Plenty Valley Baptist Community Church
PO Box 2, Doreen Victoria 3754
Place of Worship: Laurimar Community Hall: 25 Hazel Glen Drive
Minister: Rev Glynis Dickins B Th, M Th St, B Mus, M Ed St, Dip Ed
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Mrs Jan Kronberg MLC
Chair, Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee

10th November 2011

Dear Ms Kronberg

On behalf of the people of the Laurimar and surrounding housing estates in Doreen, one of Melbourne's rapidly growing northern growth corridor suburbs, I am delighted to respond where I am able to the Inquiry on Growing the Suburbs: Infrastructure and Business development in Outer Suburban Melbourne.

I am first and foremost a local resident. I am also a local minister of religion and serve the people currently moving into new estates of Laurimar and other estates around Doreen. I have replied to the submission to present something of the thoughts and feelings of local people among whom I live and whom I serve. There are many people with whom I come into contact on a daily and weekly basis, so here are their views which I have consulted widely to collect and present in this submission.

This Inquiry presents a wonderful opportunity for us as local people to present our views and for the Committee to hear from local people, so we thank you once again for the opportunity to respond. I would welcome any opportunity to present in person at any of your public hearings.

I look forward to meeting with you and members of the Committee and thank you again for hearing from us.

Yours sincerely

(Rev) Glynis J Dickins
Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee

Submission

Inquiry on Growing the Suburbs: Infrastructure and Business Development in Outer Suburban Melbourne.

Introduction:
The northern growth corridor of Plenty Road, through Doreen and Mernda is one of the fastest growing suburban areas of outer Melbourne. As a local resident and Baptist minister working in a new housing estate (the Laurimar estate) I welcome this opportunity to respond to the invitation of the committee to comment upon those points of reference which are directly relevant to the many new people and families who are settling in the Plenty Valley area of Melbourne's north. As a local minister, I not only serve the people with 'Sunday worship' and associated ceremonies such as marriage, funeral, baptism, and baby dedication services, but with my church, we also serve the local community in practical ways such as in the provision of playgroups (6 sessions per week), school holiday activity programs, the teaching of Christian Religious Education (CRE) at the new local primary school and participate in other community events such as Easter Family Fun days etc. I also serve the community on the Laurimar Alliance, a network of community representatives of education, local council, developers, local traders and general community workers. I draw your attention to these tasks simply to provide you with a basis for my response to this submission. Put simply, I interact with many many children and families across my week within my involvement in the Laurimar and wider community.

Parents and people generally share their concerns and worries as well as their aspirations and celebrations for their children as they have moved out here and settled in our estate. From my years of service here and hearing from families near and far, and my recent involvement with a resident's action group which successfully fought against the establishment of an entertainment venue with poker machines, I welcome the opportunity to comment upon relevant terms of reference.

Background to the Area
Laurimar and surrounding estates consists very largely of families. There is a high degree of home ownership as our people have moved out here to be able to purchase the family home. In order to do so, many men work very long hours, and women work part-time. They balance their budgets carefully and do not live extravagantly in order to pay off their mortgages. There are some professional people in the area; teachers, nurses, IT personnel, fire and police officers. There are also many trades people; builders, bricklayers, plumbers, concreteers, roofers, painters, store men, metalworkers and others. Among the women there are hairdressers, teachers, nurses, retail sales and
childcare workers among others. There is a substantial number of home-based businesses in the neighbourhood. As well as families with young children, another growing age group is the parents of the families, who have moved out to be closer to families and often to assist with childcare. The ethnic mix is expanding (more recently) from Australian/Anglo/European, New Zealand and South Africans and their descendents to include Indian, Sri Lankan, and other parts of Asia. Most people work hard to care for their families and establish their homes. They are very involved in the lives of their children; in sport, dancing and school. Many people enjoy the parks and walkways as they exercise their dogs and watch their children grow and play.

