

# TRANSCRIPT

## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the adequacy and future directions of public housing in Victoria

Melbourne — 16 February 2010

#### Members

Mr B. Finn

Ms M. Kairouz

Mr W. Noonan

Mr J. Perera

Mrs E. J. Powell

Mr J. Scheffer

Mrs H. Shardey

Chair: Mr J. Perera

Deputy Chair: Mrs E. J. Powell

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Dr J. Bush

Research Officers: Dr T. Caulfield, Ms T. Roy

#### Witnesses

Mr B. Lipmann, chief executive officer, Wintringham, and

Ms E. Perez, general manager, housing, Wintringham Housing.

**The CHAIR** — Good afternoon and welcome. Thank you for your time in appearing before this committee which is inquiring into the adequacy and future directions of public housing. This is not a government inquiry; it is a bipartisan parliamentary inquiry. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided in the Constitution Act 1975 and further subject to the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, the Defamation Act 2005 and, where applicable, the provisions of reciprocal legislation in other states and territories. Any comments you make outside this hearing will not be afforded such privilege.

We are recording the proceeding, and you will be sent a copy of the transcript. You will be able to make minor adjustments if necessary at that stage. This is a 45-minute session. I invite you to make a verbal submission. If you could please restrict that to less than 20 minutes, it will be followed by questions from the panel. First introduce yourself with your terms of reference so that will go on record.

**Mr LIPMANN** — Thank you for inviting us and for conducting the hearing into public housing. My name is Bryan Lipmann. I am the chief executive officer of Wintringham.

**Ms PEREZ** — I am Elizabeth Perez, general manager of Wintringham Housing. Wintringham Housing is a subsidiary of Wintringham.

**Mr LIPMANN** — I intend not to take up the whole 20 minutes in a presentation. Whether that means that the session will still be 45 minutes is, I guess, up to you people. I am taking the presumption that you have read our submission. It may or may not have elicited some questions, which I am happy to answer. I guess at the expense of redundancy, that you people might already know it, I would just like to tell you a little bit about Wintringham, which I have not necessarily included in the submission. It is just to locate Wintringham in your proceedings. I would like also to acknowledge that although we did not hear all of the last presentation we were impressed by it and found a lot of similarities in the types of issues that we face. I intend to find that young woman and tell her that, because I thought there were a lot of similarities in the types of things that we were doing.

Wintringham is quite a unique organisation not only in Australia but, from my experience, around the world. It is neither a housing organisation, a homeless organisation or an aged care organisation; it is in fact all three. As such, I have not found any other organisations that relate in that way. The company's history is that I used to work in a building called Gordon House, which is not far away from the old Gordon House that was privately managed. It was closed because of fire restrictions and it was rebuilt largely through the efforts of a homeless man called Tiny Wintringham who with the assistance of the state government and got the building relocated..

That building lasted for a number of years before it was closed and pulled down and the new Exhibition Centre (known as Jeff's Shed) was constructed. I used to work at the old Gordon House, not the one here in Bourke Street but the one on the banks of the Yarra. That was a 10-storey building with 300 homeless people, men and women, in it. It was unique, from what I saw around the world, certainly the Western World, in that there were both sexes, you could stay during the day and you had small cubicles. A night shelter, for those people who are not aware of it, is usually just a very large room with beds one after another and you are kicked out first thing in the morning. The closest thing I can suggest — some people might have seen the Katrina disaster and the photographs of large basketball courts with hundreds of people being housed overnight. That is pretty well what a night shelter looks like. I can show my staff photos of the night shelters but one thing photos do not show is the smell. It is the smell of the night shelters that always lingers in your memory many years after they have closed. Into all of that horror were thrust very elderly people whom the aged care sector, for whatever reasons, had not looked after. They tended to cherry pick those residents who could afford to pay accommodation bonds.

