



CONVENOR'S REPORT No. 51 - MAY 20, 2025

The Hon. **KELVIN THOMSON** - Convenor

Email: pleasant123@me.com

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PLANNING AMENDMENTS PASS VICTORIAN PARLIAMENT

Victorian Planning Amendments VC257, VC267 and VC 274 will now come into force, following the failure of an Opposition-led Disallowance Motion in the Legislative Council on 14 May.

VC257 introduces the Housing Choice and Transport Zone and the Built Form Overlay into the Victoria Planning Provisions. The Built Form Overlay for the core activity centre exempts applications from the usual provisions concerning notice, rights of objection, and appeal, thereby excluding residents and third parties.

Amendment VC 267 gives effect to Government changes to ResCode. If a development meets the new deemed-to-comply standards, then local Councils must issue a permit.

Amendment VC 274 introduces a new Precinct Zone to the Victoria Planning provisions and all planning schemes in Victoria. The new zone is particularly related to Suburban Rail Loop Precincts.

HOW THEY VOTED

A motion to disallow the amendments was defeated 22-15. Labor MPs voted against the Disallowance Motion. They were supported by the Greens, Legalise Cannabis, Animal Justice and Libertarian MPs. The Liberal and National Party Opposition MPs voted in favour of Disallowance. They were supported by the Shooters Fishers and Farmers MP, and the One Nation MP.

WHAT THEY SAID

Professor Michael Buxton – "In siding with Labor, the Greens condemned the urban environments valued by millions of people as valueless, changing fundamentally the ways people will live. They also abandoned democratic principles by supporting Labor's autocratic exclusion of citizens and local government from decisions about the future of their own city.... The Select Committee recommended the planning amendments be modified upon consultation with councils and communities. This used to be called "proper planning". The government has replaced it, supported by the Greens, with a new authoritarianism". (Herald Sun 16 May, "Labor will destroy a City that doesn't need saving".)

David Vorchheimer, Principal, Government, Planning and Environment Team at Russell Kennedy – "Melbourne has long prided itself on being a city of character - leafy streets, vibrant neighbourhoods, and a patchwork of communities shaped by decades of careful planning. But in one sweeping move, the Victorian Government has put all of that at risk... the result will be cookie-cutter developments devoid of character, eroded community protections, and a policy vacuum where thoughtful, considered planning once stood. Hoddle would turn in his grave.... The irony is stark: while the government removes requirements to consider neighbourhood character, one of the new provisions is titled "Neighbourhood Character"! ...Planning is not the enemy - it's essential to shaping our future".

Richard Riordan, Victorian Shadow Minister for Planning

– "There is no clear link between housing affordability in Melbourne and council planning and protection policies. In fact, there is clear evidence that most Councils have planned for adequate land growth".

National Trust – "these reforms could allow developments to proceed with limited community input, weaken local oversight for re-developments of unassessed heritage sites, and encourage demolition over adaptive reuse of existing buildings. Mature trees may be replaced with saplings, heritage streetscapes may be compromised, and local councils could lose the ability to shape significant development outcomes for their communities. Heritage is not a barrier to housing - it is part of what makes our cities and towns liveable".

Royal Historical Society of Victoria – "The Royal Historical Society of Victoria Heritage Committee is increasingly concerned by the government's Plan for Victoria. We believe that it represents an unprecedented threat to heritage buildings across the state". "The government's Standing Advisory Committee Reports recommended removing 'areas within the Heritage Overlay or a Neighborhood Character Overlay from the HCTZ so that the HCTZ would not apply in these cases... The government ignored their experts.'"

The Royal Historical Society held a seminar on 29 April titled "Housing, Heritage, Density: Vibrant neighbourhoods or Hong Kong without the view?" It was addressed by Professor Michael Buxton, Christina Branagan (Boroondara Heritage Group for Advocacy and Protection), James Lesh and Mike Scott.

