



**Submission from the Committee of Management of the
North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House to the
Legal and Social Issues Committee
Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program**

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House ('Railway House') is a community facility located next to a public housing estate in Princes Hill / North Carlton. Many of the participants in its various programs and activities are residents of that estate.

We the Committee of Management of Railway House strongly support efforts to safeguard secure and affordable housing in Victoria now and into the future.

We oppose current State Government plans to demolish public housing estates across the city of Melbourne and appeal to the Committee to look closely at the consequences, both practical and social, of this decision.

We oppose the current renewal program for the following reasons:

- **Adequacy**

The redevelopment will not create enough housing. NERA Economic Consulting and Sensing Value consultants reported to 3 of the affected councils, concluding that the scheme would result in a shortfall of nearly 1,100 dwellings by 2022. (The Age, Monday 30/10/2107)

- **Effect on current public housing tenants**

The program of renewal is too large, and should be gradually staged. There is an acute lack of housing to offer to large numbers of people whose current housing will be demolished, causing some to be relocated far from their current home. They face instability, uncertainty and lack of support. Residents' usual networks, both within their estate and their neighbourhoods, will be lost. Given that there are many seriously ill people living in public housing, the impact of dislocation cannot be underestimated. As one resident at Princes Hill estate commented, having read about an elderly person who died alone in his home without anyone aware his absence, *'This would never happen to any of us, would it? We all look after each other here.'*

- **Existing neighbourhood character**

Our local estate and many others have been around for a long time – they are well embedded in their local neighbourhoods, and this is one of the wonderful social features of Australian society. More will be lost than we can imagine if this social connection, linking

diverse socioeconomic groups across communities, is broken. We believe some community soul will be lost along the way.

- **Genuine community consultation with affected residents**

Public housing tenants on estates all over Melbourne have not been given clear and unequivocal information about where they will be relocated, how they will pay for it, and what standard of accommodation it might be. Who can return? There is a lot of fear and genuine distress out there because of the approach being taken with vulnerable people treated en masse.

- **Other Concerns**

The use of the term *community housing* is somewhat misleading. People on the Housing estate in Prince Hill have raised concerns that this term is being used as though it is the same as *public housing*. Rather, people in community housing receive commonwealth rental assistance, compared to public housing tenants who pay out 25% of their income. The latter is a flexible arrangement more suited to those with unstable employment caused by a multitude of reasons. Community housing can never replace public housing. It also tends to segregate public housing communities – those with lesser needs are more likely to get into Community Housing as they have better capacity to pay rent; those in Public Housing will increasingly come to represent the extreme end of need. This is not a good trend. In reality, a broader mix of people in public housing is less intense, and simply works better for the people on the estate as well as for the wider community.

Past generations put aside this land and built this housing – it was given priority although we were not such a wealthy country at that time. Are we really saying that today we no longer care enough to make this our priority? We are writing to demonstrate that many communities do care about what happens to vulnerable people in the Housing estates. Once the land has gone, the new places will need renewal in years to come, but there will be no land to trade off then – we have simply created a future problem.

We would be happy to expand further on our submission at a Committee hearing if required.

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