Wintringham was established when I left the shelter to try to look after aged homeless people, and I was fortunate enough to receive the support of the government minister at the time, Peter

Staples, so we started on this long journey which has led to our present situation where we have moved from the position of having one worker to now having nearly 400 and we have about 1100 clients scattered all over Melbourne. Recently, through the opportunities that the state and federal governments have enabled, we have built housing in regional Victoria. The member for Shepparton would probably be aware that we are building something there, and we are very proud of that. And now we are contemplating an interstate move.

That is basically the background. We would like to stress that our unqualified support for public housing really comes from our experience of the lack of alternatives to public housing. Obviously we are not public housing because we are not a state body, but we are very much strong supporters of public housing, even though we are social housing developers. Recently, because of the development of housing associations with the state government, we developed a subsidiary, and I am very pleased and proud to say that Liz has come to work for Wintringham and now is the general manager of that service and will be developing all the regional housing, which some people may be aware of.

That is basically the story of Wintringham. I might ask Liz — if you do not mind?

**Ms PEREZ** — No.

**Mr LIPMANN** — It is actually interesting when someone who comes to Wintringham has not, like myself, been there for more than 20 years and who has seen the impressions of Wintringham from an outside position and then moved in. Again, I think this reinforces some of our commitment to why social housing and public housing needs what we call support. It cannot operate without it, and clearly that was what this woman before us was saying.

**Ms PEREZ** — I am fairly new to Wintringham Housing, so I suppose I still have some level of objectivity, but I have a lifetime of working in the community housing sector through different types of models. What I have seen that makes Wintringham work is a range of things, including the housing. One of the most important things is the support and the care that is given to the residents. What I have seen that is successful at Wintringham and the model that is provided at Wintringham basically has a number of essential planks. One of them is developing a relationship with the client. It is not a matter of just getting the first name off a list and placing that person into the first vacancy. Often in Wintringham a relationship is developed with that resident before any housing is offered. An assessment is made and there is also then a linkage and an alignment with the care that that resident may need. That is critical; that is what Wintringham does extraordinarily well: it is able to make assessments and offer a range of care services not only that are appropriate but also that the resident accepts, and that is often challenged. There may be some difficulty in getting the resident to accept the care but that is critical to their going into the housing and maintaining long-term tenure.

The other thing about Wintringham and Wintringham Housing, because of their involvement and specialist knowledge in working with the elderly, the aged and the frail, is that the housing that they provide is specifically designed and tailored to meet the needs of the elderly. At the moment we have an extensive development program, and what Wintringham Housing is doing in Shepparton and other areas is pay great attention to detail at the design stage so the housing is completely designed for the elderly and the frail. We have one-bedroom units, and they are rare in the public housing portfolio. They are also very difficult to access in the private market. We are able to provide a specialist service and basically increase access to social housing which might otherwise be denied through either public housing or the private rental market. We have specifically designed bathrooms. The houses are all wheelchair accessible — not only the houses but the sites are wheelchair accessible. The paths are able to accommodate wheelchairs and scooters. We provide charge points for scooters and safe areas where they can be stored. The bathrooms are designed so that carers can go in and work with a client. All of that has in mind keeping the resident in the home and independent for as long as possible. There is great attention to detail even at that design level.

**Mr LIPMANN** — I just want to stress that it is important to recognise that Wintringham is a single-focus company, only working with the elderly. So when we talk about support and when Liz talks about support, we are actually talking about brokering federally funded, principally, support through either aged-care packages or through residential aged-care facilities. We have a motto at Wintringham which is ‘A home until stumps’. We recently had the Prime Minister out and I was able to tell him — it is quite an extraordinary statement really and one that we hold dear — that we actually have a permanent solution to homelessness. From the moment that one of our outreach workers finds an aged homeless man or woman the chances are that they will never go back to the streets again. We have around 1100 people a night, and I would think that over the 20 years I could count on one hand those people who have gone back to the streets. It is a stunning achievement, and I am not saying that it is unique to Wintringham — I would say there are probably some other cohorts who could do that — but I can say that about Wintringham at least.

