

T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria

Melbourne – Friday 20 June 2025

MEMBERS

Juliana Addison – Chair

Martin Cameron – Deputy Chair

Jordan Crugnale

Daniela De Martino

Wayne Farnham

Martha Haylett

David Hodgett

WITNESSES (*via videoconference*)

Charmaine Calis, Chief Executive Officer, Mallee Accommodation and Support Program; and

Mark Jenkins, General Manager, Healthy Communities, Mildura Rural City Council.

The CHAIR: Good morning. Thank you for joining us at this public hearing for the Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria.

On behalf of the committee, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture and their elders past and present. We also extend that to the traditional owners of Mildura and wherever our speakers may come from, as well as acknowledging the different countries that we all represent, mine being Wadawurrung – I do not represent them, I get to live on them, sorry.

We are in Melbourne today for the final public hearing of the Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria. This hybrid-style hearing provides an important opportunity to hear from stakeholders across regional Victoria on how the government can better support regional communities to build the housing they need, to attract the new residents required to remain vibrant and economically productive and to ensure existing residents are able to age in place with comfort and security. The committee looks forward to compiling the evidence gathered throughout the inquiry in preparing the final report. The report will be tabled in December with what we hope to be well-informed and constructive recommendations. I will just run through some important formalities before we begin.

All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that you can speak freely without fear of legal action in relation to the evidence that you give. However, it is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments made outside the hearing, even if you are restating what you said during the hearing.

You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so to check. Corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report.

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. I am Juliana Addison. I am the Member for Wendouree and the Chair of the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee meetings. Thank you very much for being here today.

Martin CAMERON: I am Martin Cameron. I am the Deputy Chair and Member for Morwell down in the Latrobe Valley in Victoria.

Wayne FARNHAM: I am Wayne Farnham, the state Member for Narracan, which represents the West Gippsland region.

Daniela DE MARTINO: I am Daniela De Martino. I am the state Member for Monbulk, which covers the Dandenong Ranges.

Jordan CRUGNALE: My name is Jordan Crugnale, the state Member for Bass, covering Pearcedale through to Inverloch.

Martha HAYLETT: I am Martha Haylett, the Member for Ripon, probably your closest neighbour. I represent communities like Saint Arnaud, Ararat, Wedderburn all the way down to the outskirts of Ballarat.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for being here today. We are really interested to hear about what is happening up in your very, very beautiful part of Victoria. We have been able to travel to the Grampians, we have been able to travel to Gippsland and we have been up to Castlemaine in the Central Goldfields area. We really think an important part of this inquiry is to hear about what is going on in Mildura and your beautiful part of the world and what are the challenges you are facing. I might start with Martin Cameron, if he wants to ask a question of Mildura.

Martin CAMERON: Thank you, Chair. Thank you very much for coming and spending some time with us today. What I would love you to do, first and foremost, is tell us a little bit about yourself and what you actually do up in Mildura, even to the point of where there are a few pressure points at the moment in housing up there.

Charmaine CALIS: Absolutely. I can start. Firstly, I would also like to acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the land on which we are all meeting today, and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

My name is Charmaine Callis and I am the Chief Executive Officer of a local not-for-profit organisation called Mallee Accommodation and Support Program, or better known as MASP, locally. We are a broad community service organisation and we work across several key areas. Homelessness support is one of our big areas of focus, but we also work across the children, youth and family space; the family violence space; residential care; and a small section of our organisation also provides social housing. We work across a really large geographic area, being not only Mildura Rural City Council but across Swan Hill, Buloke and Gannawarra. Then into New South Wales we work across the Wentworth and Balranald local government areas as well, so a really wide, really large geographic area.

Certainly one of the pain points that we see locally is around diversification of housing supply. I know, having had a look at some of your transcripts from your previous hearings, you are hearing that a fair bit. Certainly we see the most applications on the VHR being in that one- and two-bedroom property type. Traditionally we are seeing three-bedroom properties built locally, so there is certainly a disconnect there around what is being built locally as opposed to where some of that greatest need is, especially around that lower end of the social demographic population. Certainly that diversification of stock is one of the key areas that we see as an organisation.

