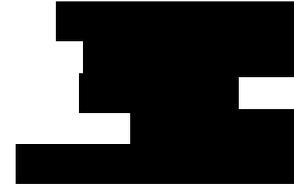


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My experience with getting access to information for the Abbotsford Street Public Housing Renewal – a lesson in being ignored and consultation barriers

To whom it may concern,

I am concerned about the validity of the consultation process for the Abbotsford Housing Renewal Project. My experience has been exasperatingly poor. My concern is that the consultation timeline is being progressed despite obvious deficiencies. These deficiencies, be they grounded in incompetence or deliberate obfuscation, affects the legitimacy of the process. Below is an account of my experience.

On the 19th of May I received a letter mentioning the housing renewal (HHSD/17/35748). I knew I could not attend the (only) two sessions so I followed the instruction in the letter and sent an email requesting more information. I did not receive a reply.

On the 3rd of June I sent a follow up email requesting a response and more information. By now I had potentially missed my opportunity to provide feedback and I was very frustrated and mentioned that if I did not receive a reply I would contact the minister. By the 9th of June I received a reply stating that more information would “shortly” be available. No time frame was given. I checked the link supplied to me with reasonable frequency but could **not** access more information, sketch plans, or, indeed, anything of consequence. I could still not access plans or documentation by the 8th of July. This does not reflect “shortly” in my opinion.

On the 8th of July I again emailed because it was unfair and unreasonable that I could access no information whatsoever. I requested assistance in locating the information or alternatively have the information be sent to me in a pdf. Once again I did not receive a reply.

This is disappointing and unreasonable. I was then out of the country for 4 weeks and unable to monitor developments.

On the 17th of August I received a letter in the mail (ADD/17/16062). On this date I re-checked the website was finally able to access sketch a plan on the website¹. I was able to view the sketch plans in pdf form². These plans appear to be dated the 3rd of August 2017. This did not give me adequate time to provide feedback. Nonetheless, I prepared feedback in a word document for the sessions that was scheduled to be on Friday the 25th of August and then proceeded to attempt to complete

¹ <http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/north-melbourne-renewal>

² North_Melbourne_renewal_sketch_plans_2017_08_03%20(1).pdf

the online survey through the link provided on the website³. The link supplied was for a closed survey.

It is important to note that unbeknownst to me the plans I was looking at² were already obsolete and I was wasting my time.

On the 23rd of August, **two days** from the scheduled session, I had lost my letter and wanted to confirm the time and location. I first checked the webpage¹ and observed that the webpage **still** claimed that the August session had yet to be confirmed and **no dates** were listed. I called 13 11 72 and asked to speak to someone regarding the North Melbourne Housing renewal project. A representative told me that the consultation sessions had yet to be scheduled and they may be occurring in September.

I was given this false information two days before the event. How many other people were misled? This is incredibly disturbing.

I was not satisfied with the response because I recalled the letter listed a session time. I called again and on this occasion asked to speak to the manager of the project. I believe I spoke to someone, whose name was [REDACTED]. I did not catch a surname. I was told that the meeting was indeed on the 25th of August. I told [REDACTED] that staff were disseminating false information and that the website did not reflect that information sessions had been scheduled. [REDACTED] agreed to check the status of the website.

The website still did not reflect accurate information at COB on the 23rd of August.

On the 24th of August I received a letter from [REDACTED] (no letter identification) informing me that there had been a change to the plans. I went to the website¹ that I had been consistently checking over the past three months. The session time had, indeed, been updated, but the plans appeared to be unchanged. The pdf was unchanged².

I attended the session on the 25th of August 2017 at 17:30 at the North Melbourne library. The session was in an inadequate venue for the numbers and the nature of the presentation. The session was often disturbed by disgruntled members of the community, who, by all accounts, were having equal difficulty obtaining timely, up-to-date, and relevant information. There were many new plans available for view on the walls. Plans I have never seen! I was told that these plans had been available for two weeks! I was incredulous. I returned home and went straight to the website¹. The plans were unchanged! I could not understand what was going on?

I re-read all the documentation that had been sent to me and discovered the issue. I have identified a huge problem that NEEDS to be addressed. There are TWO websites! And they DO NOT link!

<http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/north-melbourne-renewal>

and

<https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/shrp>, which re-directs to
<https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/policy-and-strategy/housing-strategy/social-housing-renewal-program>

³ <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NorthMelbournerenewal>

I was directed to the former in the letter ADD/17/16062 from [REDACTED] and the later in the letter, from [REDACTED] dated 23 August 2017 (arrived on the 24th). As an aside, the contact number on this letter (131 186) states that the number is disconnected. This is yet another barrier to seeking clarification from the department.

It is **not reasonable** to expect a member of the community to have known about the second repository of information when they have been directed to another. There are also to email addresses! (sh.renewal@delwp.vic.gov.au).

The consultation process has been incredibly flawed and that makes people feel frustrated and powerless. This places the planning team in opposition to the community instead of working with it.

I was told that the plans are not fixed. However, the plans I was presented with on the 25th of August are very far progressed and I am only now in a position to comment due to the incredibly woeful process that has been followed.

You must:

1. Remove the obsolete website as soon as possible.
2. Acknowledge that the consultation process has been flawed
3. Cease the flawed and illegitimate process
4. Commence a new process and do it right
 - a. Notify all residents – not just some
 - b. Reply to email enquiries – do not ignore them
 - c. Keep your website up to date
 - d. Keep your call staff up to date
 - e. Do not disseminate false information

This is the only way to progress with legitimate consultation with the community.

Furthermore, I have since been made aware that there is a Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into these matters and I will be raising my concerns about the consultation process with this enquiry.

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/lpic/inquiry/923>

Kind regards,

Emily Frain