CORRECTED VERSION

OUTER SUBURBAN INTERFACE/SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into growing the suburbs:
infrastructure and business development in outer suburban Melbourne

Melbourne—26 March 2012

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Witness
Pakenham Business Group: (via telephone)
Ms J. Staindl-Johnson, President.
The CHAIR—Hello, Joanne, we have extended our flexibility in speaking to you by phone today because I understand you could not be with us. It is good to have this opportunity to speak with you, even if it is through this means.

Ms STAINDL-JOHNSON—We certainly appreciate that. I run a coach tour company and I am away in Queenscliff. I do appreciate your flexibility.

The CHAIR—Thank you very much for that little bit of detail as well. On behalf of the Outer Suburban and Interface Services and Development Committee, I want to welcome you to our hearing. As we have our conversation with you today it is being recorded and it will form a transcript of our time with you, and the rest of the hearing we have conducted here this morning. A hard copy of that transcript would be available to you in about two weeks time where you could make changes to spelling and typographical errors, but not context or syntax aspects. You would see that for yourself if you were here in the setting with us today because the Cardinia Shire Council has hosted a formal meeting room space for us where that has been established.

Before we proceed to ask you some questions as the president of the Pakenham Business Group, what I need you to do for the record is state your name, your designation and the group that you represent, and whether you are speaking to us in a professional or private capacity, please.

Ms STAINDL-JOHNSON—Certainly. To confirm, my name is Joanne Staindl-Johnson. I am the current president of the Pakenham Business Group. We have not had a meeting since the invitation to present to this forum was made available to us. Whilst I speak as a representative of that group, I speak without prior consultation with our committee.

The CHAIR—We appreciate that point. How long have you been president of the business group?

Ms STAINDL-JOHNSON—I have been elected for my third term.

The CHAIR—Congratulations on that. Is the term a 12-month term, is it?

Ms STAINDL-JOHNSON—Correct, a 12-month term. I am just going into my third year.

The CHAIR—Ms Staindl-Johnson, if you would like to make some opening remarks to set the scene of the aims and objectives and a little bit about the history and the connection with the business community, something about your constituents within the business group. If you could lay things out for us for the record formally first, please.
Ms STAINDL-JOHNSON—The Pakenham Business Group has been operating for about eight years, I understand. It grew out of a recognised need amongst the business group for a representation or conduit for major stakeholders, especially considering the rapid growth at that time that was recognised to be lying ahead for Pakenham and the Shire of Cardinia. Prior to that, Pakenham in the 70s, 80s and even into the 90s—the 90s a little bit, but not so much the 90s—had a very strong chamber of commerce. Throughout the 90s and early 21st century there were some endeavours to get a collaboration of business owners together, hence the Pakenham Business Group.

The Pakenham Business Group membership currently sits—I may stand corrected but I understand it sits at slightly over 50, and to date that would seem to be made up, the majority being small business operators, predominantly in the service sector. Very few manufacturing businesses are represented. A couple of larger entities, the banks, for example, and a couple of the large supermarket chains are represented. We meet on a monthly basis as a committee to consider issues and any matters that have been brought to our attention or that we raised ourselves. Then we have general meetings that anyone is welcome to attend, whether they be a member or not. We have general meetings four times a year. We have hosted one of those in cooperation with Pakenham Racing at which 82 people attended.

Our main role we see is as a conduit. We do not operate as a chamber of commerce. We do not run one-day sales or events, that type of thing. We conduit with the likes of Cardinia Council, the police, water authorities, any other organisations, institutions or stakeholders that we feel are necessary for better business in Pakenham.

The CHAIR—Would the conduit role extend into an advocacy where you might be preparing something by way of a submission on behalf of the group to authorities as well? Would you go that far?

Ms STAINDL-JOHNSON—Absolutely. We would advocate on behalf of our members if that was required.

The CHAIR—I am going to invite our Deputy Chair to put some questions to you now.

Ms GRALEY—Joanne, I was wondering what is the business climate like at the moment and what would be the main concerns that local businesses have when they are contemplating maybe expanding their business? I am thinking about skills, the retention of workers, planned policies, anything you have heard that local businesses are concerned about when they are thinking about expanding.