One of our other pain points that we see is around the funding models that government use, specifically around moving from the capital grant funding that has traditionally been used through to the availability payments that we are now starting to see coming up. Being one of the smaller providers in terms of social housing, that certainly limits MASP's abilities to be able to compete within those funding rounds, because we do not have the ability to carry a significant amount of debt that some of the larger providers do. And we certainly see that we have a role to play locally in increasing that supply of social housing, but having the ability to continue operating within that sort of funding landscape is certainly going to prove a challenge for us moving forward.

One of the more innovative things that MASP has been doing over the last couple of years is working within the college lease scheme. That is land that is owned by the Department of Education, and it provides funding for local schools within the region. We have got four projects that have been completed or are nearing completion on college lease land, and we really see this as a great opportunity for government and community housing providers to work collaboratively with each other around what we see as a more lower cost ability to be able to build social housing, while still maintaining that social good of being able to contribute to the local schools as well. So we think it is a really good model and a win-win for us and government to be able to partner on that land to be able to increase the supply of social housing. Now, that is probably it for me. I might hand over to Mark.

The CHAIR: Mark, if you could just introduce yourself as well, please.

Mark JENKINS: Yes, sure. My name is Mark Jenkins. I am the General Manager for Healthy Communities at council, and I too want to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we meet on today, the Ladjji Ladjji people, and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. Thanks for the opportunity today to speak. As a council obviously we have got lots of responsibilities, but I will talk mainly about housing of course today, and we recognise the critical need to increase supply of housing across regional Victoria, in particular in our council.

So a bit about Mildura: you know already we are probably the largest council of Victoria, with 10 per cent of the state's land area. We are home to about 57,000 people, and our population continues to grow and age. But this growth is outpacing our housing supply, and the pressure is becoming acute. Rental vacancy is currently about 1.1 per cent, and then rental stress in households in Mildura is about 44 per cent, probably due to the high level of social disparities we experience in Mildura. And also there is probably about 30 per cent of residents affected by mortgage stress. The biggest gap, as Charmaine has already covered, in our local housing market is

for smaller affordable homes, typically one- and two-bedroom dwellings. These are always in high demand across both the private and social housing sectors, yet remain in short supply, and as a result we are seeing larger homes being used inefficiently, leaving people in housing that does not suit their needs and adding to broader affordability pressures.

There is also an ongoing shortage, especially in the Aboriginal community, where overcrowding is a serious concern. Data shows that 18 per cent of Aboriginal households in our region have six or more residents, compared to just 8 per cent of non-Indigenous households. So it is pretty clear that we need more targeted housing that is not only affordable but culturally appropriate and designed in partnership with local Aboriginal communities. As we said before, more broadly we need greater diversity in housing types and more incentives to build smaller accessible homes for both older residents and new arrivals to the region. We also see a potential in better promoting housing sharing platforms, especially to help match individuals and share spare rooms in larger homes with those who are seeking affordable housing. A lot of data from Mildura indicates a lot of homes in Mildura are large homes with only two people living in the household.

Access to affordable and secure housing is a foundation to health, safety and community wellbeing. It plays a vital role in reducing the impacts of domestic and family violence, which is of high prevalence in Mildura. But community attitudes can be a barrier also. There is also an urgent need for more public education to help shift negative perceptions around social and affordable housing. I think one of the problems in Mildura ongoing is people see the need for public housing but do not want to necessarily have it near where they live currently. Homelessness is also rising in Mildura, and it does fluctuate. The current level of housing and support services simply is not enough. I know MASP, as Charmaine has covered, does a lot of work in that space. We need to immediately invest into more accommodation options for people at risk of experiencing homelessness.

One of the biggest challenges for a council is funding infrastructure. In our submission we did mention the difficulty council has in funding infrastructure development needed for growth. We have identified some shortfalls in Mildura of around \$12 million in infrastructure development. Mildura is basically a very – the development area is very flat, and obviously drainage is always an issue in our developments and results in high costs of development, so council is very keen to get any support we can around supporting development. That has probably covered most of it. Thanks.

