



Victorian Public Tenants Association (VPTA) engagements about public housing redevelopment

Findings & Recommendations Report

Victorian Public Tenants Association

Authorship & acknowledgements

This Findings & Recommendations Report was written by Andrea Cook, Director of RedRoad Consulting, Katelyn Butterss, Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian Public Tenants Association (VPTA) and Matilda Hooper, the Community Engagement Lead of the VPTA and. The final Report was also shaped by the review and input of VPTA Board members and staff and by participants of this engagement process.

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We also acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Owners of the Country where these engagements occurred. We recognise their cultures, histories, diversity and deep connection to this land and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

October 2024

At a glance...

In September 2023, the State Government released the Victorian Government's Housing Statement, which included plans to redevelop Melbourne's 44 high-rise public housing towers.

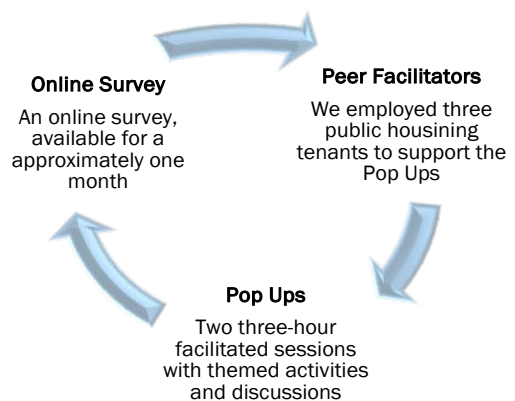
As a response, the Victorian Public Tenants Association (VPTA) decided to facilitate an engagement process in Flemington and North Melbourne (two of the early redevelopment sites) to help residents communicate their hopes for the new homes, buildings/surrounds and community connections at the redeveloped properties.

This Report outlines the findings of these consultation activities and makes design and community development recommendations for the properties at Flemington and North Melbourne as well as recommendations for planning, resourcing and conducting similar engagement processes in future.

Key engagement themes:

1. *People's ideas and preferences for their HOMES*
2. *People's ideas and preferences for their BUILDINGS & SURROUNDS*
3. *People's ideas and preferences for their COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS*
4. *People's other experiences, ideas and questions about the redevelopment*

The approaches used:



Who participated

People from approximately 50 households attended the Flemington Pop Up (16 August 2024, 3pm to 7pm) and those from approximately 35 households attended the North Melbourne Pop Up (27 August 2024, 3pm to 7pm). We also had 16 people complete the online survey.

In total, over 100 households participated in this engagement process and that represents about 1 in 5 (or 20%) of all those households affected by the redevelopment at the targeted sites.

We saw strong involvement of migrant families, especially from African communities, women and children under 18 at the Pop Ups. The survey attracted a slightly different audience with higher proportions of Australian born and male respondents.

What we heard

Key ideas and messages about HOMES:

- many renters prefer homes with separated (versus open plan) kitchens and living areas
- offer internal laundry, rather than a shared one
- people want a balcony with high balustrades for safety
- windows which open to allow air flow, heating and air conditioning
- people prefer a toilet that is separate from the main bathroom and want appropriate disability accessible bathroom fittings
- space for cultural/religious practices

Key ideas and messages about BUILDINGS & SURROUNDS:

- provide spaces for informal socialising, both indoors and outdoors
- prioritise safety via security personnel and infrastructure
- provide adequate parking, ideally underground
- deliver good quality open space with nature, exercise/sport/play and socialisation opportunities
- don't forget the children... design quality play, learning and socialisation space for children

Key ideas and messages about COMMUNITY CONNECTION:

- people are most concerned about losing their sense of community and the community connections they have built through the redevelopment process
- key community groups, activities and services that people want are learning and culture-oriented
- people are worried about vulnerable renters (e.g. older people, people with disability, people with low English language skills) becoming socially isolated

Key ideas and messages about OTHER MATTERS:

- the communications and information for the High Rise Redevelopment Project need to be stronger
- renters are anxious about the relocation process that is part of the redevelopment, and those anxieties are heightened by renters who have already been relocated and experienced difficulties
- people would like their right of return guaranteed
- this type of engagement process, at future redevelopment sites, can both inform and empower renters and deliver practical renter advice to Government

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1 Introduction & Background

Background

In September 2023, the State Government [released the Victorian Government's Housing Statement](#), which included plans to redevelop Melbourne's 44 high-rise public housing towers. Amongst the first public housing to be redeveloped are properties in Flemington and North Melbourne and work has begun to relocate current residents ahead of the redevelopment.

This project has met with very mixed reactions, including from those currently living in high rise public housing across Melbourne.

While some renters are welcoming of the process, many have expressed feeling anxious, stressed and confused. These uncertainties and worries exist even for renters who have already been temporarily relocated, and for those who are supportive of the project. (e.g. Will it be large enough? Will it be suitable for people with disabilities? Will it be culturally appropriate? How will it integrate into the wider neighbourhood?)

How can my future housing better fit my/my family's needs?

What will happen to my community through this process?

Where will I live during redevelopment and when can I return?

The Victorian Public Tenants Association (VPTA) decided to facilitate an engagement process to help residents of the first towers slated for redevelopment to discuss these and other topics they feel are important in the redevelopment process. The consultation sought to identify the housing aspirations of the community impacted, so that these can be factored into the next stages of the renewal process, including the drafting of the Request for Quote documents.

Further, the consultation sought to trial a new method of community engagement for residents affected by public housing renewal and relocation, that can be iterated and expanded to future projects.

The engagement process is described in more detail in the next section but, in summary, involved:

- Training and employing three peer facilitators from public housing to help us attract others to the engagement

- Running two on-site Pop Up events that allowed for informal, drop in engagement
- Hosting an on-line Survey for approximately a month, enabling people to engage remotely and on their own time.

The process began from the position that the people who currently live at the renewal sites, and who wish to return to them are the subject matter experts on their own housing needs and desires, the strengths and weaknesses of how the sites work now, and how communities work in these places. Their feedback and suggestions will be invaluable to Government as these sites are renewed.

