



Town and Country Planning Association Bulletin

Volume 10 Number 6

Home Page: <http://www.vicnet.net.au/~tcpa/>

November – December 2003

2003 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notices of the 2003 Annual General Meeting on 24th November 2003 of the members of the Association and of coincident election of Officers and Committee Members were circulated to all members as per the TCPA Constitution.

The 2003 Committee (Ray Walford, David Littlewood and Peter Hill) automatically retired at the AGM as per the Constitution. Alan Parker had previously resigned from the Vice-Presidency and from the Association. Four seconded nominations for election were received from members: Horst (Oz) Kayak, for President; Ray Walford, for Vice-President; David Littlewood, for Secretary; and Peter Hill, for Treasurer.

As no other nominations were received, these four candidates were declared elected at the AGM.

Peter Hill, Public Officer, Town and Country Planning Association Inc.

Stawell Mall Closes

Twenty-five years after it was opened, Victoria's first pedestrian shopping street, Gold Reef Mall, in Stawell, is being converted back to a vehicular street (Main Street). Northern Grampians Shire is very upbeat about its project, which has so far cost \$900,000 on road works alone, but many of Stawell's residents are not happy with the decision. It has been the object of heated debate in Stawell for the past twelve months (as you can read in the second and third websites listed below).

The main argument to support the reversion to a traffic street was the declining trade in the mall, the main shopping strip for the town. Those opposing the re-opening to traffic cited poor service and high prices in Stawell compared to Ararat and Horsham, the town's main competitors. It will be interesting to see whether trade in the street picks up over the coming months and years.

Background to the project can be found on a number of web sites, including:

- http://www.ngshire.vic.gov.au/page/page.asp?page_Id=348
- <http://www.abc.net.au/westernvic/stories/s833446.htm>
- <http://www.stawell.yourguide.com.au/displayops.asp?class=your%20say>

MELBOURNE 2030 – REPORT ON SUBMISSIONS

The report is not the best example of public accessibility. Interested citizens are either forced to read or download a 300 page document from the Melbourne 2030 website or to spend the day in a few selected locations in order to read a hard-copy version. You cannot buy a copy.

This is unfortunate because the report, despite its late release, is interesting reading. It conveys clearly community and local government concerns about managing the impact of increased densities, the challenges facing local level planning of activity centres, the current lack of planning controls and local planning schemes to address the objectives of Melbourne 2030, and the pressures for development under the new policy.

Responses by DSE to comments by submitters underline two key elements. First, the DSE is facing a huge challenge to provide the necessary support to local government and Smart Growth Committees over the next 2-3 years. Secondly, the State Government is seemingly not ready to flag any major funding commitments for public transport or other infrastructure.

Generally the most immediate problematic issue is the planning for activities centres (see article on the City of Boroondara) and the management of increased densities. The TCPA was interested in views on residential densities and provision of public transport in growth area corridors. While the TCPA was not named, it was evident that other submitters agreed with our position that the suggested 15 dwellings per hectares is too conservative.

Boroondara's Approach to Multi-Unit Development and Melbourne 2030

The City of Boroondara is planning to confine multi-unit residential development "in and around" 23 identified strip shopping centres within the city. By confining multi-unit development to these locations, the majority of the city's residential streets will be protected from unwanted development. The strategy is exactly what the TCPA has advocated.

Although the strategy complements Melbourne 2030, the council says that its strategy was already under development when Melbourne 2030 was released. In other words, it was a response to resident disquiet over

Continued overleaf

Boroondara's Approach (continued)

unrestricted multi-unit development in the city, which just happened to coincide with the release of Melbourne 2030.

Melbourne 2030 concentrated on the larger activity centres, identifying Camberwell Junction as a principal activity centre, and Kew Junction as a major activity centre (but strangely omitting Glenferrie Road, which ranks second to Camberwell Junction as a retail centre in Boroondara). Boroondara's strategy is to spread multi-unit development more evenly across the city. This not only reduces developmental pressure on the larger centres, it makes social, environmental and economic sense to reinforce the smaller centres.

The price to be paid for this strategy is that residential streets bordering the shopping centres are likely to see a concentration of multi-unit developments at the interface with the shopping area. By insisting on retaining a low-rise profile in residential streets, residents will create a steep density gradient at the boundary between existing housing and new developments. Problems of overlooking and overshadowing could result. Two-storey townhouse developments would make a less dramatic impact on existing single-storey housing, and could be allowed to percolate further into the residential streets.

What is not certain is just how much development can be accommodated in this way. If development is prevented from spilling into the surrounding residential streets there will be very little land available for development, and most of it is likely to be along the arterial roads on which the shopping centres are located. There seems to us no reason why multi-unit developments should not spread out along arterial roads that are well serviced by public transport, particularly where there is already some mixed-use development, up to a kilometre from the shopping centre. To some extent this is already happening in Boroondara, and it could act as a safety valve if developmental pressure continues unabated.

The State government's report on submissions to Melbourne 2030 specifically cites the City of Boroondara's argument for the development of planning controls that would 'strengthen its ability to prohibit medium or higher density development' and would give greater certainty to communities and the development industry.' The government rejected this position in its response. It considered it inappropriate to prohibit medium density housing in areas outside activity centres and notes that over the next 30 years dispersed residential areas 'will continue to house 28% of all metropolitan development'. In the eastern region, of which Boroondara is part, 45% of all development 'is still proposed for dispersed residential areas'.

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In the light of this the recent decision to allow the City of Bayside to impose a two-storey height limit across all residential areas in the municipality came as a surprise. This would have to set a precedent for other municipalities. The boundary of activity centres will become an even more sensitive planning issue.

The City of Boroondara is also mentioned with respect to the problem of managing pressures for development of activity centres while local planning policies were still being undertaken. The City had requested that 'there be an ability to form an interim policy control over activity centres..'. The government's response was to reiterate that planning and responsible authorities are required to take Melbourne 2030 into account as a 'seriously entertained planning policy' and that the application of Melbourne 2030 activity centre policy in decision-making could not be put on hold.

However, the report is clear that the time and resources required to undertake structure planning, and how to manage development pressures during the transition period, is a common concern. A large number of submitters believed that the State Government would need to support structure planning through funding, assistance and incentives.

The time lag in the development of structure plans would seem to be a problem, and one not helped by the lack of completed State government support packages. State guidelines for higher density housing, buildings of four or more storeys, (ResCode +), are still to be developed, and the government is still working on its Activity Centre Design Guidelines and a Sustainable Neighbourhoods Project. Guidelines for Activity Centre Structure Planning were released in December 2003.

The report on submissions would suggest that the City of Boroondara, for one, does not see State guidelines for more intensive housing to provide 'clarity and consistency' is the best approach. It suggests the use of urban design frameworks for specific areas.

The State government is clearly leaving the task of resolving conflicts between policies of higher densities around activity centres and protection of neighbourhood character to the local councils.

Submissions also drew attention to the issues of infrastructure investment, land assembly to assist activity centre redevelopment, and the need for controls to support mixed-use activities.

The strong message is that a lot of work on implementation at the State Government level has still be done.