

Inquiry into the protections within the Victorian Planning Framework

Mr Colin Gridley

Organisation Name:
Your position or role:

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

I welcome and greatly support the nature and timing of this inquiry. I'd like to address a number of areas in the Terms of Reference.

(2) environmental sustainability and vegetation protection -

>I refer you to the Whitehorse Council's Urban Forest Strategy (attached). This, as is the case with many other Councils, is a terrific document to balance development and the environment. I commend it for your reference when considering this point. Tree canopy is so precious for shade to reduce our alarming climate warming, sequester CO2, mental health benefits, etc etc as set out in the document. Whitehorse for example in 2018 had a canopy cover at 18% (refer "Declining Canopy Cover" on page 7 of the document. I believe this has significantly reduced since then because of natural causes (e.g. storm damage), but most alarmingly because of tree removal by residents and developers.

>Appropriate landscape replacement is not mandated or controlled and is thus causing long term and possibly permanent damage to our suburban environment.

(3)(b) protecting Green Wedges and the urban growth boundary -

>My concern here is that the urban sprawl is heading into the wrong areas and creating permanent damage to our environment. I am all for development into ex-farmland on the edges of the urbanised areas BUT when development eats into established green wedges on the periphery, and especially those areas that are already greened within the suburbs, I question the long term thinking of our planners. >I reside in the Blackburn area and much of Whitehorse is covered by "Significant Landscape Overlays". There is a constant battle against developers and residents wanting to remove single or multiple canopy trees and middle storey vegetation. COUNCIL'S EFFORTS TO PROTECT THESE AREAS AGAINST INAPPROPRIATE TREE REMOVAL NEED LEGISLATED GOVERNMENT SUPPORT. It can be seen through development, storms and bushfires that our tree numbers are quickly dwindling at a time in history where it is understood and accepted that we ought to be protecting what we have and planting more. Governments at all levels need to understand and protect our precious biolinks, e.g. the green corridor that leads from Gardiners Creek through to Blackburn Lake Sanctuary and onto Mullum Mullum Creek.

>These biolinks need protection via their water tables and the density of surrounding canopy trees. In high winds trees sway as one to protect each other. By constantly allowing holes on the canopy cover we are exposing trees and losing precious canopy.

(3)(c) community concerns about VCAT appeal processes -

>Having attended, and presented, at VCAT hearings I am concerned about 2 issues here. Firstly, the percentage of planning permit applicants that win their cases for each presiding VCAT member. I am concerned as to the independence and bias of certain members towards developers in particular.

>Secondly, I would like to see the presiding members attend and personally inspect every subject site so they can understand the issues first hand, rather than just relying on the evidence and arguments presented in the VCAT rooms or via zoom links. I believe this would assist in understanding the character of the area and specific issues.

(4)(g) penalties for illegal demolitions and tree removals -

>This is an areas that needs immediate review and rectification. It is far too easy for developers to demolish

existing premises and denude vegetation including precious canopy trees. The fines are not of adequate amount or severity to be a deterrent, especially at present with property prices so high. Developers are simply costing them into the project costs.

>I'd also like to bring to your attention the human impact of rules not being clear or strong enough to support the rules and spirit of Government and Council planning policies. Here in Whitehorse, Council tries to support and uphold their Significant Landscape Overlays (SLO) because there has been an appreciation of the precious bushland character of the area. This is now under constant threat with encroaching development of multiple dwellings per lot and high density living especially around major roads. Those residents who are "keeping an eye and ear" out for inappropriate development are getting frustrated and jaded by the inability of Council to enforce their rules and being told that the Government has not supported their SLO rules sufficiently. Subsequently, residents become disillusioned upon seeing wanton destruction of property in the name of profit with multiple properties without adequate landscape replanting.

>This also sadly turns neighbours against neighbours and the sense of shared space within Community is irreparably damaged. I really feel for those volunteers in local environmental groups (e.g. community nurseries, "friends of" groups facilitating working bees at nature reserves and suburban sanctuaries, etc). Without support of Government at all levels volunteering numbers for these community groups will dwindle and continue to be served by those few aging retirees running out of energy and patience.

>Here's an example - Just last night at a property near us, chain saws began buzzing without a Council approved permit while everyone was watching Ash Barty's tennis final at 7pm on a Saturday night. A Council enforcement finally attended late Saturday night to shut them down. This is sadly becoming a cat and mouse game for the developers trying to skirt rules in the name of profit and is very taxing on residents who now have to be constantly vigilant to report these incidences.

>Council and Government should be sending a strong clear message to potential transgressors and not abrogating their responsibilities to the residents.

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1: [61f618b89a889-Whitehorse CC-urban-forest-strategy Jan 2022.pdf](#)

File2:

File3:

Signature:

Colin Gridley