



# Town and Country Planning Association Bulletin

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## **OPEN SPACE AND LAND USE UNDER MELBOURNE 2030**

The recent decision by the Bracks Government to secure the prime Burnley site for the headquarters of the GE finance company has reinforced concerns that land use decisions under the Melbourne 2030 vision will continue to be driven by opportunistic agendas. Ken Davidson has argued GE would be more appropriately located in Docklands or the CBD or at least in a growth development area near a rail interchange, leaving the Burnley site which is surrounded by passive open space and the college grounds of Burnley Horticultural College for medium density residential development (*The Age*, 29/9/03). Under the present proposal open space will be sacrificed for parking.

Melbourne 2030 contains well-intentioned commitments to improving the quality and distribution of open space and its long-term protection. However, sceptics who doubt the commitment of the State Government to strategic coordinated planning, or the capacity of the planning system and the watered-down Parklands Code to deliver it, will not be encouraged by two local issues in which the TCPA and some of its members are currently engaged.

### **Private Functions Centre in Albert Park**

Parks Victoria is currently supporting a planning application (before the City of Port Phillip) for the Carousel Restaurant, which has been closed since August 2001, to be redeveloped into a restaurant AND private function centre catering for 500 patrons. This is a park which already has two other restaurants and three kiosk/cafe outlets, and is surrounded by restaurant areas.

The proposal is inconsistent with the Draft Future Directions Plan for Albert Park which states that 'In no circumstances will Parks Victoria permit the development of opportunistic commercial venture in the park designed to service custom from the general community unaligned with Albert Park of the services it provides other than by location.' More significantly, this principle reflects the guidelines of Melbourne 2030, namely that 'Urban open space should include community sports facilities in a way that is consistent with other park activities.' Melbourne 2030 is quite clear that 'planners should provide for nature recreation, recreation and play, formal and informal sport, social interaction, peace and solitude.'

The Carousel occupies a prime position on the edge of the lake. This is the opportunity to implement Parks Victoria's

commitment to remove redundant buildings and to compensate for the open space lost to new buildings, i.e. school extensions, the GP garages and MSAC, as well as the new Point Restaurant.

### **Densification and Public Open Space in Kingston**

For 25 years the former City of Mordialloc, not over-endowed with public open space, leased the 1.5 hectares, much-used Chicquita Park from the Commonwealth Department of Defence. At the expiration of the lease, the department declared the land redundant. The now Kingston Council offered to purchase the land for \$500,000. This was rejected as under market value, and the land was sold to a developer who has lodged a planning application to build 63 townhouses.

Kingston has adopted a renewal and densification strategy involving Incremental Change and Housing Diversity Areas with target densities of 28-33 dwellings per hectare. One cost of this is the reduction in private open space.

Melbourne 2030 pays due attention to the importance of local public open space 'as a vital component of the urban fabric, citing evidence that the visitation rates for local parks exceed those for district and regional parks. A range of open spaces is one of the Neighbourhood Principles. It notes that strategic guidance is needed for planning local and district parks, and foreshadows 'Initiatives' to establish a planning framework and guidelines, to help local government to improve the quality and distribution of local open space, including identifying opportunities to improve provision in areas identified as deficient. But, at present it is little more than good intentions.

There is no obvious recognition that as established suburbs accommodate increased densities, the loss of private open space will create a demand for compensating public open space. Melbourne 2030 currently provides no benchmarks or standards, such as public open space per resident or a formula which is related to dwelling densities. ResCode contains indicative standards for new subdivisions only.

While the TCPA would not want to see a more efficient use of land for residential dwellings offset by increased open space, densification in existing suburbs requires a strategic approach to the protection and creation of public open space, and this may require targeted financial assistance to councils to ensure a balanced land use.

## **GROWTH AREA CORRIDORS AND MELBOURNE 2030**

The latest decision by the State government to release more land for residential development in the Hume and Caroline-Springs growth corridors this year to meet developer demands for cheap land does not augur well for the implementation of the Neighbourhood Principles in the new city's fringe (The Age, 11/10/03). With only 10-15 years-worth of land remaining, little planning is evident.

Those who are acquainted with the talks by Steven Ames on the achievements of Portland Oregon (US) to create mass transited medium density urban centres on the fringes with the city's Urban Growth Boundary will appreciate the potential opportunities.

Development of the Growth Area Plans are opportunities to demonstrate the positive benefits of mixed densities (including medium density of 30 dwelling per ha and more) and mixed dwelling types, incorporating social/public housing, in new residential subdivisions combined with well planned mixed-use zones and good access to employment, community services and public transport.

The aims of Melbourne 2030 for growth areas and the guidelines (eg Activity Centre Guidelines and Neighbourhood Principles) are ambitious against the background of past practices in fringe developments. All Growth Area Plans will require substantial investments in public transport and other infrastructure.

The proposed Committees for Smart Growth and the Growth Plans recognise the importance of coordinated provision of infrastructure and -sequenced development.

There are real dangers that integrated planning, investment in public transport and other infrastructure will lag behind the demand for out-of-sequence development and that developer pressures will result in a continuation of lower than ideal densities.

Melbourne 2030 is still without any better-defined target for residential densities and indeed has no definition of which measure of residential densities is used. The TCPA can only reiterate that the indicated density of 15 dwellings per hectare cited for the growth areas is too low for efficient use of scarce land serviceable by public transport. The City of Kingston has targets of between 28 and 33 dwellings per hectare. Melbourne 2030 needs benchmarks and bases for comparison across the metropolitan area.

At a time that the Commonwealth Government is sitting on a budget surplus of over \$7.8 billion, the Victorian DSE has announced \$2.5 million in targeted grants to be spread

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across 33 projects for structure plans for principal and major activity centres, green wedge plans and Smart Growth Plans for Wyndham and Casey-Cardinia Smart Growth Committees.

Equally worrying, chairpersons of the Smart Growth Committees for Hume and Melton-Caroline Springs had still to be appointed in early October.

The recent report of the Centre for Population and Urban Research, which has questioned the consistency of the compact city and urban growth boundary with affordable housing (The Age, 7 Oct 03), echoed predictably by real estate interests, underlines the importance of planning the growth areas (GA).

All draft Growth Area Plans have designated investments in public transport. However, the proposals for rail services are minimal and do not provide the standard of public transport services in the middle or outer ring suburbs and or approach the indicative standards for subdivisions in ResCode. Notable are the planned distances between rail stations of 2.5 km or more, which are not consistent with encouraging walking access.

The high and short/medium term priority growth areas should be used as well-resourced best practice models of what will follow in other development areas. The exemplary growth area plans or subsection of the overall plan could be used to test the effects of investment in denser rail services (i.e. stations close together) and high quality bus feeder services into a public transport interchange.

If the State government is to fiddle with the urban growth boundary at all, it should be in the Caroline Springs corridor where the UGB appears to prevent any further residential development around the existing rail line.

The worst result for Melbourne would be a series of incremental developments none of which is sufficiently resourced to meet the aims of M2030 for growth areas.

### ***ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING***

The annual general meeting of the TCPA will be held at 7.00 pm on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> November at the Montague Hotel in South Melbourne. A notice of the meeting and nomination forms are included with the Bulletin.

This is an important meeting as the present committee, which is significantly understrength, believes that it is a time to review the role and relevance of the association at this juncture when it is competing with several other professional and community groups with similar objectives.