


1 November 2017

The Secretary
Legal and Social Issues Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
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Dear Secretary

Submission to the Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program

As a resident who has followed the disappointing process regarding redevelopment of the Markham Avenue site in Ashburton, I have serious concerns about the Public Housing Renewal Program in its present form.

I believe that the Victorian Government is in danger of missing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to invest in improving the future of its most vulnerable citizens and to substantially (not minimally) reduce the waiting list for public housing.

Inadequate increase in public housing on the sites

To use an irreplaceable public asset (well-located land) primarily for private housing and for developers' profits, rather than to seriously address Victoria's shortage of public housing, is short-sighted and inappropriate. The projected increase of 10% over the life of the program is inadequate (and in places like Ashburton is dwarfed by the increase in private housing, which will be unaffordable for people on the public waiting list).

Even worse, the apparent increase in housing *units* does not always represent housing for more people, since the new units typically contain fewer *bedrooms* (as in Ashburton and Carlton, for example). However this discrepancy is rarely mentioned in the project documentation. The number of bedrooms in new public housing compared with existing public housing at each location should be clearly signalled in all material for public comment.

Uncertain match between proposed public housing stock and composition of households on public housing waiting list

Whether the proposed new housing stock will cater (in appropriate proportions) for the different types of existing public tenants and households on the waiting list is unclear. In the case of Markham Avenue, I am unaware of any information being provided on that issue.

Public land allocated to private housing

In my view, no public land should be allocated to private housing. However if any private housing is to be included, all plans should be required to stipulate equitable and convenient access for public tenants to all

common areas (open space, shade trees, gardens, play space, parking spaces, garbage and recycling facilities, etc).

Spokespeople at the Ashburton 'pop-up' meeting were unable to answer questions about these issues.

Ideal locations for employment and social opportunity

Many of the public housing sites under review are ideally located to provide access to employment and training opportunities for people who can ill afford high transport costs from outer suburbs.

In the case of the Markham Avenue estate, the site is within walking distance of shops, two train lines, two bus routes, a primary school and services for early childhood and senior citizens.

The Public Housing Renewal Program should be designed to maximise, not reduce, these opportunities for public tenants.

A wealthy community such as Boroondara should be encouraged to support its fair share of social housing, rather than have it replaced by inappropriate, profit-making private development.

Unsatisfactory community consultation

While there has been enthusiastic involvement by residents, the official process of community consultation in Ashburton has been far from satisfactory. In particular, the 'pop-up' meeting held at Ashburton library proved to be an utterly inefficient method of sharing knowledge or concerns, because the same question had to be asked/answered multiple times as people milled around the room to different (unlabelled) stalls.

Planning processes

These redevelopment projects (and especially any private development within them) should not be removed from the operation of normal planning controls for comparable sites.

Flawed principle of 'cost-neutral' planning

The principle that the redevelopment of public housing should be 'cost-neutral', as we have been told for the Markham Avenue estate, is fundamentally flawed. Required public assets should not be sold to cover the cost of important infrastructure. Fortunately that principle is not generally applied to schools and hospitals – nor should it be applied to the Public Housing Renewal Program.

Victorians deserve a visionary, inclusive approach to public housing in particular and to affordable housing in general.

I congratulate the Committee on the terms of reference which draw attention to many of the key features of the program that deserve to be scrutinised

Thank you for the opportunity to comment

Yours sincerely

(signed)

Deborah Patterson