This Report outlines the findings of these consultation activities and makes recommendations for: specific design features of the redeveloped public housing in Flemington and North Melbourne, based on current renter need/aspirations; more general advice about renter design requirements of the redeveloped social housing in Victoria and; advice for planning, resourcing and conducting similar engagement processes in future.

About the Victorian Public Tenants Association

The Victorian Public Tenants Association (VPTA) is the peak body for people who live in public housing and for people on the waiting list. The VPTA advocates for:

- people who live in public housing
- people who want to live in social housing
- improvements to the public housing system

The VPTA has been advocating for renters since the State Government announcement of the proposed redevelopment, seeking commitments from the Government that protect residents' status as public housing renters, guarantee a right of return and more broadly apply the same rights and protections that have been extended historically to relocating renters in other renewal processes.

The VPTA has also been advocating for the Government to build back public housing on these sites, collecting signatures from more than 20 other community organisations on an open letter asking Government to double the amount of public housing (and ensure that anything built beyond is affordable housing for those in most need) and to promise not to sell any of the land to private developers.

The VPTA is also representing renters through this engagement process, exploring their ideas, experiences and concerns about the how the redeveloped housing is designed and works for communities. The findings (this Report) will be used to advocate to the Government to build new homes in Flemington and North Melbourne that match their stated wants and needs as well as to provide a consultation example for future redevelopments of this sort.

Our engagement approach

This project has been a more ‘speculative’ and experimental one and so our approach was designed to learn-from-action in a grounded approach “that attempts to unravel the meanings of people's interactions, social actions, and experiences”¹.

To this end, we started with a number of key themes and questions/messages to explore with tenants, including:

What are people's priorities and aspirations for the redeveloped HOMES:

(e.g. What does your current unit offer that you like and want to see in a new unit?; What are your needs for space in your unit (e.g. number of bedrooms)?; What is your feedback about the arrangement of rooms (e.g. cultural design principles to observe)?; What do you want for in-unit amenities like laundry/drying, heating, balconies, etc.?)

What are people's priorities and aspirations for the redeveloped BUILDINGS & SURROUNDS:

(e.g. What are your preferences for the open space and what happens there?; What is your feedback on communal services like security, on-site supports, etc.?; What is your feedback on communal facilities like play areas, meeting rooms, parking, etc.?)

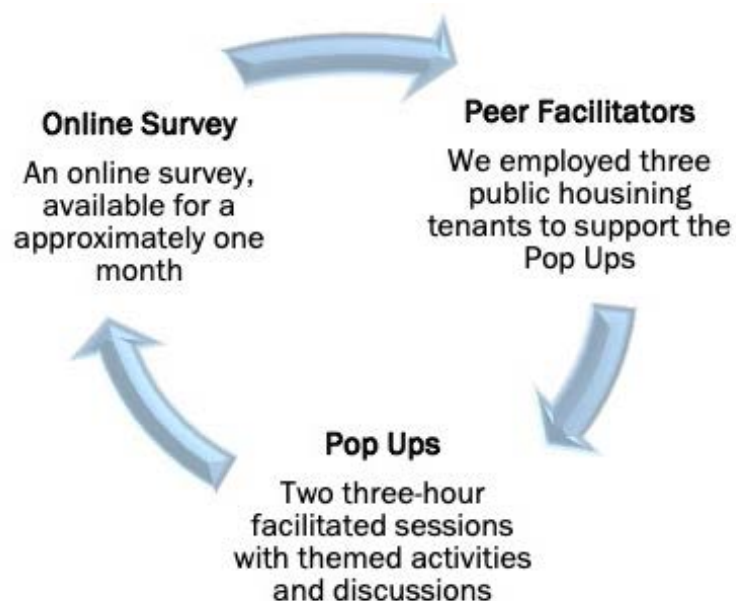
What are people's priorities and aspirations for the COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS of the redeveloped housing:

(e.g. What groups and clubs are important to have and/or to re-establish?; What services/supports should the Government offer to renters and what other sort of social services would like to access near home?)

Do you have other questions or feedback about the redevelopment?

(e.g. What do you need?; How can we help you get what you need?)

The methods we employed to explore these questions included:



¹ [An Overview of Grounded Theory in Qualitative Research](#) (2023: np)

The peer facilitators

An important part of the approach to this engagement was to resource a small group of peer facilitators² to learn from and contribute to the engagement discussions. Three peer researchers were recruited, each from different towers at Flemington and North Melbourne.

The peer facilitators were involved in a training session and then worked at the two Pop Up activities (including publicising those events to people in Flemington and North Melbourne public housing and to people from different culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (as all three peer facilitators were from CALD communities themselves)).



Fig. 01: Peer facilitator (right) in discussion with a North Melbourne Pop Up participant (left)

The Pop Ups

Two three-hour Pop Up discussion sessions were held on Friday 16 August (Flemington) and Tuesday 27 August (North Melbourne). Both were held between 4.00pm and 7.00pm to cater to families with children after school and into the evening for those working 9am to 5pm. The Pop Ups were catered, with a hot meal cooked by residents offered to participants, and were staffed with peer facilitators and interpreters able to help people participate in English, Arabic, Vietnamese, Cantonese/Mandarin, Somali and Amharic.

The Pop Ups were arranged into 'stations', each with display information (Appendix A) and engagement activities aimed at the broad engagement themes and questions discussed earlier:

² A peer (or community) facilitator is a person from the community being consulted who, after appropriate training and support, assumes the role in managing engagement discussions with their 'peers'. The benefits of this approach include increased participation (given the peer facilitators networks in and knowledge of the community), leadership and skills development. For an overview of how peer facilitator processes operate, see University of Michigan (2019), ['What is Peer Facilitation?'](#)

1. Reception, information and evaluation
2. About your HOME
3. About the BUILDINGS & SURROUNDS
4. About COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

People from approximately 50 households attended the Flemington Pop Up and those from approximately 35 households attended the North Melbourne Pop Up.



Fig. 02: people at the North Melbourne Pop Up, 27 August 2024

The survey

The survey was provided in online format and was available to people over the course of approximately four weeks. In total, 16 people completed the survey.

The survey had 31 questions, most of which used visual examples to ask people about their design preferences and their views of how the redevelopment would best work in terms of home and building design and community connections (see Appendix B).