This is in relationship to the previous speaker — massive costs savings are made if a person can be found and services delivered to them before they get into a critical position. It is enormously valuable to the community. There was a research study going on in America — it really was not research; it was more a journal article, but it was a very lengthy one in the *New York Times* called ‘Million-Dollar Murray’. It was about a homeless man who consumed a million dollars worth of services over a very short period of time through admittances to public hospital psych wards and a whole range of other services, all of which could have been overcome if he had been given housing and the appropriate support. Support services can at first look like an overindulgence towards a disadvantaged person in relation to the rest of the community, actually ends up saving the community a vast quantity of money down the track, apart from just the humanity of providing the services.

What Wintringham does is broker a whole of government approach. We can broker services, not so much with the government of Victoria but certainly with Victoria and the commonwealth — so we will often use money that is in part from Victoria and use commonwealth aged-care services to fund the aged-care services.

I do not know what more we really want to say. We will have to talk about any of the other issues contained in the report. We do feel very much that we create a sense of community in our facilities. That means that we must be able to have some control over who comes into our facilities. It is important to recognise that that is not cherry picking. We take the hardest people any organisation takes from the aged homeless but we must have an ability to match people to a house and, as I put in my report, in the memorable words of one of my managers, ‘We can take 11 Napoleons but we cannot take them all at once’, or something to that effect; I have forgotten the exact words he used. It is simply that we have to have some flexibility. We exceed any requirements that any government has ever put on us in terms of the numbers of people from the public housing waiting lists. We would aspire to, and generally achieve, 100 per cent, unlike other housing associations.

The only other issue that I want to highlight before I take your questions is leverage. This is a very contentious issue which may not be what you want to talk about it, but I want to raise it again. While I have watered down my views — I initially felt it was a flawed policy — I would now perhaps say that it is a policy that needs to be mixed with a willingness to accept that some organisations cannot offer leverage. I set up Wintringham to look after the frailest of people who have no money and no resources. If my organisation has to borrow a lot of money to provide leverage for a new service, it is essentially the same as if any of you people went out and bought yourself a \$2 million house. The banks would say, ‘How are you going to service that debt’?. You would have to say, ‘I am going to quit Parliament and get a better paying job’. Then you would be able to service that debt. If I have to have a debt, I cannot service that debt from my clients who are impoverished. I have to move slightly up the scale and move more into affordable housing. I have no problem with affordable housing but it is not in the space that Wintringham wants to be. Wintringham wants to be in a much lower space than that — people who are actually in crisis and need support. In our view the policies of leverage have to be mitigated in some way to recognise

that housing associations that are required to provide leverage will struggle to address the needs of the poorest.

That is a lot shorter than 20 minutes but I am happy to stay here with Liz and answer questions if you have any.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much. Your submission notes that clients are reluctant to enter transitional housing. Why is this? Also, in your system do you deal with transitional housing?

**Mr LIPMANN** — I would not want to say that all our clients are reluctant to go into public housing, I just want to say that some might be. That is because some public housing estates are pretty violent, and you also have to recognise that our guys are the frailest they are going to be in their life. Really, you have to put yourselves in the position of people like your grandparents, who are frail without any services, often very sick, living near some potentially violent people who are maybe doing drugs, maybe not, maybe with a psych illness or whatever.

Some of the stories are pretty harrowing. I visited a fellow recently who had been living in a urinal. That was because he had a defibrillator and the only way he could work a defibrillator as a homeless man was to get a power point and the only power point that was available was in a Carlton urinal where he slept so he could plug in his defibrillator. That is an appalling story for an old man. Our outreach workers found him and provided him with a community aged-care package and we got him placed in public housing, so we were all pretty pleased with ourselves thinking that that might be the solution to his problems. When I went to visit him with the worker he was distraught, exhausted and fearful. The reason was that on the same floor there was one person in particular, but perhaps others as well, who had a severe psych illness and rampaged all night long, bashing on doors, screaming and yelling, threatening a bloody crime. Whether he would have done it or not is not the point. This old man was terrified and all he could think about was going back to the refuge of the urinal. If he had a choice of where to live, I would say that public housing would be the very bottom of his choices.