Municipal Association of Victoria – "We are disappointed that the Victorian Government's recent approaches to reform have avoided and rejected meaningful consultation or partnership with the planning system's primary administrators in local government... A planning system that empowers landowners and municipal planning

authorities to meaningfully shape their own futures will achieve democratic legitimacy. A planning system that prevents these opportunities will not".

Banyule Council – "These reforms are likely to seriously impact on our neighbourhood character, residential amenity, infrastructure and tree canopy in Banyule". Cr Alicia Curry moved an Urgent Motion, which was carried, to request the Planning Minister to delete Future Homes Clause 53.24 from their planning scheme.

Kilmore and District Residents and Ratepayers Association – "If these radical planning reforms are allowed it will totally spoil our neighbourhood character which we hold as very important for our history and these heritage places are a monumental tourist attraction, we do not want this spoil".

Beverley Lines – "I am totally at a loss to understand why there is no respect for all the beautiful old buildings, shop fronts, facades in Melbourne's most established areas... Paris and the UK would forbid totally the course we seem to be on in Victoria... People don't want to live this way in isolation, lonely and never knowing who any of the other occupants are. These are ghettos".

On-line Petition against the Planning Amendments – "Preservation of heritage is not just an aesthetic choice but also a cultural obligation. Our heritage sites form an integral part of our community identity and historical narrative... Adaptive reuse and retrofit are essential for addressing climate change"

Croydon Conservation Society – "The State Government has no mandate to hijack local planning schemes... We have already experienced a dramatic loss in the number of canopy trees. In the last ten years, complex canopy cover has reduced from 31% to 21%.... Croydon Conservation Society is supportive of Maroondah Council's approach".

COMMITTEE INQUIRY

Prior to the vote on the Disallowance Motion, the Legislative Council established a Select Committee to inquire into the Planning Amendments. The Committee received many submissions, and heard from a wide range of interested parties.

Many submissions were critical of the scant community engagement concerning the amendments. Mark Cassar from Liveable Moonee Valley said 95% of the residents he had spoken to had never heard of these proposals. "They think an activity centre is a child's playground", he said.

The Committee reported on 13 May. It found that the consultation around the amendments had been inadequate. It made recommendations concerning the reduction of environmentally sustainable development standards in major local government areas, the excessive removal of existing trees, and the removal of consideration of flood risks from the planning process.

Michael Buxton has suggested the Greens Sarah Mansfield could be asked how she could spend all her allotted time in Parliament outlining the problems with the amendments, only to then vote with the government to support them!

THE FUTURE

Change of this radical nature necessarily requires us to have a think about the road ahead. I am going to do this on Saturday morning June 14, at the Majorca Room in the City Library (which is different from the State Library!) at 253 Flinders Lane Melbourne, between 10.30 am and 12.30 pm.

Please RSVP by emailing me so I have a proper idea of numbers. If you are not able to attend, but have some thoughts you want to pass on, feel free to give me a ring, on 0458 750 700. You might have to bear with me in terms of the time I take to respond to you, especially if I get a lot of calls.

ACTIVITY CENTRES PROGRAM EXPANSION

Jane Oldham has brought to my attention the State Government's recently announced consultation program for new Activity Centres. Upcoming events are as follows –

- 20 May - Hawthorn, Glenferrie, Auburn and Kew Junction drop-in session.**
- 20 May - Thornbury on-line drop-in session.**
- 21 May - Carnegie to Oakleigh drop-in session.**
- 22 May - Thornbury drop-in session.**
- 22 May - Merri-bek online session.**
- 24 May - Merri-bek drop-in session.**
- 26 May - Tooronga to Holmesglen drop-in session**
- 27 May - Middle Footscray to Tottenham online.**
- 28 May - Heidelberg drop-in session.**
- 29 May - Carnegie to Oakleigh drop-in session.**
- 29 May - Heidelberg online session.**
- 31 May - Middle Footscray to Tottenham drop-in session.**
- 31 May - Hawthorn, Glenferrie, Auburn and Kew Junction drop-in session.**
- 2 June - Tooronga to Holmesglen online session.**

For more details, or to RSVP, go to engage.vic.gov.au, and to the Activity Centres Program Expansion – Phase 1: Understanding Place.