- Six basic DEMOGRAPHIC questions
- Six questions regarding preferences about people's HOMES
- Ten questions regarding preferences about the BUILDINGS and SURROUNDS and about COMMUNITY SERVICES
- Four GENERAL question for final comments and feedback

The survey generated mainly quantitative data for these engagement findings, though it should be noted that the survey sample size does not allow for statistically valid analysis and summary. The summary is therefore woven together with the other (qualitative) data to provide a thematic analysis.

Who participated?

In total, over 100 people/households participated in this engagement. Given there are 503 affected properties at North Melbourne and Flemington³ and given the invitations to participate were targeted, we have reached approximately 20% of households affected.

The demographics of the Pop Ups were not collected but most participants were women and substantial numbers of children (more than 15 of approximately 50) attending at Flemington. Two children (of approximately 35) attended at North Melbourne. The ages of adult Pop Up attendees were well distributed from young adults in their 20s and 30s to those over 75 and the majority were born in countries other than Australia, particularly in Horn of Africa countries like Somalia and Sudan. Due to the drop in nature of the event, we are confident that all participants lived in the local public housing and/or were on-site community agency staff.

The summary survey demographics, which we did collect, were as follows:

Gender	N	%
Female	7	47%
Male	6	40%
Non-binary	1	7%
prefer not to say	1	7%
Age		
< 24	0	0%
25-54	6	40%
55-74	6	40%
75+	2	13%
prefer not to say	1	7%
Household size		
1	8	53%
2	2	13%
3	1	7%
4	0	0%
5	0	0%
6+	1	7%
no answer	4	27%
Language spoken at home		
English	8	53%
Arabic	2	13%
Somali	1	7%
German	1	7%
no answer	4	27%

³ see [Transcript of the Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis in Victoria](#) (2023:6)

In addition, 30% of respondents noted that their household includes people with special needs or a disability and 40% of respondents said their home needs 'specific modifications to ensure accessibility, safety and dignity for everyone'. None of the survey participants indicated that they or members of their household were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders.

The survey included a larger proportion of single person households (53%) and households without children (71%) than was represented at the Pop Ups.

Reflections on the approach

This was a reasonably small, grassroots engagement exercise on a sensitive topic with anticipated lessons for future processes, and so a reflection on the strengths and limitations of the engagement approach is useful.

The strengths of this process, as identified by participants and facilitators, included:

- the overall usefulness and facilitation quality of the Pop Ups, with most participants evaluating the session as 'great'
- the specific value of having peer facilitators involved in the project, encouraging more and deeper participation by those from diverse CALD backgrounds while also building skills and leadership for the peer facilitators themselves
- the impact of using visual representations (as opposed to just verbal/text prompts), which helped facilitate participation for those with limited English
- the confidence in the data, which has been an increasing issue for online data gathering globally. There was no sign of manipulation by bots, for example.

The limitations of the process included:

- some people's reserve about participating in the design advice activities because they didn't want their participation seen as tacit agreement with the redevelopment
- the limits of resourcing and budget to the number of peer facilitators engaged, the capacity for publicising the engagements, the number of events, etc.
- the assumption that some participants may have taken part in both the Pop Ups and the survey. As the numbers this would apply to are small and the data is not being treated quantitatively, this is a minor issue.

2 A summary of findings

In this section, we describe the overall findings and key themes emerging from all sources (the Pop Ups and surveys) of this engagement.

Priorities for people's homes

The **size of new homes** is a pressing issue with many people expressing that they would like more and larger rooms. In the survey, for example, all respondents currently lived in one, two or three bedroom homes while wanting a greater diversity of bedroom numbers (from one to five or more) in their future homes (Fig 03).



Fig. 03: Survey responses regarding current versus future preferences in home size

The Pop Up participants reflected this priority as well, looking for a better match between bedroom numbers and household size. The larger family sizes of recent migrants from Africa were correlated to this priority and the finding also reflects other recent engagements with public housing tenants who felt their houses are too small for their families⁴.

⁴ see the [Social Housing Regulatory Review](#) Public Housing Tenant Consultation Report (2021)

Most survey responses to the question of what **room size** they wanted, opted for (on average) moderately larger rooms, even if that required more upkeep like housework:

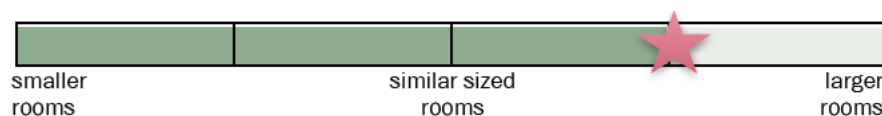


Fig. 04: survey responses regarding room size preferences for the redevelopment

Facilitator reflections on the discussions with participants did underscore that some of this desire for larger rooms seemed a direct response to the (newer) community housing properties they were being shown in the relocation process – and the way those newer properties also ‘proxied’ for the build back of their current homes. So ‘bigger’, at least some of the time, meant ‘bigger than the potential relocation properties I am seeing’ as opposed to ‘bigger than my current home’.

Across the Pop Ups and survey, the following **spaces and amenities within the home** were broadly seen as important design elements, with the living spaces receiving the most feedback at the Pop Ups and amenities like laundries and balconies a focus in the survey.

SPACE	DOT 'VOTES'	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
Living room	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need bigger space for bigger furniture (F47 + F53) • Large and separate from kitchen (F41)
Kitchen	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separate kitchen, not open space with living/dining • dishwasher
Balconies	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second highest priority in survey • Balustrade height was very important to parents, who felt that the fencing on balconies at new properties they had been shown were too low for them to feel confident of the safety of young children.
Religious and cultural practices	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including area/s for ablutions prior to prayer in the bathroom
Main bedroom	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuite with toilet and shower
Laundry	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest priority in survey • Want in-unit laundries, not shared
Space for visitors	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fourth highest priority in survey
Shared bedroom	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's bedrooms need room for desks/study
Disability access	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third highest priority in survey
Good ventilation/ cooling/ heating	1	



Fig. 05: Children add their ideas to the Idea Tree at the Flemington Pop Up

A significant number of people raised **disability access/universal design** requirements and highlighted that their household needed modifications to their homes to ensure accessibility, safety and dignity for everyone in the home. Forty percent of the survey respondents had this requirement for their home, for example, and others at the Pop Ups noted accessibility as a priority:



