



Town and Country Planning Association Bulletin

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

September - October 2002

Annual General Meeting

It is proposed to hold the Annual General Meeting of the Town and Country Planning Association at the Montague Hotel (South Melbourne) on Monday, 18th November. Confirmation of the date and arrangements will be mailed separately to members.

The Committee has decided to schedule this early AGM in order to better meet the requirements of annual reporting of the financial affairs of the association to Consumer & Corporate Affairs Victoria. The AGM will also be used to amend the association's constitution to bring it in line with the current rules for associations, in particular to adopt a provision for resolving disputes among members. Copies of the present constitution and proposed amendments will be mailed to members with the formal notice of the AGM.

2003 Committee

Nominations will be sought for the following positions:

President
Vice President
Secretary
Treasurer
Committee Members (8)

We urgently need members to fill positions on the Committee. The current committee has only one general committee member, which means the Committee has a bare quorum. This constitutes an unsatisfactory basis for running the organisation and for representing the views of the members.

Committee meetings are held monthly at the time convenient to the majority of committee members. As much business as possible is conducted by way of the email.

Nomination forms will be mailed with the notice of the AGM. In the meantime please consider nominating. The Committee can arrange for nomination forms to be signed by a nominator and seconder.

Email Tree

The TCPA is keen to keep members informed by email of forthcoming events and opportunities for submissions. If you have not already provided us with your email address, please consider doing so.

The Ledger Prize

The Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning of the University of Melbourne is hoping to establish an annual award for the top graduate from its Bachelor of Urban Planning and Development. The prize is to be named after the late Fred Ledger, the first Professor of Town and Regional Planning, and also a former member of the TCPA.

The Faculty hopes to establish a trust fund of \$50,000, the interest from which will provide an annual prize of around \$2000. It is seeking donations, with a target of \$25,000, which will be matched by a further \$25,000 donation.

The TCPA has been invited to contribute to the trust fund. The Committee considers that a donation would be an appropriate use of our funds, and will put a recommendation of between \$1000 and \$1500 to the AGM. Any member who has views about this is invited to contact a committee member.

State Government Strategies

The Metropolitan Strategy (Melbourne 2030: Planning for sustainable growth and five draft implementation plans) has been released for a period of public review and comment up to 14 February 2003. The reports are available from the DOI bookshop and website www.melbourne2030.vic.gov.au. Public information sessions at six venues will be held from 18 to 26 October.

Implementation Plan 5 Green Wedges was launched on 1st October. The TCPA welcomes the policy initiatives contained in the plan and congratulates the Green Wedge Coalition for a "win". But, as the Coalition recognises, the details of the proposals will need to be scrutinised.

Analysis of and critical comment of Melbourne 2030 and the draft implementation plans will be a priority for the TCPA in the next few months. We will be particularly looking closely at the transport strategy and related land use planning proposals. The Committee will welcome comments and views of members.

We have just received Parks Victoria's final open space and bicycle trails strategy, *Linking People and Spaces*. There looks to be some interesting subtle changes to the draft; we will be looking closely at the final commitments.

Bulletin Contributions

Members are invited to use the Bulletin to report or comment on planning issues and initiatives relevant to the objectives of the association.

RESCODE AND THE ENVIRONMENT.

Just one year ago, Victoria gained a new approach to assessing residential development plans. It trades under the name *Rescode*, though in fact, unlike its controversial predecessor, *The Good design Guide (for Residential Development)*, it is actually an addition of three clauses (54.0, single dwelling requiring planning permit; 55.0 multi-unit development; & 56.0, subdivision.) to the 78 state planning schemes. So how well does *Rescode* deal with the environment? Will it lead to a greener, more sustainable urban environment?

One of the really new aspects of *Rescode* (or in some cases, clarified) was the inclusion of clauses which focused on “environmental considerations”. The key new sub-clause was 54/5.03-4 - *Permeability*. In this the “Objective” was to decrease stormwater run-off by requiring at least 20% of the site to be “permeable” A laudable requirement, especially when one considers the wasted water which has to be transported down streets and drains to the sea, becoming ever more polluted by the metre. But what is a “permeable” area? A lawn, a garden, a terrace of loosely laid on sand brick, or a granitic surfaced driveway? Is sand different from clay? Alas, *Rescode* stopped short of entering such controversy.

So how is this requirement shown in development applications? Various, but not clearly, must be the short answer. Most applications just state the claim as fact, and any planning assessor would be hard pressed to dispute it as no indications of the areas counted are shown. There is a simple way out of this; the applicant should simply give an outline site-plan indicating the *permeable* (as well as *built* and *hard* surface) areas, and the measurement such that it can be checked. So, the intent seems to be there. But the implementation has a way to go

Similarly, by way of improving an older requirement, no more than 60% of a site should be covered by building. While this is generally easier to assess, it does get clouded by the inclusion of wide eaves, terraces (are they “built” areas?), and in some dubious cases, the inclusion of a “Storage” area required by CI 55.05-6.

Another key environmental consideration is the Objective of CI 55.03-5 which requires that a multi-unit development (but not single houses) should be “capable of achieving” a 4 star (SEAV, “First Rate” test) standard. There are various ways in which a building can be made compliant, ranging from structural components such as concrete slabs and eaves, to cosmetic add-ons such as carpets and curtains. Overall, most new buildings can be easily planned to be compliant, though just how thoroughly this is checked before a *Certificate of Occupancy* is issued remains to be seen.

For single houses (requiring a permit) they should merely be planned to “reduce the use of fossil fuels”, and be

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designed such that they do not affect the energy efficiency of adjoining buildings. So it’s curious that a recent VCAT decision overturned Bayside council’s refusal to issue a permit to an applicant who was blocking a neighbor’s access to solar panels (*Age*; 13/8/02).

Overshadowing has long been a voluble cry from neighbours of new developments, and has previously been an issue to be assessed. *Rescode* has required some increases in the areas of *Private Open Space* and *Habitable Room* windows to be left (partially) unshaded, though it’s doubtful that many assessors check the claims and calculations of applicants. These claims are all the more difficult to check when often the “Shadow Diagrams” included (or not included) are wrongly drawn, and omit any consideration of the effect of footings (and thus resulting wall-height) in casting shadows.

Similarly solar access to windows, especially north facing windows, which are now treated differently, is improved. These windows are required to have a greater setback from a neighbouring wall, thus increasing the amount of sun and natural light to those rooms. Nevertheless, many would still claim that this provision doesn’t go far enough.

Trees also get a mention in *Rescode*. Not only should (not *must*) significant trees be retained but replacements for those removed are required. Applications should even note trees which have been removed within the last 12 months – an attempt to stop an early *blitzkrieg* of the site to ensure there are no impediments. But how is such contravention ascertained by the planner? Perhaps with the set of aerial photos (which most councils would have access to). But, as with so many things in the life of a harassed council planner, who’s counting?

Landscaping (CI 55.03-8) should also “maintain and enhance habitat for plants and animals in locations of habitat importance”. Hopefully, planning assessors are versed in habitat features of the local area to assess this.

Finally, in an attempt to encourage a more environmentally friendly means of transport, multi-unit developments are required to ensure that bicycle parking for residents and visitors is “appropriate” (CI 55.03-11). It’s anyone’s guess what is an appropriate quality or quantity of bicycle parking. But for the tenants in units, it’s “on yer bike”.

Overall, the introduction of new environmental requirements, and increased emphasis on others, is good, though it must be regarded as a “work in progress”. But even as things stand now, the key thing is to ensure that the appropriate sub-clauses of 54/5.0 are properly assessed at the planning (or Building Permit) stage to ensure compliance.

Max Nankervis