The CHAIR: Can I just pick up on that point, Mark. What role should the Victorian government play in planning and funding infrastructure to enable development? What do you see the role of the Victorian government to be?

Mark JENKINS: Well, I think in particular I suppose where we have shortfalls is particularly that trunk infrastructure that is shared across a whole range of different developments. In our case it is very specifically about drainage. That is probably our most significant cost in development, and then obviously road infrastructure. Mildura is lucky because we have got a road layout that is probably well laid out for development thanks to the Chaffey's, but certainly drainage and a lack of natural watercourses other than the Murray to accept drainage just result in high costs. So if we needed any support, it would be around infrastructure linked to drainage. That would be the biggest issue for our council.

The CHAIR: Terrific. Wayne.

Wayne FARNHAM: Yes, sure. Thanks, Chair. Hi, how are you? I am going to go into the housing targets that were set by the government for all the LGAs across the state. I suppose there are a couple of points to this. The housing targets the government set Mildura Rural City Council, are they achievable? And the other point to it I suppose is: is there enough land rezoned to accommodate those targets as well?

Mark JENKINS: I do recall we did some numbers on that forecast. From my recollection that number was about correct based on current development rates. In Mildura it does fluctuate. We might see between 250 and maybe as high as 320 or 330 per year of developments – that is, infill and greenfield development. So in the Mildura case, the numbers are about correct, give or take swings and roundabouts in that era, because it is a long time to 2051. Over time that is about the steady, constant rate.

I suppose the challenge for that is, as we mentioned before, the cost of housing. Across the state the cost of housing developments has gone up considerably in the last five years, and that probably will affect development as well in terms of development. On the zoned land front this council is actually well planned

ahead for growth areas. For example, there is a report we just had prepared actually, which just came out last week that we had through a ring plan that maps out very clearly – which I am happy to share – about our housing situation. So on the zoned land front, we are in a good situation. We have got what is called the South Mildura growth front, which has sufficient housing for potentially the next 10 to 20 years and beyond, and we are also working in what is called the Mildura East growth area. We call it MEGA. MEGA heads out towards the east part of Mildura towards Irymple and out that way. That is probably going out towards 2051 and beyond. So we have done a lot of work in that space around future planning.

I must admit out of all that work we are doing, drainage is the one that pops up for council as a challenge, because that is where council has to allow to purchase land to put retention and detention drainage on and also make the connections to existing trunk infrastructure for drainage. Particularly in Mildura South, that design work has been completed, and in MEGA we are still working on trying to find the best outcome for drainage in that particular area. That will be an ongoing project that we are working on right now. That is going to be a high-cost project to drain that part of Mildura, purely because a lot of it is in a low spot that needs pumping to pump the water out, basically, in simple terms, and that is, again, another high cost of development. So in terms of the zoned land, yes, and we have got other land that is not zoned currently that can be rezoned that is identified in development plans. Supply of land is not the issue, but certainly the associated development costs would be the biggest issue.

Charmaine CALIS: If I can just add to that as well, I guess that is where we see some of that struggle with developers around their need to be able to build properties that they know they are going to be able to sell and get a good margin on, as opposed to getting higher costing in terms of trying to build those smaller properties that they will not have as good a margin on. That is where we are seeing some of that challenge in terms of that supply as opposed to what we are seeing out there as the need for those properties.

Wayne FARNHAM: It probably comes back to your earlier point where you mentioned that the one thing government could help you with is trunk infrastructure. Going on that point alone, if government stepped in and helped with the trunk infrastructure, do you think then that would encourage developers to pull the anchor up, so to speak, and get on with the development?

Mark JENKINS: I think the answer is yes, for sure. I think from a council perspective they can move things faster as well, because obviously if you are having to fund these things over time you would actually be able to put the money aside too in capital programs to fund these projects. If that part of the barrier was removed, I think everything would move much more quickly. For example, particularly in the Mildura East growth area case, which was the most work the council did recently around cost, there was a substantial cost in progressing that project purely on a drainage front. If that were reduced or taken away, obviously that would free up a lot more progress that we could make about providing more options.