That is not to say that public housing is not fine and good, but there are elements of people who will not go there because of their experience of where it is violent. Some public housing is not violent at all, but some is. The other aspect of that is that some people have bad debts and they are fearful they will be discovered.

**Ms PEREZ** — There is also sometimes a history of negative experiences with public housing, and there can also be quite onerous requirements with respect to filling in forms and paperwork and all of the rest of it that can also be resisted. They would be the main reasons for some reluctance to access public housing.

**Mr FINN** — That is a horrendous story, I have to say. Thank you for bringing home to us the severity of some of the problems you are facing. There is something that has worried me for probably the last 30 years — and I ask you to get your binoculars out at this point and have a look another 20 or 30 years down the track to where we are going to have an enormous number of ageing people. We see the greying of Australia now; it is obviously going to become more prevalent over the next 10, 15 or 20 years. Given the problems we face now in the areas you are talking about, if we do not act now, what are we going to be facing in 20 years time, and what should we do now to prevent that?

**Mr LIPMANN** — There are massive problems that face us, particularly in the aged-care industry, which is of course commonwealth funded. The very worrying thing for me is that I have noticed that in any impoverished group you are going to create a group of people who are marginalised and a percentage of those marginalised people become homeless. Therefore it follows that if that marginalised group becomes larger, there are probably going to be more homeless people. What we are already experiencing, and we are not alone in this, are large numbers of people — through the global financial crisis for a start — defaulting on loans and

presenting for the first time in their lives to welfare agencies. These are people who are reasonably able to cope independently but through financial difficulties have found themselves on the verge of homelessness or are homeless, and this population is increasing. There is also, apart from the global financial crisis which we were noticing before that, the increasing numbers of elderly people who are downsizing their housing. I live in an inner urban area. I have lived there for 30 years and increasingly the population there is changing. People are selling up their bigger houses out in the suburbs as the kids leave and coming into the city. That is putting downward pressure on the people who used to live there and they are moving to a different client group and continuing this cascading down so that eventually you are getting to the stage where you have people on very low incomes who are retired competing now with people who are in a far different socioeconomic group than they were before. So the population of elderly people who are disadvantaged is necessarily increasing in line with, or maybe faster than, the population of elderly people who are growing. I do not see a lot of evidence in both the commonwealth and the state arena to convince me that there is enough work going on in looking after the aged.

One of the great problems is that nearly all welfare groups have a peak body but the aged homeless do not. When you think about it, there is the aged community sector, and they are really looking after people like my mum and dad; there is the homeless sector, and they are looking after generally homeless people, often women or families; and the housing sector, of which I am the president, is looking much more at social housing and affordable housing. Wintringham has found itself over 20 years becoming virtually the voice for the aged homeless and as well as we may or may not be doing that we are relatively a lone voice. Not enough money and attention is going from government level into addressing the needs of the elderly.

We have become a housing association through an accident. After eight years of negotiating with a trust I have been able to secure vast sums of money which I can contribute as leverage. I do not think there is any question at all that if I had not been able to do that we would not have become a housing association, because we were not prepared to do it with leverage and therefore there would not have been a single housing association that would have had that as its focus. That is not to say that some housing associations would not have looked after the aged but none of them would do it professionally like us, because of our links with aged care. I think it is largely a forgotten group of people and remains forgotten.

**Mr FINN** — What happens in 20 years? If we do not take preventive action now — and I am not entirely sure how we tackle that; this committee will hopefully come to some conclusion on that — what happens in 20 years? What do you envisage Melbourne and Victoria being like in 20 years if this continues?

**Mr LIPMANN** — I would say you do not have to wait 20 years. I think you are there now. The baby boomers, of whom I am one, are there now, so I think 20 years has past. I think it is about this year and what you are going to do now, straightaway. This is a great problem. We have been saying it for a long time: you need to prepare. There has not been any willingness to prepare on this particular issue.

