

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry on Melbourne's Public Housing Towers 2025



Park Towers a heritage building



PTTM Inc.
Ground Floor
332 Park Street
South Melbourne VIC 3205
ABN 71 451 301 904 A0015872W

Ph: (03) 9696 6165
E: pttm.inc@gmail.com
W: www.parktowersinc.weebly.com
Facebook: ParkTowers1969
Instagram: [parktowerssouthmelbourne](https://www.instagram.com/parktowerssouthmelbourne)
X: [@ParkTenant16852](https://twitter.com/ParkTenant16852)

PARK TOWERS TENANT MANAGEMENT INC.

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry on Melbourne's Public Housing Towers

Submitted by:

John Lowndes

President, Park Towers Tenant Management Inc

332 Park Street, South Melbourne VIC 3205



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1. Introduction

To the Honourable Members of the Parliamentary Inquiry,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed demolition of Melbourne's public housing towers and to advocate for an alternative approach focused on renovation and refurbishment. Given the current housing crisis, it is imperative to preserve and improve existing public housing rather than resort to demolition, which would displace vulnerable communities and squander valuable infrastructure. This submission outlines the reasons for opposing demolition and proposes a comprehensive, tenant-inclusive strategy for the future of public housing in Melbourne.

2. Preservation of Existing Public Housing

Melbourne's public housing towers have provided homes to thousands of low-income and vulnerable residents for decades. Beyond their structural function, they represent deeply rooted communities. Demolishing these buildings would not only displace residents but also contribute to significant environmental harm through increased waste and carbon emissions.



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Rather than demolishing these towers, the government should invest in their renovation. Many of these buildings are structurally sound and, with modernisation, can be made safer, more energy-efficient, and more comfortable for residents. Renovation is a more sustainable and cost-effective approach to addressing the challenges of public housing.

Moreover, allocating prime urban land to large-scale private developers with minimal public return is a flawed policy. Current agreements, which see only 30% of new developments allocated to social housing, exacerbate displacement issues, forcing low-income individuals to relocate to areas lacking essential services and employment opportunities. Lessons from international models, such as New York City's Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) programme, demonstrate how development can include higher quotas for social housing while maintaining urban diversity.

3. Tenant Participation in the Renovation Process

A crucial element of any redevelopment initiative must be the meaningful inclusion of tenants in decision-making processes. Public housing should be a partnership between the government and residents, ensuring that upgrades align with community needs.

Residents should have direct input in identifying necessary improvements, including better heating and cooling systems, enhanced security measures, and expanded communal spaces. Providing tenants with a voice fosters a sense of ownership and ensures that renovations serve their intended purpose.

4. Addressing the Housing Crisis Through Renovation

Renovation presents a pragmatic and immediate solution to Melbourne's housing crisis. Instead of demolishing and displacing residents, refurbishing existing stock will increase the availability of safe and affordable housing.

The financial and social costs of demolition and reconstruction far exceed those of modernisation. Additionally, the prolonged construction timelines associated with new builds exacerbate housing insecurity. A strategic renovation plan ensures minimal disruption while rapidly improving living conditions.

5. Expanding Public Housing Stock

In addition to renovating existing structures, Melbourne must also invest in constructing new public housing. Innovative approaches, such as developing air rights over railway corridors and underutilised land, have been successfully implemented across Europe and should be considered.

Historically, public housing accommodated a broad spectrum of income groups, including essential workers such as nurses, paramedics, and firefighters. However, systemic underfunding and policy neglect have transformed public housing into a last resort for the most vulnerable. Addressing this imbalance requires government commitment to restoring public housing as a viable option for low- and middle-income earners.

6. Specialised Housing for High-Needs Tenants



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Certain high-needs individuals, including those with severe mental health issues and chronic substance dependencies, require specialised housing separate from conventional residential blocks. While many tenants with mental health conditions successfully integrate into community housing, those who pose a safety risk to themselves and others necessitate targeted support services.

The failure to provide appropriate accommodation for these individuals has led to significant disruptions within public housing estates. Establishing dedicated facilities tailored to their needs would enhance overall tenant safety and well-being.

7. Long-Term Social and Economic Benefits

Investing in the renovation and expansion of public housing yields significant long-term benefits. Improved living conditions contribute to better health and social outcomes, reducing the broader economic burden associated with homelessness and inadequate housing.

Additionally, renovation projects create employment opportunities in construction and skilled trades, providing an economic boost to local communities.

8. Reforming Public Housing Management

Addressing the inefficiencies of the current management system is critical to ensuring the sustainability of public housing. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) and Homes Victoria have demonstrated repeated failings in their administration of public housing. A restructuring of public housing management into smaller, community-led corporations could lead to greater transparency and responsiveness.

Public housing corporations, operating on a not-for-profit basis, should be governed by diverse boards that include tenant representatives. Such a model ensures that funding is reinvested into housing maintenance and tenant services rather than being subject to government mismanagement and budgetary cuts.

9. Conclusion

I first moved to Park Towers, South Melbourne, at the end of 2006 after losing my home and business due to a severe spinal injury, which I still manage to this day. I never thought I would find myself in public housing. However, having lived and worked all over the world, I had always been a strong advocate for public housing. In some countries, public housing makes up the majority of housing, including for non-nationals, and is appropriately priced.

An affordable, high-quality public housing stock is attractive to both domestic and international companies, creating an environment where they do not have to provide additional allowances for housing and healthcare. When I first moved into Park Towers, I quickly noticed the total disregard for occupational health and safety, the inept management of such a valuable asset, and the poor treatment of responsible tenants. I have never been treated so dismissively in my life, constantly threatened with eviction for making valid complaints.



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The proposed demolition of Melbourne's public housing towers is a misguided strategy that overlooks the pressing needs of vulnerable communities. Renovation offers a more sustainable, cost-effective, and socially responsible alternative that aligns with best practices in global urban housing policy.

Moreover, tenant participation, strategic public housing expansion, and specialised accommodation solutions are essential to ensuring that Melbourne remains an inclusive city where essential workers and low-income residents have access to secure housing.

Finally, reforming the management structure of public housing will prevent future administrative failures and ensure that public housing remains a public good rather than a political bargaining chip.

I trust that this submission will be given serious consideration and urge the Inquiry to adopt a policy framework that prioritises renovation, tenant involvement, and long-term housing security.

John Lowndes

President

Park Towers Tenant Management Inc

18/03/2025



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