(a) Identify Existing Public and Private Infrastructure Provision: Let me say at the outset that we love living in/around Laurimar. We love the parks, walking/bike paths and protected river red gum trees. We love how streets, houses and common areas have been planned and established. Many items of much needed infrastructure provision are gradually being established in the Laurimar estate, particularly within the new town centre. When my husband and I settled here in January 2009 (I have been travelling to work here since 2006), there were no connecting roads from Yan Yean through to Plenty Road. There were no shops or services other than one coffee shop in front of the Laurimar Community Hall, (built by Delfin Development and recently gifted to the Whittlesea Council) situated at the eastern end of Hazel Glen Drive. Since that time, we have welcomed the establishment of a ‘strip’ shopping centre built around a large Woolworth’s supermarket, a new and well-equipped primary school, doctor’s surgery, ancillary services such as optometry and podiatry, a chemist, news agency, gyms, food outlets etc, hairdresser, women’s clothing and gift/coffee shops. More recently we welcomed the opening of a ‘Bendigo Bank’, which operates in partnership with Hurstbridge and Diamond Creek, and real estate agencies. Even more recently, we welcomed the opening of the ‘Laurimar Community Activity Centre (CAC); a joint venture of state government and local council. Programs at the CAC are facilitated by the Melbourne City Mission (MCM) and they provide pre-school, Maternal Child Health/Welfare, and specialist children’s services.

While we have welcomed and embraced these services, they are at once occupied to the point of ‘full-to-overflow’ it is immediately obvious to all that these facilities are only just providing for current needs. There is literally no room for future development. Numbers at Laurimar Primary School have grown from 120 – 160 in its opening year of 2009, through 350 in 2010 to 560 in 2011. Numbers projected for 2012 may exceed 800. For 2012, the 4 year-old government subsidized pre-school program in the Laurimar CAC already has 249 children enrolled across 8 groups. While we are all grateful for increased hours of subsidized program from 2012, families with children requiring 3 year old kinder will have to again travel widely, juggling start/finish
times around drop off/pick up times, with constant roadwork's and traffic snarls, which affect travel to and from Laurimar.

Based on these numbers alone, we cannot stress how urgent the need is for a government secondary school. While there remain some places at neighbouring suburban secondary schools, these places are limited as surrounding suburbs also continue to grow and transport is always a vexed issue. It is simply not feasible to expect a majority of children to attend newly establishing private schools such as 'Acacia College' (Uniting Church) as many families just can't afford the fees. We understand that land has been acquired for a secondary school. We are grateful for this development so far and would plead with the state government to hasten its progress in actually building the school.

Sports Clubs are establishing themselves in the estate, and growing enormously, which is to be expected. Laurimar Primary School's gym-come basketball court is in use all weekend by the new Laurimar Thunder Basketball Club. Australian Rules Football (with its successful 'Auskick' program was highly patronized in season 2011), netball, cricket and soccer are all establishing themselves in the estate. These are run by volunteer parent groups. We are grateful for the establishment of joint school/council ovals and playing fields, but all the club's overwhelming need is for a large multi-function facility, which would include function room(s), training, shower and dressing rooms.

There are no disability services based in Laurimar. The primary school employs a number of classroom 'aides' for its growing numbers of needs such as autistic children, but to date there is no other assistance for families with disabled children or young people, whether physically and/or intellectually impaired. There are no welfare services, Centrelink representatives, alcohol or gambler's help services. There are no mental help services, children's support or Family Crisis Support services, such as a local family needed when their 9-year-old son took his own life earlier this year. While it may be argued that thus far, there are not many demonstrated needs, these needs will grow, as government supported families and those with special needs move into Laurimar in ever increasing numbers. There is no provision for aged care or retirement village plans to my knowledge within at least 10 kilometres form the town centre. I have even had people asking me about developments such as these as such people are wanting to plan ahead for living in their older age in this area because they love it.

To date there is no hospital, police or ambulance presence in Laurimar. While we are told that these are only a few kilometers away, and while the current roadworks are in progress, transport anywhere out of our estate is at least problematic and at worst a logistical nightmare, especially in an emergency as was experienced by a young Laurimar
school teacher whose wife, early in 2011 suffered a heart attack and passed away during the wait for an ambulance.

(b) Capacity of Existing Infrastructure to Accommodate Increased Population Growth: In short, from the comments of my contact people and from my observation, infrastructure lags hopelessly behind the rapidly increasing population growth in Laurimar and surrounding estates. It seems to many who comment to me, that the only infrastructure ahead of the houses are parks, something for which we are indeed very grateful, but these are only the beginning of what new communities require in terms of ongoing support and infrastructure.

We have always had waiting lists in place for playgroup, despite recently increasing numbers of our sessions from 4 to 6 per week, thanks to the co-operation of Whittlesea Council in leasing us the Laurimar Community Hall for those extra times. At the Laurimar CAC, Pre-school numbers are set and cannot be expanded, and while the school does not turn anyone moving into the area away, senior staff have expressed their ever-growing concern and need for another primary school in the estate. I have already commented upon the immediate and urgent need for a government secondary school.