I have to say that some things have happened which for someone who has worked in this field for most of their life are really quite astounding. I mean, this allocation of Nation Building money has never happened before. This is capital money. You would have to go back probably to the gold rush to envisage so much money going into schools as well as housing. Similarly, the state government has put a lot of money into housing. I do not want that not to be acknowledged, but I am worried about the lack of focus on how that money is being used. I do not see any real advantage to the aged homeless or even extreme aged coming through. Now, as a result of this presentation, there may be bureaucrats ringing me and explaining exactly how there has been, but I have not seen it, and that is all I do.

**Mr NOONAN** — Thank you for your submission; it reads very well. In fact it throws up a number of issues that have not come through in other submissions, and perhaps that is because of

the space that you are working in. As we have stepped forward — this is now our third day of public hearings — the differences between public housing and social or community housing are really blurring well and truly into each other. You would have noticed that our terms of reference are about public housing. In fact the only way we can look forward is to go to Bernie's issue and talk about future directions of public housing. You have rightly pointed out that you are recipients of an enormous \$34 million contribution from two levels of government, one of which is the state. I presume that most if not all of that investment will go into what would be termed social housing.

I just wonder whether, for the benefit of this committee, given that we have a set of terms about public housing, you might give us your view about the linkages between social housing and public housing, particularly given that we have to make recommendations about what happens with public housing. Without answering my own question, if the investment is not made in social housing — again looking forward at future directions — what is that likely to mean for those who are eligible essentially for public housing?

**Mr LIPMANN** — These are big questions. I think there is room for both areas. As I said before, we are an enthusiastic supporter of public housing and in an unqualified way. Government policies going back to the Kennett era have developed things such as a segmented waiting list which is targeting housing. You are moving away from the field where I and some of you guys grew up, where public housing was an option for low-income people. It is not any more. Public housing is now welfare housing. It is quite different. My observation is that what is probably happening — this is just an observation; it may not turn out to be true — is that those people who were living in public housing because it was an option for low-income people are moving to social housing. Often people will have income with a job and are raising a family in social housing.

**Ms PEREZ** — Also sometimes there is stigma associated with public housing, so people move into community or social housing because it is not seen the same way.

**Mr LIPMANN** — What is then happening is that this notion of a ghetto is starting to develop, that the people who are most disadvantaged are moving into public housing. That clearly is a problem both for raising kids in an environment that is not a mixture of society and — hopefully it does not get as far as this, but I have seen it in America with the projects — because someone in full-time employment is rare. This is a very poor environment to raise a family. Unless public housing is expanded significantly so that it does not take people just at the last resort or the highest sequence, I do not see any other way that that is going to develop.

I also note with interest that Minister Plibersek is very keen on transferring some public housing to housing associations. Theoretically we would be a beneficiary of that and yet I want to go on record as saying that I do not agree with it. She is a woman for whom I have enormous respect, but I do not agree with that policy for the same reason — that whatever one might think about public housing and how it is managed over the years et cetera, it is a very fine resource for a society to have. There is difficulty experienced by some of my colleagues in placing difficult people in housing associations. We ourselves also have experienced that with other housing associations. If public housing is transferred in any large numbers to housing associations with a proviso that they use that as leverage, you are again going to find a version of what I was talking about before. The housing associations are all fine organisations — I know their leaders and count them as my friends — but they will be placed in a position where they will have to generate enough income from that housing to service that debt. So at some level the population of that housing will change. These are very difficult questions.

The way I have approached it — and perhaps a close reading of my report will show this — is very similar to what we have done with our commonwealth aged care. Commonwealth aged care is not designed for homelessness people; it is designed, as I said, for my mum. The way you build aged-care services is through accommodation bonds. If any of you people have experienced a family member going into aged care, you will know that you have to pay a bond, which is then returnable. What the aged-care sector bureaucrats in Canberra are saying is that aged-care facilities

will be funded by accommodation bonds. But they are recognising that since the advent of Wintringham there are significant people who cannot pay bonds, so how is that going to be serviced? While they have not solved it, they have created — and we have been able to build all our services this way — a limited capital pool for those organisations that are going to target people who cannot pay a bond. In that way Wintringham has been able to develop.