REAL ESTATE AGENTS LOOK TO MAKE KILLING



Reports are emerging of real estate agents approaching property owners in designated Activity Centres and asking them if they want to sell their property. Some apparently are not above implying that their neighbours have agreed to sell, and that they should get out before the neighbourhood becomes more congested.

If you receive an approach like this, please do not take the agent at face value. Ask your neighbours directly if you have any concerns.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO CONSULTATION

The Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee is conducting an inquiry into community consultation processes across Victoria. The Committee is looking at how state and local government, statutory authorities and essential service providers consult with communities.

Submissions close on Friday 6 June. Visit the Committee's website for more information, or to make a submission.

THOUSANDS OF EMPTY, UNSOLD APARTMENTS

Thanks to B. Mc Nicholas for drawing my attention to a report in The Age which says thousands of new Melbourne apartments are sitting unsold. ("The plan to make affordable homes of Melbourne's empty, unsold apartments", Daniella White, 5 May, The Age). A Melbourne-based not for profit, Housing All Australians, is promoting the idea of a register of affordable apartments, designed to attract private investment in affordable housing on a larger scale.

I have two comments on the report. First, we keep being told the housing crisis is due to a lack of supply. If this were true, there would be NO unsold apartments in Melbourne, let alone thousands of them. Secondly, I am all for measures which make it easier to buy a house. But I do not support "Build-to-rent" apartment initiatives. One of the great things about Australia has been our level of home ownership. It is a tragedy that it is in decline. We should not be encouraging foreign corporations, or superannuation funds, to become the landlords of the 21st century. Under no circumstances should we give up on the goal of home ownership for all.



NEW ZEALAND HOUSE PRICE CRASH

Macrobusiness notes that as of 2022 New Zealand had one of the world's most expensive housing markets. However, since then house prices, and interest rates, have fallen. This has improved housing affordability in New Zealand a lot.

Macrobusiness says, and I agree, that lower house prices are a good thing, not a bad thing. Houses should be to live in, not make money out of. Policies aimed at boosting demand and prices are a fraud on our young people.

FEDERAL ELECTION HERITAGE ACTION

During the Federal election Dr Jackie Watts from the Australian Heritage Advocacy Alliance (AHAA) encouraged members and supporters to question Federal candidates about their understanding of the importance and value of heritage protection.

Responses will appear on the AHAA website.



NEW FEDERAL ENVIRONMENT MINISTER

Following Labor's Federal Election win, Queensland Senator Murray Watt has taken over as Federal Minister for the Environment. This portfolio administers the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, and manages heritage from a Federal perspective. Senator Watt has previously held the portfolios of Employment and Workplace Relations, and Agriculture.

WESTERN PORT GREEN WEDGE PROTECTION GROUP

David Cole from Cranbourne South, part of the Western Port Green Wedge, has been campaigning against a Place of Worship permit application in the Green Wedge. He and other locals have decided to set up a Western Port Green Wedge Protection Group, to fight inappropriate development in the Western Port Green Wedge. Those interested in following or supporting them can go to their Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/g/1PqAmiRCWz/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

QUEEN VICTORIA MARKET

Mary-Lou Howie (Friends of Queen Victoria Market) has been advised that the decision concerning approval for the Queen Victoria Market Southern Development project (the towers) is now due on 30 May.

PERMIT GRANTED AT WATTLE PARK

Heritage Victoria has granted Permit Application P34848 at Wattle Park in Burwood. This amends the existing permit for playscape, lighting etc works, by altering the conditions concerning the trams, which were vandalized and the subject of an arson attack. The trams will now be replaced, rather than repaired.



NEW WORLD HERITAGE STRATEGY FOR ROYAL EXHIBITION BUILDING AND CARLTON GARDENS ADOPTED

Planning Minister Kilkeny has gazetted new heritage preservation plans for the Royal Exhibition Building, Carlton Gardens and its surrounding buffer zone, in an endorsement of the importance of cultural heritage.