Linked housing is interesting too, because that means you can provide more options for people to live. I think another issue that we face is if you have a few development funds open you can give people choice – where they want to live, how they want to live – and even give more choice around options for housing types. There is a bit of an inherent issue we have not even touched on: developers probably do try and hit the middle mark of what people demand is in the market for housing, so that is generally a certain type of house format. We want to see a bit more of a mixture, and that probably can be created by having different fronts and I think engaging more with developers around what we are trying to achieve in housing and how they can participate in where the real demand lies, particularly in those smaller format homes. In Mildura people like to have a lot more of a choice. People like living in more farming zone areas; they want to live in traditional early RZ areas, residential; and certainly some people want to live in the city and in smaller accommodation. So we have got to provide a broader range in Mildura, but we need to make sure we have got that range, not just in the middle market where probably the most houses get sold.

The CHAIR: Terrific. Daniela.

Daniela DE MARTINO: First of all, thank you both for coming along today. We really appreciate this. This is how we broaden our knowledge. Charmaine, I just wanted to ask you about the pros and cons of using the college lease land model for new housing developments. I am really keen to find out more about that.

Charmaine CALIS: Certainly there are a number of both pros and cons. It certainly provides a lower-cost option to be able to get development going. The college lease is a minimal lease fee over a long period of time, so it means that the organisation is not having to come up with that initial cost for land, which is a really good aspect of that. I guess on the flip side it means that we have not got as great an asset on our books to be able to then draw from, which obviously then poses challenges. It has certainly been a really good option for us. MASP is really keen to be able to explore that further, and we have certainly done a lot of work with Homes Victoria and the Department of Education to be able to get those head lessor direct deeds where everybody needs them to be. I certainly think that there are more pros than cons from a community service organisation perspective. I can see how that sort of model would not be as appealing to developers and private investment, because they are not owning an asset at the end of that period of time so they certainly do not see that that is a viable option for them, but as a community service organisation it certainly provides a really good avenue for us that is lower cost than looking at private land initially.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Can I also ask – this might be a bit of a fringe sort of question: are any of those houses removable?

Charmaine CALIS: We have not done removable as yet. It is certainly something that we are interested in exploring. They are permanent dwellings to date, and we have got 50, 60-year leases with the Department of Education to be able to maintain those and obviously requirements with the department to operate those as social housing for a period of time. But certainly we have an interest in looking at other models of being able to build, certainly where that can look at speeding up that construction process as well in comparison to a traditional build, but we have not been able to explore those as yet.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Thank you very much.

Mark JENKINS: I might just add, Charmaine, college lease has some challenges, but MASP has done I think a really fantastic job in overcoming the challenges of using college leases and demonstrating that it can be done. I think there have been a lot of views that that was not possible, and I think they have proven that is not true. I think one of the biggest issues is that owning the asset seems to be a big sticking point, even with housing providers on the social housing front. But I think that MASP has demonstrated that it can be done and their model ongoing – you have had a few sites I know you have worked on. So college lease I think has got a lot of opportunities from our perspective, but this is about working out a model that works and is actually viable, because the cost is actually lower in some theories because you do not need to own the land in the first place, you just own the development. There is a bit of a limitation, and I think some providers are not keen to go there, but certainly MASP has done a great job I think in overcoming that issue.

The CHAIR: Jordan.

Jordan CRUGNALE: Hello, and thank you again for joining us here today. I have got a question around the seasonal workforce and accommodation and some of the pressure points. As we have travelled around the state there are areas that have seasonal workforces and movement as well, so I am just keen to hear what is happening up in Mildura on this front.

Charmaine CALIS: Well, I guess we do have quite a high seasonal workforce, and we are certainly seeing that as a challenge in terms of supply of housing. I guess we are seeing that across the whole workforce sector as well, not just seasonal workforce. I guess some of the challenges that we are then seeing in terms of supply of appropriate housing for seasonal workers – we certainly see that it is a group of people that can often be exploited in terms of living conditions and costs and those sorts of things. So it is certainly a challenge. It is not a space that MASP works in. I do not know if council sees that a bit more.

