

Nadia Ford
**Parliament of Victoria****Re: Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program**

To the Secretary,

The Andrews' government proposals for public housing are short-sighted and appear to be deliberately fast-tracked, not to address the current housing crisis (which has been ongoing for many years), but ensure a short-term profiteering in time for the 2018 election cycle. They are cynical in their attempts at preventing public housing tenants, local Councils and affected neighbourhoods (the key stakeholders for the projects) from having inputs to what will be a once in a generation project, and consequently miss opportunities for well-thought out plans reflective of community needs. In short, they will not deliver appropriate, lasting or sustainable outcomes.

I note the following:

1. Melbourne is in the middle of a housing crisis. Affordability is decreasing and homelessness is growing.
2. Successive State governments have failed to provide suitable funds and schemes to maintain and renew public housing stock in an appropriate manner. Several damning reports have been published: Sustaining Our Assets Policy 2000, Sustaining our Housing Assets, 2004, Asset Management Accountability Framework, (Dept of Treasury & Finance, 2016) and Auditor Generals reports in 2012 & 2017. These documents have made multiple and specific warnings about the need to manage State assets according to a whole-of- lifecycle approach that builds renewal, replacement and/or disposal into asset management and budgeting.
3. State government has not conducted nor released a 'base-case' assessment, upon which any redevelopment and renewal strategy should be based.
4. No assessments of alternative funding models for public housing renewal have been undertaken. The principles of good governance and project management have been ignored.
5. No information or specific commitments have been made as to how monies received from developers will be utilised.
6. No strategies have been provided as to how developers will ensure a 'salt and pepper' mix of residents. Experience from other Melbourne estates shows that developers have favoured segregation.
7. State government has not learned the lesson of failure of similar schemes in places such as the UK, where the current Conservative government has been forced to raise 9 Billion GBP to once again undertake state sponsored construction of social housing to meet demand, 30 years after it erroneously began its program of sell-offs.

8. In their short-sightedness, proposals represent a major cost to tax payers, whereby future governments will be forced to buy back expensive inner-city sites to once again develop public housing.
9. 10% increase in public housing is a paltry dent in the 35,000 plus wait list and translates as a handful of additional units in each estate.
10. The change from 3 bedrooms to 1 and 2 bedroom units represents a real-term reduction in number of bedrooms and thus people that can be accommodated. For example, around a 30% reduction in numbers of potential residents at the New Street estate in Brighton.
11. The change from 3 bedroom to predominantly 1 and 2 bedroom units favoured by developers unfairly disadvantages families from returning to estates such as New Street, Brighton, which are ideally located for families being close to schools parks and kindergartens.
12. A 1 bedroom unit cannot accommodate visitors and/or carers for elderly estate residents and will breach their basic human rights.
13. The process of public housing renewal at the 9 initial estates has been flawed.
 - a. There have been inappropriate and rushed site assessments, where DHHS consultants have not picked up obvious issues such as significant flood risks.
 - b. There has been minimal and inappropriate consultation with residents, local councils and neighbouring communities. Despite large numbers of estate residents with English as a second language, DHHS undertook consultations with no interpreters at the New Street, Brighton estate.
 - c. Submitted consultants' documents and site assessments are full of errors, omissions and misleading statements.
 - d. A cookie-cutter approach to rezoning for maximum profit has been adopted regardless of appropriateness to site location and conditions. I.e. from General Residential Zones to Multi-Use Zones in all locations.
 - e. Proposed site densities and heights will severely impact neighbouring residents of many estates through issues such as over-looking, over-shadowing, traffic, parking, reduction in safety, loss of open space and mature vegetation, site permeability and flooding, to name but a few. These impacts have been disregarded by State government.
 - f. Requirements on developers to provide good quality, sustainable outcomes have been minimised, with a 'race to the bottom' approach reflected in the proposed lax planning documents.

Therefore, I submit that:

1. All housing rebuilt be Public Housing, owned and managed by the Government, not Community Housing. Community Housing will not ensure that residents can return. Community housing cannot guarantee affordability.
2. All land should be reserved for Public Housing, none should be sold off for private housing.

3. Government should find additional sites to build more Public Housing, so that current Public Housing is not be demolished if it is livable or can be refurbished
4. Refurbishment and demolition should be gradual, as it has been in the recent past, wherever possible, to minimize disruption to tenants
5. That the Andrews Government plan will result in a loss of Public Housing/Social Housing, as measured by number of bedrooms rebuilt - which is more relevant than the number of units rebuilt. It is misleading to refer to an increase of 10% in units. In the case of Brighton New Street estate, for example, there will be an almost 30% reduction in bedrooms, even though there will be 10% more units.
6. Estates should be rebuilt with the at least same number of bedrooms per unit as currently exist, to ensure that residents can return.
7. Tenants, local Councils and neighbouring residents should be involved implicitly in the planning of individual estates.
8. Proposed schemes to better reflect existing neighbourhood character and planning scheme requirements to ensure they have a 'sense of place' and provide good neighbour outcomes.
9. Third party rights of appeal to be retained for affected communities.
10. All estates should be developed by a re-constituted Government construction and design department, not by the private sector.
11. Alternative funding models, such as collaboration with Superfunds and housing groups should be sought to retain public housing in public hands.

I'm a neighbour of the New Street Housing Estate, Brighton. I have attached my submission to the Standing Advisory Committee of Planning Panels Victoria for the New Street Estate, by way of demonstrating how poorly this project and program have been conceived and are being implemented.

I look forward to the outcomes of the Inquiry's findings.

Yours sincerely,

Nadia Ford