

From: Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program [REDACTED]
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To: phrp
Subject: New Submission to Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program

Mr Philip Salom

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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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Objection to the Abbottsford Public Housing plan/Submission to the Senate Inquiry

Government possession of public land is a profound means of maintaining social and economic continuity between the past and the future. This should be a given. Any sitting government is no more (and no less) than the caretaker of such land on behalf of the community. It is responsible for protecting such land and associated social housing as a crucial social – and not financial - asset. Once public land is sold to private developers, all social advantage, duty-of-care and controls are lost. Most emphatically, public land does not belong to any Government for its own political use and/or expediency. If government sells land off it has betrayed the trust the community has given it. It is a betrayal of the public contract. And it should be rejected.

In all cities, in many countries, the need for public housing has been increasing rapidly. Melbourne is projected to rise above Sydney in population within 20 years or so and in planning terms this is a very brief time-span. So what sane reason can there be to actually reduce the public land allocation for social housing in the face of an increasing demand for it, now and into the future. This is the time to most urgently keep public land. Therefore the Abbottsford Street Estate should be kept, the unit allocation increased, and thereafter maintained as it currently is, 100% public housing.

This is something almost all citizens agree with. I have lived in several cities and have never met anyone who recommends giving away public (let's say state- or even people-owned) land to developers. So the Libs did this in Sydney and relaxed building and public requirement rules elsewhere to allow a James Packer profit and a gambling loss which has all these public and social consequences. If that was done to advantage casino developers like James Packer ... who is the potential winner behind this Abbottsford scheme? Who is the big money for this sorry Labor cheating? As for the social disadvantage – I've said it above.

Add to that, the extra damage done to low-paid workers who hold menial jobs in the CBD and surrounds when they are forced through private housing prices to live on the outskirts of cities and commute, every day, every night, over long distances, for long hours and at increased expense. Just for more bourgeois inner-city living. Which gets back to developers making huge profits. The scheme only advantages the wealthy. And government toadies.

One call is that Public housing developments are too expensive. This is convenient nonsense. The public

housing areas across Melbourne – and the extant housing - this Labour gov't seems determined to sell off to private developers was funded by previous governments on behalf of the people. Not wanting to pay for development is different from not being able to. There is certainly no public call for building up the profits of private land developers.

If only 30% (as 'projected') of the development is to become social housing, then this ubiquitous public/private development model looks doubly shameful – the losses as above, and boosting the business profits at the expense of the public.

If, as the economists say, interest rates for Government borrowing are at historically low levels then surely this is the most advantageous era to borrow money for such a valuable re-development. Borrow the money, invest in the buildings and do the right thing on public land for public housing. Build three-story public housing. 100% public housing. Without any involvement, ownership-gifting and profit-making for/from developers.

Why am I getting the impression that the government wants to avoid this?

BTW – If the housing scheme is turned over to developers now, what is there to prevent a later government deciding to re-possess the social housing allocation and turn it over to private occupation? All of it. There must be in any developmental contracts legal means of guaranteeing continuity of public housing i.e. preventing any such shift. Regardless, that is, of the final model adopted.

Of the plans so far – confusion. And trickery? An open grassed area is referred to, but the same area is allocated for the North Melbourne Primary School?? If the latter is the case, where are the recreation areas for the site? There aren't any. If there are, then the former idea isn't true. Isn't there other land in the North Melbourne area allocated for education? Use that, or if there isn't, don't - but do not deliberately conflate the two issues of government land gift (a bad idea) and education usage (a 'nice', 'safe' idea) in order to justify this proposed development scheme. That is sleight of hand.

The image of rearing nine-storey structures with recreation areas in the foreground of PR pics – is another con. It will be a triangle of 100% bulk building up to heights totally out of character and keeping with the immediate district. Molesworth Street, is single story dwellings with a few smaller doubles, and the existing public housing is at three levels. The immediate area is consistently low-level residential and so ... this is how the Abbotsford area should remain.

This area is currently zoned Residential. We must not allow re-zoning to Mixed Use for no other reason than to slip this bad proposal through. Be honest. I have just read the report prepared by Robyn Suzanne Pollock, Team Leader of Urban Design and Design Review, City of Melbourne which critiques this and other issues and especially the government's nine-story planning for the site and her report recommends three levels only, and this I completely agree with this. I also agree with most of the report.

Whereas the government's proposed development (and attempted fait accompli?) is intolerable as an idea, self-serving in terms of claiming increased social housing, and ultimately profiteering as a financial scheme, creating a potential loss of social housing capability and of social space and of humanity therefore, while just by the way rising up as a hulking high-level battlement without setback from Abbotsford St?

Where is the parking? Where are the playgrounds? Where are the trees? Where is the logic? Where is the honest representation?

What miserable imagination dreamt up this mess? It's irresponsible and at worst it's crooked in its fostering property developer greed at the cost of low-paid individual families. And in our name? NO.

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File1:

File2:

File3: