

Legal and Social Issues Committee
Parliament House, Spring St
East Melbourne, 3002

27 March 2025

Dear Legal and Social Issues Committee,

Inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers

The Victorian Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects (Institute), which I represent as Chapter President, welcome the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry. The Institute and architectural community generally, are engaged with the existing fabric of the city and promote responsible, qualitative, and sustainable design. We understand the need for consistent evolution, development, and maintenance of this fabric but also the need for a rigorous and transparent process, particularly when significant interventions are proposed.

One of our most critical issues at this time is housing supply and the need for enduring, environmentally sustainable outcomes at scale to meet this demand. The Institute commends the government's acknowledgment of the need for an holistic plan for ongoing and ambitious reinvestment in the existing higher-density housing portfolio to ensure that it delivers good quality, social, and affordable housing stock to enhance future liveability and lives of existing and future residents.

On behalf of our membership, which includes practitioners experienced and specialised in these fields, but also on behalf of the broader public, many of whom hold a connection with these places, we encourage a rigorous and case by case assessment of the existing fabric and its potential value (environmental, economic and architectural).

Understanding the assessment of the Towers

The Institute understands that assessments have been undertaken of these public assets. We believe it is in the public interest to release the data. In particular, the Institute encourages the release of the following relating to these existing buildings:

- Geotechnical Engineering
- Structural Engineering (including seismic and wind)
- Civil Engineering including stormwater management and drainage
- Mechanical, Electrical, Hydraulic and lift Engineering
- Fire engineering
- Acoustic engineering
- Inclusivity and Accessibility
- Hazardous materials assessment
- Building Surveying assessment detailing existing conditions that might compromise compliance with existing current building

Carbon, Materials, Energy and Waste

The Institute encourages the calculation of embodied and operational carbon outcomes for the various feasibility options presumably explored by the Victorian Government to inform the development proposals for these sites. We acknowledge the government's own carbon reduction targets of 50% by 2030 and net zero by 2045. To achieve these targets, we believe that carbon accounting for these significant projects must be normalised, disclosed, and justified.

We also suggest that the government consider and optimise the principles of a circular economy when considering the upgrade of housing on these public sites, referencing the government's commitment to a Circular Economy (outlined in their 2020 policy release). Such development should also recognise, respect and account for the contributions of earlier generations in terms of resources, materials and energy as intergenerational investments in our built environment. Material Waste and recycling are also basic parameters that need to be accounted for when further progressing the government's waste minimisation targets and assessing the value of alternative options.

Explorations

Our members are keen to contribute to the public conversation around the towers and to provide unsolicited (as well as solicited) investigations on the future development of the towers.

In the links below, we direct you to some provocations from our community to showcase potential ideas for re-use and retrofitting the housing towers. None of these represent the singular view of the Institute, rather they are conversation starters. They are informed by successful international adaptive re-use projects from comparable cities.

- [*Atherton Gardens Exploration of Retrofit Case Study Options \(NMBW, Finding Infinity, Architecture Workshop, Wilde and Woollard, Cheris Barnett Architect, Dunning Thorton\)*](#)
- [*Transformation of 530 dwellings by architects Lacaton & Vassal + Frédéric Druot + Christophe Hutin*](#)
- [*Retain, Repair, Reinvest – Office*](#)
- [*Retrofitting Melbourne's high-rise social housing buildings: improving liveability and energy performance in a circular economy – Isabella Fyfe*](#)

Case by case interrogations of the Towers

Given the variety in age and typology of the public housing towers and likely different suitability for retrofit/repairs, the Institute strongly recommends that the government adopt a case-by-case review of the towers. This review should set out public criteria for the review of each tower individually. This review should include:

- Suitability for retrofit
- Heritage value of the towers including cultural and built
- Value of existing communities
- Carbon, material and energy accounting
- Material Waste and Recycling
- Site density/making the most of existing footprint
- Impact and opportunity of green spaces

Conclusion

The Institute, and the profession generally, are keen to continue to contribute to the informed debate about the future of the public housing towers. Our general society is part of a continuum which should acknowledge and respect the contribution of previous generations, recognise our responsibility to adapt and build housing that is suitable for our community, while leaving our environment in a state which can enable development by future generations. We thank the Committee for your time in considering our submission, and note, as a profession, we would be delighted to assist the Inquiry further.

Yours sincerely,



David Wagner FRAIA
Victorian State President
Australian Institute of Architects