I would say that rather than discard the leverage argument — which I realise is probably never going to happen, so there is no point in wishing that to happen — there needs to be recognition and then concrete evidence. I think there is already recognition of this, and I think I have already heard it from the minister and other people, but there needs to be more actual evidence of it happening. Those organisations that choose voluntarily to work with the most disadvantaged and cannot service a debt should be able to access housing that is either built by the state and then transferred to us or we build ourselves. I might say that these offers have been made to us interstate. So there are some solutions to that but it is a problem.

I think, in fairness, you people would also be well aware that this a problem that has arisen from massive underfunding for a long, long time. It is not going to be turned around with one big whack of money that is coming through. This is an inherited problem that is not going to go away quickly.

**Mr NOONAN** — I am mindful that we need to move on, but just to be clear, it would be wrong of this committee not to be considering what is happening in the area of social housing in the context of the terms that we have got, which relate purely to public housing, and the report that we have to produce.

**Ms PEREZ** — I think in terms of future direction, social housing is a very good adjunct to public housing, and what social housing is able to do, particularly when you have a specialist organisation such as Wintringham Housing, is actually meet areas of demand such as the aged — the aged homeless, the aged frail — which are increasing and which public housing and the private market cannot meet adequately. We can do that, and we are doing it, and we are connecting it with care.

What is critical for social housing and our model at Wintringham is that connection and the ability to provide care, and a graduated responsive care, throughout a person's history of housing. A resident may come in — into beautiful quality housing, by the way; we provide really beautiful environments and communities and support for our residents, and that may be a distinction with public housing in some areas — and then we are able to continue to support that resident and provide different levels of care. We go from independent living, then independent living with support and eventually into high care if that is required. So you have a graduated response all within our system. That is a distinction, but it is an adjunct to public housing.

**Mr LIPMANN** — While I am not here to represent the community housing federation, I would say that I do think it is a really good thing that the social housing sector has been grown. I have some concerns about how it has been done, but I think it is an excellent idea, because there is no doubt that smaller organisations, particularly if they are regionally based, have a much better handle on the needs of the community and individuals within that community.

**Mrs POWELL** — What we have heard from the committee's inquiry and from anecdotal evidence as well is that there is often a lack of choice for older people when moving out of a three-bedroom house into affordable housing. I know that you have Miller homes around the regional area, and I am quite well aware of the one in Shepparton, and I do Meals on Wheels for that on a semi-regular basis. In that area there I know the people feel very secure in their homes, and some of them have been there long term. I was interested in your comment where you said you need to have control over who goes into your service. Given the close proximity of your residents in that service, do you have a complaint process whereby, if there is a client who either starts to have mental problems or whatever, there is a way to terminate that tenancy, given that in

public housing it is a much more lengthy, complex and legal process? What is your process if there is a complaint about a tenant and you need to terminate that tenancy?

**Ms PEREZ** — We are heavily regulated as a housing association, so we have fairly stringent complaint procedures. The initial parts of the complaints process basically are to try to find resolution or to see if there is something that you could do better as an organisation. If that is unsuccessful, then you have to take other steps, normally using the residential tenancies tribunal. That would be the ultimate step if you needed to go to eviction, but what we find in the Wintringham housing model is because there is a lot of support provided, often we can step in and provide additional and appropriate support so that the problem is relieved and eliminated without going to the point of eviction. We have very few evictions, and that is not to say we do not have some very difficult behaviours. Bryan can probably give you a lot more detail, but sometimes it may be a problem with medication, sometimes it may be a problem with finances, and that can be assisted with budgeting processes et cetera, so often there are a lot of other steps to assist and to resolve the problem as part of that complaints process.

**Mr LIPMANN** — The Miller one is a very good example, because with the way it operated before there were literally no supports. They were pretty well independent, and so through the support systems we will be able to establish we anticipate those types of problems will be minimised.

The other issue to say is that while some of the housing associations might be bleating a little bit about the regulation, we are coming from the aged-care industry where we are highly regulated and we are totally house-trained in terms of the regulations that aged care requires of us, which is many times greater than those that operate in the housing association. We have just taken that whole policy and transferred it holus bolus to Wintringham Housing, so it is not so much that we are in advance of the housing associations, because that sounds arrogant; really what it means is that because of our aged-care arm — and most housing associations have 5, 10, 20, 30 employees — we have nearly 400 employees. That is because of the aged-care component, and those policies which we have had to develop over a 10-year period have now been transferred as a block.

