ocean Road Community Network says that the Great Ocean Road region is experiencing increasing strain from over tourism and over development, causing pollution and destroying sensitive habitat.

They and relevant agencies have organized a five part series focused on tourism impacts along the Great Ocean Road, and the area's future livability. It is called Tourism Re-imagined and The Great Ocean Road. It is a free public series. **Tickets can be obtained through The Great Ocean Road Network.**

Thanks to Marion Manifold for passing this on.

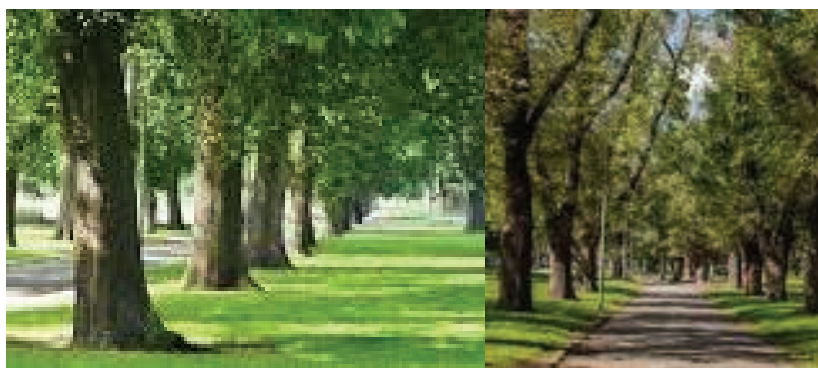


BALLARAT CBD BUILDINGS

The Age reported on 19 February that a State Government appointed panel has endorsed plans for an 8 storey development in the Ballarat CBD. If it proceeds, it will be the highest number of levels of any Ballarat building. Federation University Historian Anne Beggs-Sunter said tall developments would diminish Ballarat's skyline and views of other historic buildings, as well as the surrounding mountains. The property is surrounded by historic buildings. "Highrise and unsympathetic developments within the CBD really threatens that idea of the historic urban landscape". Ballarat Heritage Watch is calling for a height limit of 4 storeys in the CBD.

KHALIL GIBRAN

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



EDINBURGH GARDENS FITZROY

Greg Spark is continuing the fight to save the historic path and elms of the Edinburgh Gardens in Fitzroy from an extension of the tennis club for two more courts.

Greg points out that this is only the latest in a 100 year plus series of battles to protect the Gardens. In 1888 the Crown Lands Department rejected a permanent sports oval at the North end of the gardens. In 1924 the Fitzroy Council wanted to transfer a portion of the gardens to the Cricket Club, but the Minister for Lands rejected this. In 1924 the Fitzroy North Branch of the Australian Labor Party proposed alienation of the gardens by a sports club, and another proposal for sports club use was rejected 100 years ago in April 1925.

BRUNSWICK ACTIVITY CENTRE ZONE

The Brunswick Residents Network reports that the Planning Minister has authorized amendment C230mbek, which proposes to apply an activity zone to the Brunswick Activity Centre. The amendment will now be placed on exhibition for community comment. Brunswick Residents Network is concerned that this may be a roundabout way of increasing building heights in Lygon Street.

**MACRO
BUSINESS**

AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES SOCIAL LICENSE

Dr Raffaele F. Ciriello, a Senior Lecturer in Business Information at the University of Sydney, claims that corporate elites have hijacked Australian universities.

"Australian public universities are no longer run for education. They have been taken over by a managerial elite that prioritises profits over academic integrity. Vice-chancellors earn more than the Prime Minister, with 16 of 41 making over \$1 million annually. Meanwhile, academics face insecure work, PhD students live below the poverty line and international students bankroll the system while having no say in governance."

"Universities have become addicted to international student fees, which account for up to 40% of revenue."

Thanks to Macro Business for this report.

UK GOVERNMENT APPROVES NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS

The UK Government is reforming its planning rules to allow more nuclear power plants to be approved across England and Wales. Prime Minister Starmer said he was "changing the rules to back the builders of this nation and saying no to the blockers". Currently nuclear development is restricted to eight sites.

COMING EVENTS

Thursday 27 February, 6.30-8.30pm

City of Whitehorse Planning Forum
Function Room 1 and 2, The Round
379-399 Whitehorse Road, Nunawading

To register go to:

<https://www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au/events/whitehorsecommunity-forum-victorian-government-planning-reform>

Saturday 1 March, 2.00pm to 4.00pm

Kingston Residents Association
Annual General Meeting
Guest Speaker Kelvin Thomson
The Allen McLean Hall
37 Albert Street, Mordialloc

Sunday 16 March, 10.00am to 1.00pm

Maribyrnong Autumn Garden Get-together
Burton Crescent Reserve, Maribyrnong
Free Community Event featuring a range of gardening activities. This event is part of the Flood Recovery Program for the Community of Maribyrnong.



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