I was very pleased that the distinction between "greater sensitivity", and "lesser sensitivity" (which you don't find in other World Heritage listed cultural landmarks) has been removed, and the buffer zone is now considered to be of "greater sensitivity".

Congratulations to those who put in years of advocacy to get this outcome, such as Margaret O'Brien and the Friends of Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens, B. Mc Nicholas (Heritage Matters!), Fiona Bell and the Protectors of Public Lands, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, and the Australian Heritage Advocacy Alliance.

NEW FRANKSTON HIGH-RISE APPLICATION



Michele McKinlay advises that the Pace Development Group has submitted a new application for a 14 storey apartment/retail tower at 438-444 Nepean Highway Frankston.

The application is within the new Activity Centre Zone Schedule 1. Apparently there are no third party rights to notice, appeal, or review. Approval has previously been granted for 14 storeys at 448-450 Nepean Highway, and 424-426 Nepean Highway, Frankston. The Great Wall of Frankston appears to be underway.

KHALIL GIBRAN

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

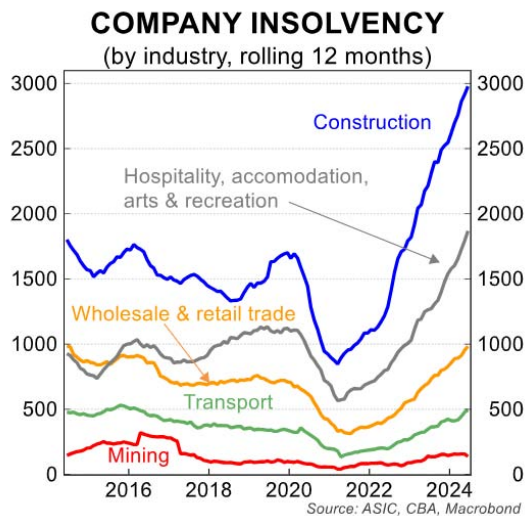


THE CARLTON RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION INC.

CARLTON RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

The Carlton Residents Association (CRA) puts out a regular newsletter called Newsflash. Its latest edition (March-April 2025) expresses concern about the empty public housing blocks at Elgin Street Carlton. The social housing tenants were removed years ago, and the site has since been empty. The CRA wants serious consideration of refurbishment of the building, rather than demolition. They want to see the site continue to be used for social and affordable housing. They do not want to see it sold off to a commercial property developer who has no interest in social and affordable housing.

RECORD CONSTRUCTION BANKRUPTCIES



Macrobusiness reports Australian Securities and Investments Commission data that 2795 construction firms have gone bankrupt so far this year, representing a 24% increase on 2024.

Macrobusiness says that this will make it impossible for the Federal Government's Housing Target of building 240,000 new dwellings every year for the next 5 years to be achieved. Australia has never built 240,000 new dwellings in a year.

Macrobusiness says that unless the federal Government reduces immigration to previous levels, Australia's housing shortage will continue to worsen.

IAN PENROSE OFFER TO SPEAK

Ian Penrose is a former State Water Commissioner, the first Yarra Riverkeeper, and former Australian Conservation Foundation Councillor.

He has been giving talks to community groups titled "Let's talk about our growing population". He knows his stuff. If your group would like to have him as a guest speaker, you can contact him at ianpenrose1949@gmail.com, or phone 0409 510 766.

CLIMATE ADAPTATION REPORT

Michael Spencer, from the Fitzroy Residents Association, is an Adjunct Senior Research Fellow, Green Lab, Monash Business School. Michael has been working on the issue of climate change adaptation, and did a report published in Monash University's Politics and Society, titled "Climate adaptation – a multi-billion dollar problem invisible in election 2025".

He points out that in a "cost-of-living" election, there was no discussion of how climate change is driving up insurance costs, and insurance costs are, in turn, a major driver of the consumer price index.