My priority for home is bigger rooms, storage, not open plan (keep the cooking smells in the kitchen and is more culturally sensitive) a good living room and a good kitchen, disability access especially for the bathrooms

Woman, 41, North Melbourne Pop Up

Grab bars in bathrooms were most commonly mentioned but so too were:

- doorway width and orientation (especially to bathrooms and bedrooms)
- flooring type (wood or tile versus carpet)
- separate toilets and bathrooms
- shower seating and seating for prayer ablutions/preparations

As a significant number of engagement participants were practicing Muslims, there was a focus on design elements facilitating **cultural and religious practices**, as the following comment highlights:



My priorities for my new home are ... religious areas for daily prayer... and an ablution area for prayer preparation, e.g. a tap or foot bath close to the ground for washing feet and/or a seat and handrails for disability access.

Man, 74, North Melbourne Pop Up

An important design preference people expressed was regarding **open plan living**. While many were ambivalent and unconcerned about whether living areas were open plan or separated, some felt very strongly about not wanting their future homes to be open plan. They cited kitchen smells and privacy (especially between women and male visitors) as reasons for wanting this room separation.



{I would like} a spacious living room that can fit a 7 seater couch/lounge and a closed kitchen with spacious storage and enough fridge space

Woman, 68, Flemington Pop Up

Finally, people spoke about a range of more **general design preferences** for their homes that included things like:

- ample storage throughout the home (and in lock up areas in the basement/parking area)
- a second bathroom in larger homes
- desk/study space for children
- space for a kitchen table/meals area in the kitchen
- space for twin beds in shared bedrooms (not only bunk beds)
- security doors with peepholes



Fig. 06: Participant's 'ideal home', Flemington Pop Up

Priorities for buildings and surrounds

People involved in these engagements made a range of suggestions about how the redeveloped properties' building and surrounds could best meet their needs. The contributions were informed both by the facilities they currently had and wanted to see returned to the redevelopment (like the learning centre and community rooms) and by what people wanted to see improved (for example, parking).

Across the Pop Ups and survey, the following **spaces and infrastructure for shared areas** were broadly seen as priorities for the redevelopment. Informal socialising space, security personnel, open space, accessibility and parking (access and safety) were the highest priorities for the Pop Up participants and socialising spaces, learning spaces and large and small meeting areas were the highest priorities for the survey respondents:

SPACE	DOT 'VOTES'	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
Indoor/outdoor informal socialising	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Highest priority in survey</i>
Security staff	12	
Space for trees and animals	9	
Accessibility/modification	9	
Parking	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more parking (renters have emphasised that families will require more than one car park) • underground parking • storage cages
Security infrastructure	8	
Activities for older kids/teens	7	
Elevators and stairs	7	
Learning	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Second highest priority in survey</i> • learning centre/job assistance/computer learning/library/internet/language • strong support for study areas (including computer and WIFI access) for children and young people
Large meeting area	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Third highest priority in survey</i> • required
Outdoor play	5	
Creative activities	5	
Gardening/growing food	4	
Small meeting areas	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Fourth highest priority in survey</i> • community rooms via booking system
Communal cooking/eating	3	

Unsurprisingly, the children who participated in the engagements (and in the child-led 'guided tour' activity at the Flemington Pop Up in particular) stressed that wanted **child-friendly amenities** like good play spaces, places they could go on their own safely and activities (like gardening) that they enjoyed doing with their parents.

Perhaps more surprisingly, the children were also sensitive to parking design and wanted underground parking, which they felt was safer and allowed for direct access into the building. It also allowed for more open and green space on the surface.

They also agreed with adults on needing study spaces where they could access learning materials and other supports. Other observations that the guided tour children (six children, aged 7 to 11) had about their existing buildings and surrounds were:

- The frequency of visiting the playground area was once a week for three of the children once a month for two of the children and not all that much for one of the children
- The existing soccer pitch is broken and constantly vandalised plus it is a hard surface so not much fun to play on
- The kids are happy to share with people from outside the estate
- The flying fox is a big hit and very popular
- Some added swings would be good as would a rock climbing wall with harnesses
- Children valued nature and the community gardens particularly as this was a place that they spent time with their parents



Fig. 07: Children leading a 'guided tour' of the building surrounds at the Flemington Pop Up

People had mixed views on their preferences for the **height of the new buildings**, with a majority (just over half of the Pop Up participants and all survey respondents) supporting lower-rise options while also recognising the difficulties in providing enough housing for all renters at that scale.

SPACE	DOT 'VOTES'	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
Low rise	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elderly person with difficulty walking/standing • Safety, less disturbances, easy access, better for families with young kids • Fear of heights
Mid rise	3	
High rise	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is more housing in high rise • High rise is more secure than low rise • Fewer problem with insects, dirt and mess

As many were not very interested in this question (with just 16 Pop Up dot votes and more than half of the survey respondents skipping the question in the online survey), the following quote from a Pop Up participant may be quite reflective of people's broader views on building height:



I'm not worried [about the height]: it's just nice to have a place to sleep.

Girl, 13-17, Flemington Pop Up

Finally, when asked about preferences for **potential commercial leasing options** on the redeveloped properties, there was a clear preference for leases to community services and to community-led services in particular. People were also supportive of leases for small shops and restaurants/cafes:

COMMERCIAL LEASE	DOT 'VOTES'	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
Community services	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second highest priority in survey • Local community-led organisations
Small shops	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third highest priority in survey • We already have [a convenience store] around the area
Medical services	4	
Large shops	4	
Restaurants/cafes	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest priority in survey (tied)
Something else?		
childcare centre	1	
transport (trains, trams and buses)	1	
none of the above		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest priority in survey (tied)

The leasing of space to commercial uses offered an important opportunity to build community enterprise and connection, as the following survey comment from a renter illustrates:

“ I don't mind commercial spaces, but it would be good if the government offered those spaces at a discounted price to local residents who have a business idea that would better serve the community. I believe in 'for the community, by the community'. Who better to serve the community than those who live in it and want to see it thrive?