While we enjoy the shops and eating places we currently have, we remain disappointed in the lack of progress made by Tattersall’s in their promised development of a Family-friendly Bistro/eating place. I have already mentioned how a resident’s action group fought successfully against the building of a large venue with sporting and electronic gaming machines. Since then, Tattersall’s have promised a revised and smaller eating-place, but one year on, there is no progress. Take-away outlets are over worked and the waiting times just get longer for families wishing to enjoy a take-out meal without traveling many kilometres away from the estate(s).

Transport and Road access in and out of the estate(s) remains the most challenging and ongoing issue of concern in terms of lack of infrastructure we all face. Put simply, the vast and overwhelming majority of employed people work not just outside of the estate(s), but most travel many kilometres to their places of work. In fact, I am amazed at the distances people travel, because they have to if they want to live in/around Laurimar. The bulk of traffic travels from north to south of the city CBD and suburbs in the morning and from south to north in the evening. I have even heard of men driving from Laurimar to Cheltenham and the Mornington peninsula daily. Not only are our two main access roads hopelessly choked with traffic, especially at peak times, they are simply not constructed to take anywhere near the sheer volume of cars, utes and trucks. While mindful of widening road works on Plenty Road, it seems to me that the problem begins at the Yarra River. There are just not enough
crossing points over the river. Everyone fights their way into traffic queues to cross the river at Bulleen Road, Fitzsimmond’s Lane or the Warrandyte Bridge. Speaking personally, my husband drives daily to Box Hill. Rather than sitting for up to 90 minutes in polluting traffic queues, he is forced to leave later (9.00am) and come home later (7.30-8.00pm) to conserve valuable time. It seems to me that many more offices and businesses could do well by relocating north of the city and at least one new river crossing would greatly benefit us all.

While we welcome the rail extension from Epping to South Morang, it remains the most ludicrous situation to stop the train there. At the very least, the train should be expanding out to Mernda, let alone Whittlesea to where it once traveled. Old railway land is by and large still available, much of it lying parallel to Plenty Road. When we consider the other main growth corridors of Melbourne (western suburbs and south-eastern suburbs or north via Craigieburn), it seems incomprehensible to local people here that a growth corridor such as ours is not serviced by a rail link. We plead with government to consider a much needed rail link from South Morang to Whittlesea. Buses just do not come anywhere close to fulfilling transport needs. So households in our estate(s) are forced into acquiring a second car or risking social isolation, which in turn contributes to family stresses for which we do not have support services.

(e) The Role of Community Groups: To date, Whittlesea Council, local churches and Rotary remain the only community (other than sport) groups establishing in the area. Council has been particularly proactive in seeking to accommodate programs for youth and young people as they grow and mature. Council experiences similar difficulties, as do the churches, including mine when we attempt to offer youth programs and activities. There is a massive shortage of multi-use facilities for such programs – as indeed for any type of public gatherings. So our efforts become fractured and not always well coordinated, despite our best attempts and open communication.

While we admire the Delfin Development’s intention for the estate to have a ‘place of worship’ (preferably multi-denominational) and to which we strove to take part, the fact remains that no church group has financial resources with which to purchase land, let alone develop a building. Such a building, where it was planned to be in the heart of the town centre would have provided much needed co-ordination for many meetings and community gatherings beyond church groups. So we do our best with the facilities we access by lease from the Council.

Whittlesea Rotary group sponsors a community monthly market, but to date all funds leave the area and we fail to see anything invested back into our community thus far. Scouts are trying to establish, but the issue remains of where such a group could meet. None of the existing community groups, including churches are able to make much (if any)
impact in developing local expertise yet. We are simply too busy trying to keep up with the demands for immediate needs that are before us and those needs that we do our best to meet.

Conclusion: Speaking as a resident in the community and minister who serves our community, I hope I have presented some sort of picture of life in outer – northeastern Melbourne. I trust I have presented a positive picture, but one which can always be improved. I know you will hear from experts and much more qualified and able people than myself, but your local resident has not only learned much from living and serving people in this area, but feel I can speak for the vast and growing numbers of ordinary people; mums and dads with children and babies, extended families and early retirees who want to live near their children/grand-children to secure the best future we can for our community – and nation’s most precious asset – our people.

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