There is no doubt that we are in for more extreme weather events in future, such as fires and floods, and that our planning and other policies will need to support our adaptation to this changing reality. Moonee Valley Council and Moonee Valley Sustainability are working on flood resilient design for homes. **They are holding an online event on this topic on Thursday 5 June at 6pm. More details in the Green Living in Moonee Valley May 2025 newsletter.**

ROYAL PARK STAKEHOLDERS MEETING

Michael Petit, the Secretary of Protectors of Public Lands, reports that the most recent Royal Park Stakeholders Network Meeting achieved a number of positive outcomes. The City of Melbourne's Draft Master Plan for Royal Park had attracted widespread criticism, and an outstanding number of comments (1900) and formal submissions (425).

As a consequence, Council has agreed to a proper study of lighting in Royal Park. Reduced speed limits are being considered in Royal Parade. I was amused to read that Melbourne University is lobbying to increase the Free Tram Zone to Parkville. It said the State Government should cease targeting its students as a cash cow. Pot, kettle, black.

CITY OF MELBOURNE DRAFT BUDGET

Residents 3000 reports that the City of Melbourne has released its Draft Budget 2025-2026. You can have your say on it by providing feedback to the City of Melbourne by 5pm, 2 June. To do this, visit participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/budget-2025-26.

The Budget does not include funding for the \$315 million Greenline, a vanity project of the former Lord Mayor, which is being quietly dropped by her successor Nick Reece.



EAST COBURG CRICKET PRESENTATION NIGHT

I was given an opportunity to say a few words at the East Coburg Cricket Club Presentation Night at Licodia Eubea Social Club on May 2. While I am long gone from public life, I still enjoy being behind a microphone, as you can see!

RESIDENTS 3000 ON SAFETY, STREET WASTE AND GRAFFITI

I was pleased to see Residents 3000 holding a forum on this topic on May 1. The forum explored how city cleanliness and policing interact and relate to perceptions of public safety for local residents, workers, and visitors. I think this is an important issue. I am convinced that things like litter, graffiti and vandalism create a perception of a place being unsafe, and over time this becomes self-fulfilling. On the other hand, public spaces which are clean and attractive encourage a sensation of well-being. They promote civic pride and civic-mindedness.

GREAT OUTDOORS REPORT

Nina Earl has drawn my attention to a recent update from the Great Outdoors Taskforce. The Taskforce examined the future of Victoria's forests, and received over 4000 submissions.

One of the themes in the submissions was the need to close legislative loopholes that could enable the return of native timber harvesting in Victoria.

The Taskforce will report to the Minister for Environment in mid 2025. Further information can be found at

<https://www.deeca.vic.gov.au/futureforests/future-forests/great-outdoors-taskforce>.

GREEN WEDGES LOSES A STALWART

Kahn and Julie Franke are retiring to Queensland. A good move for them, no doubt, but a loss for the Green Wedges. Kahn has been the President of the Green Wedges Coalition for over 20 years. He was also a driving force behind the Green Wedge Protection Group in Nillumbik for a decade prior to that.

Thanks to Rosemary West for drawing this to our attention. Congratulations, Kahn, on a job well done, and best wishes to you and your family in your new home.

GROWING MANGROVES IN WESTERN PORT

Neil Daly has written again in the Bass Coast Post (7 May) about the issue of growing mangroves in Western Port. Based on the results so far, he asks "Given the many mangrove planting activities that have taken place over the past 20 years along Western Port's eastern foreshore, should DEECA be asked to audit the situation and present an environment impact assessment of this work?"

He also asks whether the greater success of mangroves in sheltered areas should lead to a greater focus on those areas, and whether we might be better off concentrating on encouraging saltmarsh and wetland environments, rather than mangroves, along the low-lying parts of the eastern foreshore.

COMING EVENTS

Saturday 14 June - 10.30am to 12.30pm.
The future of Planning Democracy.
Majorca Room, City Library (not the State Library!),
253 Flinders Lane Melbourne.



Thanks as always for your support. You can opt out of receiving these Reports by replying to this email and typing STOP in the subject line.

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