Mark JENKINS: We think we do, because we do a lot of work around rural accommodation. I have been out of the planning area for a little while now, but I know there has been some work done recently about rural worker accommodation particularly in farming zone areas and large agricultural areas. It is often an issue in Mildura that comes up about what you can and cannot develop in farming zones. I think there is still more work to be done in that space about how you can actually ensure you have got appropriate housing in rural areas and then also, have you got access to services? When they are living remotely how they do access services? There are some good examples recently in Mildura that have funded some rural worker accommodation, in my understanding, but there are some models where they cross over into tourism accommodation, so where they

can be multi-use depending on what the demand is. That makes sense in a Mildura context when you can use the housing for different purposes. That seems to be a model that is popular, but it would need, again, funding and support, because it is obviously a large investment for someone to take on. But certainly I think there is more work to be done in that space, and that will be common across other councils I am sure around rural worker accommodation.

Jordan CRUGNALE: Thank you.

Martha HAYLETT: This is probably a question for both of you, Mark and Charmaine. I am just keen to know a bit more about the Mildura Social and Affordable Housing Taskforce. How has that gone over time and what are the tangible outcomes that have come from that taskforce? If you could shed a bit more light on that, that would be great.

Charmaine CALIS: Absolutely happy to do that. It is a fantastic taskforce that has come together and really brought together all of the key players locally that have a role and a responsibility to look at providing social housing within our community. One of the key things that we really see out of that group is the ability to collaborate more with our partner agencies, which I do not think we have done overly well previously. I think we all recognise that it is a very competitive landscape in terms of funding, but I think if we continue to work together, our aim is to make sure that we get the most funds brought into the region that we can possibly achieve. Some of the key outcomes that the taskforce has achieved to date are around looking at land availability locally, both through local government and state government to identify if there has been any land available that we could try to make use of for social or affordable housing, and we are currently developing a community education campaign that the taskforce will run to destigmatise some of that commentary that is out there around social housing, because I think everybody within the community and the sector acknowledge and agree that it is a really important part of our housing needs locally, but there is always going to be that community perception and concerns around who is coming into that housing and what that is going to mean for the local neighbourhood. We are really keen to make sure that we work together on dispelling some of those myths, addressing some of those concerns and really getting a better understanding within community around the important need for social housing and the type of people that are struggling out there and who really do need that additional support.

Mark JENKINS: And we probably have tuned a lot more into data. Councils are actually very much focused on data collection around housing. As I said, our new report this last week or so identifies in a lot more detail opportunities for land development in Mildura. In the basic sense about it, anything we can assist with on the planning front, we often try to do whatever we can on that front as well. Also, the networking things that Charmaine mentioned, we have probably got a good relationship with most people in the space, which we wish we had before as a council. We are also working in some of the challenging areas, and I think there are a lot of housing providers, particularly in the Aboriginal housing space, that could do with support to improve the situation in that particular area. We are doing some work with DFFH around housing in Mildura, because obviously some housing in Mildura is available but there is a low take-up of people in government housing too. So it is how we can improve the situation of existing housing through a whole range of techniques that we can contribute to as a council. I think the taskforce has brought out a whole range of things we did not anticipate it would bring out, actually. Also, we want to do a bit of work with developers locally around how they could contribute to improving the outcomes for social housing, affordable housing, which is probably a discussion that we have not had a lot to do with in the past, but we see that as a good opportunity in the future in terms of work with developers, to explain the situation and see how they can contribute to the new potential solutions.

Martha HAYLETT: Can I just chuck one more in?

The CHAIR: Sure thing.

Martha HAYLETT: This one is mostly for you, Charmaine. I am just interested to know how that experience of housing stress or housing insecurity and homelessness has changed over time in Mildura. Obviously you take in a really massive catchment area. Have you seen quite significant changes even, say, in the last five or 10 years in terms of how people are experiencing homelessness and housing stress?