**Ms PEREZ** — I have to say with my background in housing that often if there is a problem, it is very straightforward. You just follow the procedures in the Residential Tenancies Act, and you can go through to eviction. The approach at Wintringham is very different. It really is an approach that focuses on the resident and their needs and on a resolution and a genuine attempt to reflect on what has been done to see if that can be changed in some way, and that is extremely successful.

**Mr LIPMANN** — For example, in that story I told you which you were interested in about the guy who had moved from the urinal and then that man storming through in a terrible anger, the approach that Wintringham would take is not to get that man evicted. It would be to say, ‘Why is this man so angry? Why has this man who has clearly got a psych issue been placed without supports?’. Although I have not met this man, I have only heard about him, I would be absolutely confident that our staff would resolve that man’s psychosis through either medication, support or better accommodation. So the answer is not to evict, because that is only then passing the problem on to the next guy.

**Ms KAIROUZ** — You talk about offering your clients support. Do you do that in partnership with other associations and government departments or bodies, or do you just source them yourself?

**Mr LIPMANN** — Certainly not with other housing associations, because they are not support providers. We would do them with other aged-care organisations. The vision that has driven Wintringham is one-stop shopping. I used to be an outreach worker. I know the frustrations of trying to deal through myriad government departments and myriad social welfare organisations

and people, so as a broad company principle, when an outreach worker finds an old homeless man and woman we try to solve every problem that person has within the company.

**Ms KAIROUZ** — Obviously you get some funding from the state and federal governments, but where do you source the rest of it?

**Mr LIPMANN** — It is sustaining. It is just the same as the aged-care facility down the road from where you live. The funding comes from the commonwealth, both outreach and capital. The residents pay a fee. With commonwealth aged care you are expected to pay about 80 per cent of your income, but then you are getting meals and aged care, because this is a full residential. Housing is 25 per cent, so they are paying that plus rent assistance, and the support is a separate issue and that needs to be brokered separately, particularly support from the state government, which is again proving to be difficult. Our model works, but it only works if we have the supports. We will not be able to continue and grow that model just by the provision of housing; we need supports as well.

**Ms KAIROUZ** — Where are you getting the supports from now?

**Mr LIPMANN** — At the moment we are getting them from government, but we are having a massive increase in housing, and we would like to grow it a lot more, because we actually provide a good product, which I think the government is pleased with. But it would be a mistake to think that our existing services can be replicated just by the provision of housing, because our existing services work because we have support, which is not necessarily coming from the Office of Housing. It is coming from DHS through the aged-care side, but nevertheless it is still coming from a mixture — a soup — of commonwealth and state funding.

**Mr SCHEFFER** — This will be a quick one. I realise we are out of time. Liz, in your presentation, which I also thank you for, you talked about the very careful planning that goes into the establishment of the new facilities that you are building in various locations across the state.

Further to the question I asked the previous group that you may have heard, in that planning how do you interact with the local community where you are going to build that facility? I guess with aged care you would not have quite the perception of the threat that would exist in some communities. But nonetheless you said sometimes behaviours are challenging, so some of those things might apply. Could you talk about that bit?

**Ms PEREZ** — Yes, I can speak about the developments we are doing currently with the Miller trust and with funding through Nation Building and also state government support. We are doing it in a number of ways: some of our developments have gone through the Nation Building fast-track process, so our consultation with neighbours has been by way of fact sheets, meetings and letter drops. In some areas some of our sites have beautiful heritage homes on them, so there has been some degree of consultation about those sites.