Man, 25-54, Survey comment



Fig. 08: a participant adding their ideas about buildings and surrounds, North Melbourne Pop Up

Priorities for community connection

The concern about the redevelopment fracturing **existing community connections** was arguably the most consistent finding of this engagement process. People were very anxious that their current community connections would be irreparably changed and damaged.



With the relocation move we are losing relationships and community we have built for more than a decade. We would like to re-establish those connection in our new home.

Man, 25-54, Survey comment

This fear of loss was primarily about other community members, of course, but it also related to the loss of financial and ‘sweat equity’ investments people had made in the development of local community facilities and services (the Islamic prayer room in North Melbourne, for example). Strong connections to such local groups strengthened people’s already strong desire to return to the new housing and neighbourhood and to avoid permanent or long-term relocation to other areas of Melbourne or Victoria.



Fig. 09: People value the community connections that have been built in the current public housing



[My priority is} keeping the Community together, not relocating us all over the place to other suburbs on promise of return.

Woman, 55-74, Survey comment

There were many similar and some slightly different **ideas for community groups and services** in the two locations, with Flemington residents stressing things like children’s study and culture-specific groups and North Melbourne residents wanting adult

education/language tuition and cross-cultural groups where “different communities come together as one”:

FLEMINGTON	NORTH MELBOURNE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community (love heart) • All facilities to have disability access, green space, garden where elderly can sit. Gym, youth facility. Somewhere young people can hang out and have activities, a prayer area. Community room with kitchen. • Somali community • I want all the groups to be back, especially Drummond street services, they did a great job in Flemington. • Places where students can study in peace • All the community come back again together • Tutoring area to help with homework • We like the community getting together and keeping our culture, food. We also received every possible support from government. Keeping our Somali culture alive and passing values to our children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'd love to see the community together... more of the culture language like at the North Melbourne Language Centre school for language • Replace the North Melbourne Language Centre • I would like to see similar activity after the redevelopment where different communities come together as one • Local community led organisations • Language schools

In both Flemington and North Melbourne, though, the importance of maintaining and strengthening community connections and looking after each other was a constant and important theme.



My priority for the community is to take care of older people who can be isolated because of language. Older women in particular are alone a lot because they are widowed or separated with husbands going back to Africa to marry younger wives, so it is very important for this group to have friend networks.

Woman, 41, North Melbourne Pop Up

Other findings from these engagements

As often happens with community engagements, our findings weren't limited just to those things we asked about: residents also had their own questions and priorities which they brought into the conversations held.

The most common discussion points raised were about renters' relationship with Homes Victoria, the relocation process, and the Redevelopment Project overall.

Many participants felt that their questions about the relocation process and the project overall have not been satisfactorily answered, leading to worry, to distrust in Government and to a sense that there is a lack of care and respect for renters.



We want the right to return and come back to public housing, we need something in writing no one believes what [Homes Victoria] is saying. We need a document otherwise we all feel very nervous.

Man, 40s, North Melbourne Pop Up

People spoke at some length about the lack of communication and consultation during the relocation process, beginning with not really being aware that the redevelopment process was happening followed by confusion about the relocation process, right of return and other project elements.



The process was poor...we didn't know the redevelopment was happening, we were only given two choices for relocation and there was a threat to remove people from the list if they didn't take one of the two places. This is causing people to panic.

Woman, 41, North Melbourne Pop Up

Lack of policy clarity from Government has exacerbated distrust in these communities felt towards Homes Victoria, with many renters expressing an opinion that information is being withheld purposely.

Uncertainty and confusion are evidenced by examples of people who understood from communications early in 2024 that they should pack their belongings and have been living in packed up homes ever since.

As noted earlier, there were concerns about the redevelopment that related to the relocation housing options people were being shown. We heard stories of dramatic mismatches between people's households and what people were being offered (for example, putting large families into multiple units, housing with too few bedrooms, housing without necessary safety modifications for special needs household

members, etc.). These mismatches further erode renters' trust in the Government, the process and how 'fit for purpose' the future housing that is to be built back will actually be.

Several participants registered their concerns about current public housing transitioning to a community housing model. Rent increases were a part of this concern.



Rent has gone up through the relocation process and we are worried it will go up again when we are returned to the new housing.

Woman, 40s, North Melbourne Pop Up

Finally, people raised concerns about (and experiences of) stigmatising and disrespectful treatment through the process. Participants told us about experiences where Homes Victoria staff “gave attitude” and where support services like movers were bigoted and ‘punished’ renters by refusing to complete moving tasks after the behaviour was reported.

Participants told facilitators clearly that they want a guaranteed right of return to public housing, and do not want to be transferred to community housing. They are also hungry for more information, and written documentation which specifies what their rights and protections will be during relocation and upon return with regard to their tenancies.

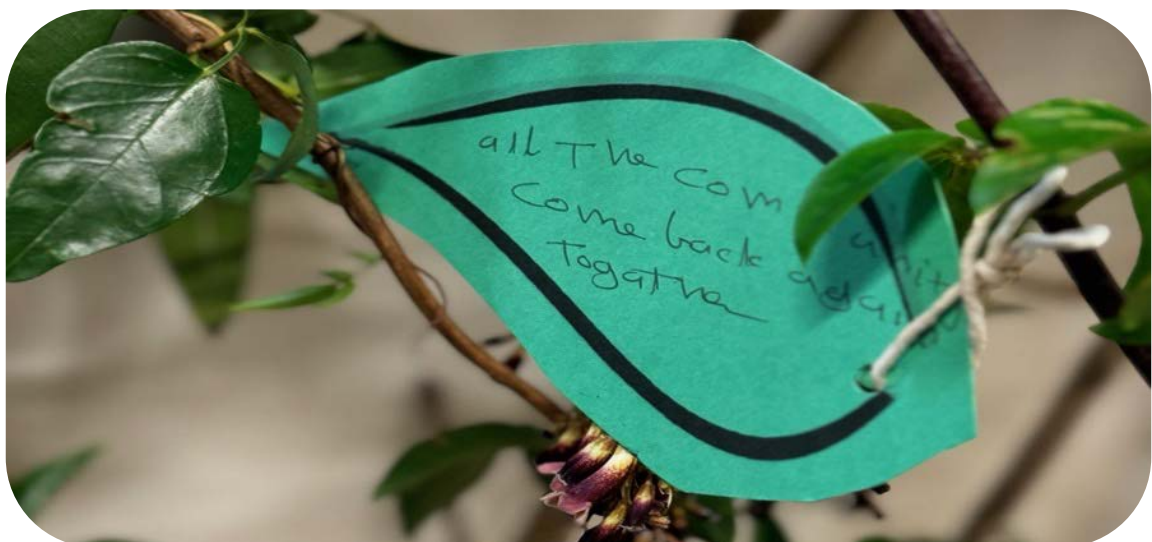


Fig. 10: A participant's desire for “all the community to come back again together”

3 Key learnings and recommendations

Key Learnings

About homes

There was substantial consistency in the feedback from renters across both Pop-Up events and the survey.

