

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL COMMITTEE INQUIRY SUBMISSION

As a fervent lover of Melbourne's domestic architecture, with its infinite variety, charm and eccentricity, I am grateful for the opportunity to comment on our inherited 'heritage' capital. Heritage homes are usually in the wealthier suburbs, but the sight of them and their gardens belongs to us all. I look at a 'grand home' as something I too have a share in, just as I delight in the humbler abodes in my own area. It is the individualism that I see while walking in any of our older suburbs, or looking at them from a tram. The 'fabric' of our suburbs belongs to us all, and whether classified as 'heritage' or not, our domestic architecture is our **collective heritage**. And as houses fall to the bulldozer in any suburb, I feel sadness and outrage. I wonder if we shouldn't just put the bulldozer on our flag.

No government body seems to be looking at the sheer wastefulness of mountains of bricks and plaster - not to mention trees and gardens all in the same skip - going to landfill, only to be replaced by ugly concrete boxes surrounded by a narrow strip of cement paving. So often, houses could be re-modelled, extending outwards or upwards, to include a second 'home', with as a third, a 'tiny' house tucked into the garden. I could do it easily on my modest block, without losing a tree. Banks and councils alike find this hard to accept.

It is particularly galling that any part of our collective heritage is open slather for the foreign investor. I cannot understand why we debase ourselves by giving financial incentives to foreign nationals to demolish our houses, or how Australia betters itself by subsidizing this process.

There is so much I could say, but in particular I'd like to plead the case for beautiful and interesting surroundings being good for our mental health. We demolish charm and individuality, trees and gardens, at our peril. I don't know anyone whose spirits soar when they look upon yet another concrete block (thanks, Romans) or a tiny 'garden' of pebbles from some degraded overseas river. That is why we'd rather have a walk in a park (if you can get one) than a new estate.

What I have tried to plead for is that our built environment should be seen in its entirety as our collective heritage. Underlying the classification of certain buildings to be preserved at all costs, I would like to see the rules altered so that every building has heritage significance, using less strict criteria for demolition or renovation, but seen as a significant tile in the overall mosaic.

Finally, here are some specific recommendations which I'd like to offer:

1. Plans for new buildings should be assessed by council experts for environmental impacts, eg use of materials (a dark roof? no!), proportion of non-paved outdoor space to paved and built area, etc.
2. When councils set strict rules for size & height of buildings, this should be respected by VCAT.
3. Plans for demolition should be scrutinized by council experts, in particular for loss of trees. The government should set standards for sorting demolition materials, & for recycling what is possible. Even concrete can be recycled. Money spent on these processes is well-spent in the long run.
4. You must have your planning permit finalized before you demolish a building.
5. Developers cannot make political donations.
6. Residents to have easy access to all new plans, and encouraged to comment. Consultation processes for big projects, as they are, treat residents with contempt. After all, it is the residents who have to live with these new buildings. VCAT'S leanings towards developers and landlords are notorious. Maybe it's run its course.
7. The function of inspections to be returned to councils, with random checks from an expert state-wide panel.
8. People from overseas not be allowed to 'buy' their citizenship with promises to bulldoze our houses.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

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