Charmaine CALIS: Yes, absolutely. I think we are seeing a really different cohort of people coming to access services now. Traditionally what we are seeing with people is that they have previously held a tenancy.

Out of the 500-plus people that we have worked with this financial year alone, the majority of those have previously held tenancies, and the struggle that they have had is being able to maintain those. A lot of the work that our staff do with people is around some of that role modelling and that teaching around how you successfully maintain a tenancy, because we all know that it is much easier to sustain somebody's tenancy than to get somebody a new tenancy and start again, especially if they have had a few challenges with previous agents and then struggle to be able to get those properties. We are certainly seeing a large number of people that have been incarcerated before, that have been released from jail and do not really have anywhere to go. We see people come up from Melbourne on the train and the bus and get as far as Mildura and not be able to go any further, and then they feel like they get a bit stuck and are not sure what to do or do not have anywhere to go and do not have that support to be able to do that.

Our team are working with nearly 70 rough sleepers this year within the Mildura, Wentworth and Balranald local government areas, and that is certainly more than we anticipated that we would find. Quite a high proportion of those, as I said, have been released and been incarcerated. Also, a large number of older women are experiencing primary homelessness. They may be experiencing mental health issues and other things and may have found themselves in a position where husbands or partners may have passed away and they have not been able to sustain a tenancy, and find themselves sleeping in cars and motels and those sorts of things. Certainly we are seeing that different group of people come through the service, and we are seeing a lot of challenges with that young cohort as well, especially those that have been involved in the service system, so they may have been in out-of-home care or residential care. We are seeing them at quite a great risk of experiencing homelessness following exiting those care service systems.

Martha HAYLETT: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you for sharing that. I was just wondering, with you being a border community – and I know, Charmaine, that you mentioned Balranald and Wentworth earlier – are our friends north of the border doing anything good that we could take from? Do you have any experiences with the New South Wales government in terms of what we could learn from them or what we could do? Are there any examples north of the border that could be beneficial for our inquiry?

Charmaine CALIS: Yes, absolutely. Some of the work that we see over in New South Wales is around earlier intervention strategies. We receive a lot of referrals from real estate agents where somebody's tenancy is starting to become at risk. We are seeing an earlier intervention over in New South Wales that allows our staff to then come in and work quite quickly and early with somebody around what the challenges are that they are facing that may be putting their tenancy at risk, as opposed to in Victoria, where what we are often seeing is people have already lost their tenancy and then we are starting from a much further back position than we are in New South Wales.

The CHAIR: Charmaine, can I just dig a bit deeper on that? Is that a requirement under New South Wales legislation, and what does the intervention look like?

Charmaine CALIS: It is a more proactive approach that is being taken rather than a requirement. On the ground that looks like our staff actually working cooperatively with the real estate agents and the tenants to address some of those barriers. So that might be around looking at NDIS support, that might be around supporting somebody to get identity documents or a drivers licence or engaged with employment services or really just that role modelling around what it takes to be a good tenant, so what are the nights that your bins go out and budgeting and that learning and life skills type work as well. That is how we are seeing that play out on the ground.

The CHAIR: Great. Terrific.

Martha HAYLETT: Do you have anything to add to that, Mark?

Mark JENKINS: No; well, I think on the development front, though, Wentworth council across the river – there is a lot of development still happening across the river that I think is probably based on demand in New South Wales. People do live across – in particular Gol Gol–Buronga is probably the biggest growth area adjacent to Mildura, and that probably does put a bit of pressure on services back in Mildura. I think most of the people who live over there do come back to Mildura for the central services. That does I think in all border communities create a bit of a demand on services in Mildura that particularly we provide that are used by

people across the river, but I have noticed that on the development front, those with closer proximities to Mildura are developing quite quickly. There is high demand for that land over the river as well, so I suppose we do not put that into our numbers in terms of supply, but that growth would probably contribute to growth overall for the broader Mildura Sunraysia region, for sure.

The CHAIR: Mark, not that we are competitive, but do you see anything in terms of trunk infrastructure from the New South Wales government that you would like to see on your side of the river?