Households are generally satisfied with the existing layout and size of their homes, although would like to see some improvements in the redeveloped buildings. These include:

- separated versus open plan kitchens and living areas
- an internal laundry, rather than a shared one
- a balcony with high balustrades
- windows which open to allow air flow
- heating and air conditioning
- a toilet that is separate from the main bathroom
- space (and amenities) for cultural and religious practices

The preference for separate living and kitchen areas was informed by a cultural need for different spaces for men and women when there are visitors in the home and by the desire to keep cooking smells confined to the kitchen.

Additionally, many participants reflected that the newer build properties they had seen (at Victoria Street, Flemington, for example) were much too small for their families, and did not have the features they require. Commonly referred to problems with these designs included:

- open plan kitchen and living
- small bedroom sizes, especially if they need to be shared
- insufficient car parking
- small kitchen and living areas

One participant asked if they were meant to cook on the floor, when reflecting on the size of the kitchen. Other participants spoke of already-relocated family and neighbours who could not take their furniture to the new apartments, including new couches and fridges, as they would not fit in the space.

About buildings and surrounds

There were many views about which shared amenities were important to renters. Almost universally, participants emphasised the importance of

- informal socialising space
- parking (including a preference for underground parking in the new buildings)
- greater safety, using trained security personnel and infrastructure (e.g. CCTV)
- learning spaces (for adults and children)

There was substantial interest in outdoor spaces for many different purposes, including as pockets of nature with trees and animals, for gardening and growing food, sports and exercise, children's play areas, as well as quieter spaces for relaxation and socialising.

Children, who were strongly represented at the Flemington Pop Up where they led facilitators on a guided tour of the site, expressed a strong desire to see flying foxes, football pitches and swings on the new site, as well as more strenuous activities such as a rock climbing wall.

Finally, many participants indicated a desire to see a study area for older children and teenagers, as well as bright community spaces with kitchen facilities that could be booked for small and large groups.

About community connection

Many participants told us that they treasure the community at the high rises and were worried about being separated from each other. This view was held equally between those that oppose the project and do not wish to move and those, that while stressed and anxious, see a benefit in the renewal of the buildings.

People spoke of the time and care that had gone into building the supportive communities that now exist in both Flemington and North Melbourne, worrying in particular about:

- older renters needing support for day to day tasks like getting groceries
- socially isolated people, especially those with weak English language skills
- people with disability
- extended families who might be separated via the relocation process



"I don't mind to move but people are very sad, we know we won't get to see our community again, some of us will move very far. People will be isolated and sit in their homes, no one will visit them. My neighbour, I help her but if she didn't have me who will help her? She doesn't have family."

Woman, 50s, Flemington Pop Up

About the redevelopment process

Although participants were not asked for their opinion about the High Rise Redevelopment or the relocation process, many were eager to discuss these issues with facilitators.

Many participants expressed concern about:

- the communications and information available to renters about the process
- the relocation process, which was seen to offer too few and too mismatched housing alternatives
- the absence of a guaranteed right of return
- the shift from public to community housing, including concerns that rents will increase if the housing model shifts from public to community housing
- the lack of meaningful consultation
- perceived stigmatisation and bigotry via the process

These process weaknesses exacerbate renters' mistrust of Government and create a sense that there is a lack of care and respect for renters. For some, this is translating to anger, frustration and a stauncher "I don't want to move" mindset.

About the consultation approach

The strong take up of the engagement events, the design of activities to work for people of all ages (including children) and the depth of conversations held with facilitators strongly indicate the success of this type of engagement approach.

We conservatively estimate that around 100 households participated in the engagement either in person or online. As about 503 households overall are impacted by the relocations in the three targeted towers, this process reached roughly 20% of those affected, a significant proportion of affected renters.

A clear strength of the approach was the use of peer facilitators, one drawn from each target building. The strong Pop Up participation of households from the African migrant community was a direct result of the peer facilitator involvement, given all three peer facilitators were also from this community. The addition of interpreter support in other key community languages further supported traditionally 'hard to reach' communities to take part.

The project was limited by only having one peer facilitator per building. The initial project design allowed for two (six in total), but this was limited due to the financial constraints of the VPTA. Having more, and a more diverse team of facilitators would likely allow for a strong multiplier effect on the views represented in the final findings.

Financial constraints also only allowed for one Pop Up to be held at each site. The time slot of 4pm – 7pm on a weekday was selected based on renters' recommendations about when people were most available to attend but we recognise this wouldn't have suited all renters and there were some who couldn't attend either session.

Recommendations

Setting communities up for successful relocations

1. Consult with community organisations in advance of communicating new sites to residents to ensure information and policies will be clearly articulated to households, and likely questions can be anticipated and answered in detail.
2. Communicate to renters that their building is becoming a part of the program before making a public announcement.
3. Conduct a household audit of affected buildings as part of the decision-making process to ensure that nearby relocation options are suitable for the households being relocated, in terms of size and layout.
 - a) Ensure properties are available, or there is a clear pipeline to access the required properties, prior to commencing relocations. The Department should consider access to community supports, health services, faith-based organisations and facilities, as well as school zones.
4. Create clear, written and audio materials in community languages which specify:
 - a) the Right of Return,
 - b) the policies and procedures returned renters will have their tenancies managed under, especially with regard to rent and the social housing tenure,
 - c) the conditions their tenancies will be managed under during temporary relocation, and ongoing relocation in the event households do not elect to return to their original site.
5. Increase the financial support available to renters for relocation if they are unable to take their existing furniture and appliances to their new property.