For other sites, where they are in a more residential area, we are having very few concerns expressed. The types of queries we are getting are planning queries like, 'Will the trees be gone from that site?', 'Will you be keeping trees?' or 'Will the landscaping be appropriate?', more than queries about the actual types of residents that we are housing. If we have those types of queries, we say that it is a social housing development, that we are dealing with the elderly and the frail and trying to do all the things that we try to do, which is to provide them with beautiful accommodation that is appropriate and to look at long-term independence, and also that it is an asset for the community in the sense that there is such a need, and that seems to allay most of the concerns.

**Mr LIPMANN** — Can I also say that that can work, but it has also worked against us. I have a very interesting example. We did some housing in East Bentleigh which created a furore; something like 400 signatures — —

**Mr SCHEFFER** — That was you, was it?

**Mr LIPMANN** — It was a difficult development.

**Mr SCHEFFER** — So what motivated that? Could you unpack that a bit for us?

**Mr LIPMANN** — It was a marginal seat. The nimby phenomenon is alive and well. In America — you might be interested — I heard of ‘nimto’, which is ‘not in my term of office’. The nimby is alive and well. It can be managed, because at the same time as doing that East Bentleigh one which was so horrendous and which was only 20 little houses, I did a 60-bed nursing home and 20 houses in Avondale Heights and we had not a single objection. The mayor stood up at the end of the council planning meeting and turned to the Wintringham group in the audience and said, ‘Thank you for coming to Moonee Valley’.

**Mr SCHEFFER** — Could you explain that a bit further? What was the difference?

**Mr LIPMANN** — I think the difference was that the East Bentleigh one was an unfortunate set of circumstances. There was some political mileage that could be obtained by uniting residents against a development, and some fairly mischievous information went out about it. It was not handled well by the Office of Housing; too many people spoke and there were too many conflicting and divergent fact sheets about it. It was unfortunate in that there were a couple of local residents who were enlisted, I suppose, in stirring up issues. We had pretty noisy public meetings. We had defamatory signs about the future elderly residents posted on our building signs.

For the one in Avondale Heights we decided that every single public statement would come out of my office, and we employed a town planning consultant to assist us to go through the process. I spent a lot of time with councillors and the local member, who was Rob Hulls; and there was just a lot of legwork that went into doorknocking residents, trying to explain what was going on, holding public meetings, showing plans and allaying fears. So there was a combination of better management and better luck.

But I think if any organisation sits before this committee and says that they have a solution to developing social housing in a community, be wary, because that is not the case. It is not impossible but it is always difficult. It is a worldwide phenomenon. It can be managed, but it is difficult.

The great problem in my view is that there has been an abuse of democracy. The ability to object without any consequences has been abused. Bear in mind that we are a not-for-profit welfare organisation. Prior to fast-tracking — which I know has created some concerns in some communities and areas, but you have to look at the alternative — we pretty much budget for \$50 000 to \$100 000 in legal fees to go through VCAT and anywhere up to a year’s delay. If we do not have to use that, that is great. That is what we are pretty well budgeting, and my colleagues would say something similar.

There are some very serious reasons why fast-tracking was introduced. It was because it was almost impossible for services to get up. If it is a private enterprise, they include that in the cost, but as a not-for-profit organisation we are not funded for that. Apart from anything else we are building housing for a reason — because people desperately need it. If you have to wait a year, it is unnecessary, and frankly it is an abuse. You should have the right to object, but you should be able to have some consequences for frivolous objections and you should be almost forced to negotiate and not just make those objections. That is my view.

**Mr SCHEFFER** — Just very quickly, are there any recommendations that you think a committee like this could make that could obviate some of those difficulties?

**Mr LIPMANN** — I have been saying for years that a version of fast-tracking should be there.

**Mr SCHEFFER** — That is a plus?

**Mr LIPMANN** — It is absolutely a plus. There are issues of national importance, such as building a new port or a new destroyer or something like that, and it should be similar for issues of social importance such as schools, housing and hospitals — they should bypass the ordinary process. As much as that is difficult for some people in the community to accept, in my view it is a better good for a community that needs to be recognised.

**The CHAIR** — We are out of time. Thank you very much.

**Mr LIPMANN** — Can I also say that if anyone wants to visit any of our services I can organise that.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for your invitation.

**Witnesses withdrew.**