Mark JENKINS: Not that I can say off the top of my head. I think that drainage is our biggest issue, and it is probably standalone solely our issue locally. But obviously drainage is affected by proximity to the outfall, so in their case they would probably have a few advantages over us in terms of being in closer proximity to the Murray River, where the outfall would be. I think as Mildura has grown, the outfall options have become more distant obviously and increased the cost, so as we grow with obviously a much, much, larger scale of growth in Mildura, that cost grows. I think in our current growth areas, particularly in the east, where we are heading out, we cannot really grow; we grow one way in Mildura really, and that is probably heading east – south is bound by the airport overlay. It has probably raised the cost of development due to the proximity purely geographically about where it is located and the lay of the land being flat and in a depression as well, so it is challenging here because of that cost. Without knowing the details, they probably have a lower cost in that space than what we would.

Martin CAMERON: Mark, just one quick one for me: down in the Latrobe Valley, where I am from, we are seeing more and more builds of rooming houses. Rooming houses have their place to help us out with our housing crisis, but have you seen come through the council the want for nine, 10 bedrooms in one house, whether they be new builds or people that are not renovating their houses but turning them into these rooming houses, causing issues up there?

Mark JENKINS: To be honest, it is not my area of expertise here at the council. I have probably heard more of the negative parts of that discussion, where people are trying to not abide by the rules and there has been enforcement, for example, but I probably need to take that on notice if you want information on Mildura, because I could certainly find out. From my understanding and experience there have been attempts made to increase the use of particularly existing homes for that purpose, but most of my experience has been just hearing anecdotally about enforcement around noncompliance and that issue. We can find out, but it is not something I have heard a lot about. I certainly think there are a lot of issues in Mildura when that does not work well. You will hear a lot about that from the community when they are in close proximity to other residential housing and they are causing a few issues – that certainly does come up as an issue in our council.

Martin CAMERON: Thank you.

Wayne FARNHAM: I will finish off. Mark, earlier you mentioned that you would like to have a conversation with developers to contribute to social housing. Can you explain to me what that would look like and how that would be formulated?

Mark JENKINS: I think what we would like to do and one of the ideas in the social and affordable housing taskforce is to engage more with developers around this topic, so we always felt that that was something that was going to be explored. I am not saying there is going to be some magic solution there, but in some discussions we have had I have detected some interest from some developers who have a bit of a feeling of social responsibility and are wondering what they can do and how they can contribute. I do not think in our case this discussion has been held greatly over time; we think this would be worthwhile – and then providing some examples across the state and outside of Victoria where people have worked successfully with developers to create options for various housing types that include social housing. It has been done elsewhere, and we thought it would be good to bring it to Mildura just as a bit of a showcase of what is possible, how they could contribute and what they could do, because I often think they are not aware of these things and what is possible. It does not need to be some unneeded thing; it could be something they could provide that just has more diversity or different densities or different types of housing, format-wise, that could actually reduce the issue. Having spoken to a couple just in conversation about it I felt there was definitely an opportunity, but we have been trying to get together a bit of a forum locally to get that happening. That is something that we are aiming only do this year; that is one of our goals for the year really, isn't it, Charmaine?

Charmaine CALIS: Yes, absolutely. It certainly seems like there is an active interest from developers in being able to help, for them to look at how they can help contribute to the supply of affordable housing, so I think that is certainly something that is worth exploring. I think bringing the government along in that conversation with developers, so they can really understand what some of the drivers are that would support developers to be able to come into this space a bit more, would be a really important part of that as well.

Wayne FARNHAM: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Well, we are right on time at 9:45 am. Thank you very, very much. We seemed to traverse many, many important topics. Can I just say thank you for the great work that you are doing up in Mildura and across the Mallee, because obviously there are many challenges.

If there is anything further that you would like to provide, any additional information or responses to any questions taken on notice, please speak to our secretariat. Thanks so much. We will make sure we get you a copy of the report when it is tabled in the Parliament.

Witnesses withdrew.