New homes

6. Ensure that at least a portion of new social housing homes are publicly owned and managed housing.
7. Ensure the dwelling mix of new social housing responds not only to demand for new applicants on the Victorian Housing Register, but also the make-up of the existing building residents to facilitate rights of return.
 - a. Homes for families should include larger bedrooms and living spaces to allow for children to share a bedroom comfortably.
 - b. Homes with more than one bedroom should be structured so that the toilet is not in the main bathroom.
 - c. New homes should allow for good ventilation, with windows that open and close, as well as balconies with high barriers for the safety of children.

- d. Kitchens should be separated from living spaces in multi-bedroom apartments.
- e. Built in storage should be prioritised.
- f. New homes should use hard flooring, rather than carpet

New buildings and surrounds

- 8. Ensure new buildings are staffed with trained security personnel and are designed to maximise passive (e.g. sightlines from balconies) and formal (e.g. CCTV) surveillance to support onsite security.
- 9. Ensure security doors are used in new buildings, with peepholes.
- 10. Ensure there is no decrease in the number of car parks available to each unit and increase this if possible.
 - a. Car parks should be included in the basement of each building, with additional security measures to access the car parking.
- 11. Outdoor play spaces should have soft surfaces, including sporting fields.
- 12. Include multipurpose outdoor sporting fields, responding to the preferences of the community.
- 13. Shared spaces should include an area for older children and teenagers to study and learn if this cannot be delivered within individual apartments.
- 14. Community rooms should be flexible to allow for smaller or larger meetings and include cooking facilities.
 - a. Community rooms should be accessible via a booking system to ensure their security.
- 15. Outdoor spaces should include areas for residents to participate in communal gardening and food growing, in addition to play, exercise and relaxation.

Re-establishing communities

- 16. Consult with community leaders to consider ways Homes Victoria may be able to support communities to remain connected while they're temporarily separated by relocation.
- 17. Community centres should be equipped to run activities in community languages.
- 18. Consideration should be given to how community members support each other informally and buildings and sites designed in a way that provides for this, including by ensuring as many areas as possible are fully accessible.
- 19. Consideration should be given to areas for the provision of onsite services.

Continuous Improvement

- 20. Government should fund the VPTA to implement an expanded version of this consultation process at all future High Rise Redevelopment Project sites.

Appendix A: the Pop Up display boards

1 Reception & Information

THINGS TO DO AND THINK ABOUT:

Ask a **facilitator** or **interpreter** to help you

If they aren't already...! We have people here to walk you through the Pop Up and help you get the most from your visit!

Sign in and grab a 'passport' ~

Pop your name on the sign up sheet, fill out a consent form (for photos/ video and kids - you can say 'no' and still join in) and grab a 'passport' which you can trade for a lovely meal!

Sign up for the **scheduled activities** ~

Put your name down for a children's guided tour or small group discussion. Each will be about 30 minutes.

Take a moment to **evaluate the Pop Up** ~

Before you leave, just drop a token in a jar to let us know what you thought!



2 About your HOME

THINGS TO DO AND THINK ABOUT:

Ask a **facilitator** or **interpreter** to help you

They can help you with the following activities and get your 'passport' stamped. They can also just have a chat with you about what you want your new HOME to be and feel like after the redevelopment.

Activity 1: **Photo voting!**

Tell us about the priorities you have for your home and different spaces in it. Use 'voting' sticky dots to show us what's important and add any comments or ideas on the post it notes (or ask your facilitator to).

Activity 2: **Design your ideal home!**

Use the materials provided -- and your inner architect! -- to create your perfect home floor plan! Your facilitator will take notes at the end to capture your design.



3 About the BUILDINGS

THINGS TO DO AND THINK ABOUT:

Ask a facilitator or interpreter to help you

They can help you with the following activities and get your 'passport' stamped. They can also just have a chat with you about what you want your new BUILDING and SURROUNDS to be and feel like after the redevelopment.

Activity 1: Photo voting

Tell us about the priorities you have for the different spaces you share with other residents, indoors and outside. Use 'voting' sticky dots to show us what's important and add any comments or ideas on the post it notes (or ask your facilitator to).

Activity 2: Build a model of your future building/surrounds!

A model making activity for young and old! Use the materials provided to sculpt (or draw) something you'd like to see in or around the new building. Maybe a play area or a place to meet friends... describe it on the cards/post its available so others know what you want to



4 About your CONNECTIONS

THINGS TO DO AND THINK ABOUT:

Ask a **facilitator** or **interpreter** to help you

They can help you with the following activities and get your 'passport' stamped. They can also just have a chat with you about what you want your COMMUNITY to be and feel like after the redevelopment.

Activity 1: **Photo voting**

Tell us about the priorities you have for different groups, services and networks that can build community. Use 'voting' sticky dots to show us what's important and add any comments or ideas on the post it notes (or ask your facilitator to).

Activity 2: **The Ideas tree!**

Write your idea for maintaining or building a strong community on a leaf and add it to the tree. Make sure to read some of your neighbours' leaves too, to see what ideas they have!



Appendix B: the survey



High-rise public housing redevelopment: preferences and ideas

This short survey is part of a public housing tenant consultation being done by the Victorian Public Tenants Association (VPTA) on the planned state government redevelopment of high-rise public housing in Victoria.

The survey is focused on your preferences, feedback and ideas for the new homes and the new buildings/surrounds that are built back through the redevelopment process.

The VPTA (and this survey) are not part of the formal redevelopment project but we do hope to use the information gathered through the survey and other activities to write a report that will be available to you and be used to advocate with the government as they design and plan the 'build back'.

The survey will take about 15 minutes and is open until Friday 6 September 2024.



***Please note that the images used in the survey are stock photo examples only and not actual architectural drawings of proposed changes to Victorian public housing.**

Before we begin, can you tell us a little bit about **YOURSELF**?

1. Where do you currently live?

- ☐ North Melbourne public housing (high-rise)
- ☐ Flemington public housing (high-rise)
- ☐ Other public housing
- ☐ Other private housing
- ☐ Currently unhoused
- ☐ Other (please specify)

- ☐ Prefer not to answer

2. What is your gender?

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Other (please specify, if you can)

- ☐ Prefer not to answer

3. What is your age group?

- ☐ under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-54
- ☐ 55-74
- ☐ 75 and older
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

4. How many people currently live in your household?

5. Which language do you prefer to speak at home?

6. How many of the following apply to your household (tick all that apply)?

	Yes	No	Prefer not to answer
There are children under 18 in the household	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The household includes Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The household includes people with special needs or a disability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your home needs specific modifications to ensure accessibility, safety and dignity for everyone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

High-rise public housing redevelopment: preferences and ideas

To start, let's talk about the **HOME** (e.g. your private living space) that you currently live in and the **HOME** you'd like to move into after the redevelopment...

7. **How many bedrooms** do you currently have and how many would you like to have in the new home?

	Current Home	Future Home
1 Bedroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Bedrooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Bedrooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Bedrooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5+ Bedrooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. What **room size** do you want in the new home, also thinking also about the **housework** (like cleaning) needed? (move the slider to your preference)

smaller rooms/less housework

larger rooms/more housework

9. What is your highest priority for **amenities in your home**? (pick your top choice)



A: balcony



B: laundry



C: disability supports



D: visitor space

10. Thinking about all the options in the previous question, how would you **rank how important they all are** for the new home? (from top-most important to bottom-least important)

- A: balcony
- B: laundry
- C: disability supports
- D: visitor space

11. Would you like to **tell us more** about why these amenities are important to you inside your home? Or, are there **other options for amenities** in your new home that we've missed and you think are really important (you can upload an example/image in Q24, if that's helpful)?



12. Are there any design suggestions you have for the new home layout that reflect the **cultural needs and practices** of your household (you can upload an example/image in Q24, if that's helpful)?



High-rise public housing redevelopment: preferences and ideas

Now, let's talk about the **BUILDINGS and SURROUNDS** and the shared areas inside and outside.

13. Tell us about the height of the building you currently live in (on the left) and your height preference for the building you will live in in the future? (on the right).

	Current Building	Future Building
very high-rise (20 storeys or more)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
high-rise (9 to 19 storeys)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
medium-rise (4 to 8 storeys)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
low-rise (1 to 3 storeys)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

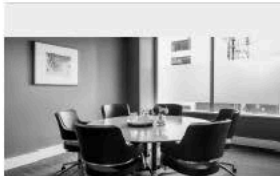
14. What is your highest priority for **shared indoor space** in the redevelopment? (pick your top choice)



A: learning spaces



B: socialising spaces



C: small meeting areas



D: large meeting areas



E: play spaces



F: communal cooking



G: arts and crafts



H: teenager spaces

15. Thinking about all the options in the previous question, how would you **rank how important they all are** for the new building? (from top-most important to bottom-least important)

- A: learning spaces
- B: socialising spaces
- C: small meeting areas
- D: large meeting areas
- E: play spaces
- F: communal cooking
- G arts and crafts
- H: teenager spaces

16. Would you like to **tell us more** about why the shared indoor spaces you chose above are important to you? Or, are there **other options for shared indoor spaces** in your new building that we've missed and you think are really important (you can upload an example/image in Q24, if that's helpful)?

17. Tell us about the things in your current building that you most want to see in your new building

	I don't care about having this in the new building	I want this in the new building but hope it is different	I want what we currently have in the new building	Don't know/not applicable to me
Car parking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Open space, trees, gardens	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Building security	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Elevators	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community rooms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Play spaces for children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to community services/supports	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good neighbours and 'sense of community'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. What is your highest priority for **outdoor open space** in the redevelopment? (pick your top choice)



A: children's play spaces



B: community gardens



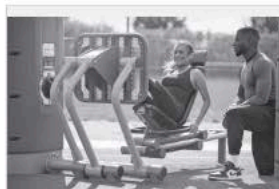
C: socialising space



D: space for nature



E: space for teens



F: exercise space

19. How would you **rank the importance of these different options for open/public space** illustrated above? (rank from top-most important to bottom-least important)

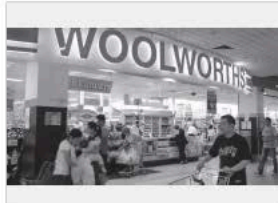
- ☐ A: Play spaces for younger children
- ☐ B: Community gardens and food growing
- ☐ C: Areas for casual socialising (e.g. a barbeque, etc.)
- ☐ D: Space for nature, trees and animals
- ☐ E: Activities for teenagers and young people
- ☐ F: Outdoor exercise space/equipment

20. Would you like to **tell us more** about why the shared outdoor spaces you chose above are important to you? Or, are there **other options for shared outdoor spaces** at your new building that we've missed and you think are really important (you can upload an example/image in Q24, if that's helpful)?

21. The government has mentioned making some **commercial or leased space** available in the redevelopment. What would you most like to see in that space? (pick your top choice)



A: small shops



B: large shops



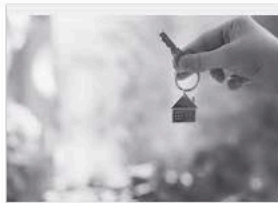
C: community services



D: medical service



E: cafes/restaurants



F: private housing

☐ None of the above

22. Would you like to **tell us more** about why the commercial/leased space you chose above appeals to you? Or, are there **other options for commercial/leased space** that we've missed and you think are really important (you can upload an example/image in Q24, if that's helpful)?

High-rise public housing redevelopment: preferences and ideas

Finally, let's talk about more **GENERAL ISSUES** and about anything else you'd like to raise or share with us...

23. Do you have anything else you'd like to add about **the look, feel and way the new units and buildings should work** for you and your family?

24. Would you like to **upload an example** of the sort of home, building or open space design you really like?

Choose File

Choose File

No file chosen

25. Do you have anything you'd like to raise in terms of the **redemption process** (like relocations, managing the construction site, etc.) that you want VPTA to advocate for with the government?

Would you like any **follow up from the VPTA** on the issues you've raised in this survey? If so, add your name and email/phone below.

26. Contact details

Name

Email

Phone number

My key issue