Ms STAINDL-JOHNSON—I think a very large concern is infrastructure, and infrastructure on a couple of fronts, one of which is the provision of telecommunications. We are currently working with council and we understand the economic development unit at Cardinia Shire Council are working very hard with Telstra to improve confidence in the provision of reliable telecommunications services in the town. This is recognised by businesses as an issue in what we call the CBD area, the Main Street, John Street, James Street area, where we have businesses looking to expand in their physical footprint, but also their actual employment base. However, you know if you are running a service business you cannot put people at a desk if they cannot have a phone. There has been to date a physical shortage of telephone lines and this has been going on for some years now, and that has resulted in a lack of confidence in telecommunications.
We also saw, for example, when #(indistinct) was establishing their base on the SouthEast Business Park they went to establish themselves and there was no telecommunications at all. They had established there because they had become too large for their business in Dandenong. They had a definitive date by which they had to move. Fortunately, this was raised with us, we conducted through to council and they—I do not know how they did it but they waved whatever wand they had to wave and negotiated with Telstra and there was only a delay of some days, I think, maybe two weeks in telecommunications instead of the month. That is an example that goes to the heartland of business confidence. That is an infrastructure issue that businesses contemplate when they look at attending.

We also have a further issue in the immediate precinct that we are currently engaging with and possibly will be advocating on behalf of members in relation to carparking. This is in the immediate centre of the town again. Whether this is a shortage of provision of space, whether there is a need for businesses to recognise that their expectations for what needs to be provided needs to be shifted, or whether there is a whole different approach needed to the way we use the provision of carparking. All of those considerations are currently active and on the table. As recently as Saturday morning I was in discussion with retailers in John Street in Pakenham, and Pakenham Business Group have been asked to come to a meeting of the gathering of some of these businesses.

We do also have issues that are waiting in the wings. When we met with Justin Madden's office in relation to the Woolworths development we raised it very firmly then, and we know this is in the wings, and that is traffic management, traffic flow in and around Pakenham, coming out of our industrial area into the Bald Hill Road area, the roundabout there, the bank-up of traffic that results when your train lines are active and your boom gates are down and it is peak hour and the traffic is banking up et cetera. Traffic management there, traffic management in and around the centre of the town, these are issues that are alive and well and waiting in the wings to become an issue for business.

The CHAIR—Does the Pakenham Business Group have any form of dialogue with the women's business networking group, Women Making it Work?

Ms STAINDL-JOHNSON—I am member of that myself.

The CHAIR—We had Ms Annemarie Cross as one of our witnesses today and it was a very inspiring presentation, I have to say.

Ms STAINDL-JOHNSON—I know Annemarie very well. She is a very active business woman. She is an inspirational woman.

The CHAIR—The Pakenham Business Group as it is now, I have the impression that it looks at the issues around the existing town centre of Pakenham. Do you have ideas and a concept that people might have raised or discussed or hoped for in terms of future commercial developments, new town centres and the models of industrial parks and so on, in terms of opportunities and places for people to expand their business or perhaps diversify their business or uptake bigger premises? Can you talk a little bit about some of those planned areas that may or may not be in competition, but they might also be opportunities for expansion.

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Ms STAINDL-JOHNSON—In mid-1990 there was a business group then in Pakenham growing out of the advent, if you will, in Pakenham at the time of neighbourhood precincts. When businesses were operating in 93, 94, 95, they were looking at the growth of the new area of Lakeside. That business group was in discussion all the way back then with council about the role that these neighbourhood precinct could play. There was discussion all the way back then in relation to Lakeside, in relation to Heritage, in relation to what was being mooted as a business 3, 4, business park such as we now #(indistinct) business park or the proposals for that. For 15, 17 years now, business has had its eye on what is going on. There was a blend there, and I am interested by #(indistinct) of your question because I think the way your question is phrased reflects how business used it as well; that is the coming of neighbourhood precincts, it is the coming of industrial parks. It is called diversification of location that is to be welcomed as opportunities for growth or does it in fact equal a diluting of the consumer's view as to where things are and how to access them.

Pakenham Business Group has an ongoing relationship with the Lakeside Residents Forum. In talking with the Lakeside Residents Forum and going to some of their meetings there is a strong perception that is driven home that people on some of the new estates do not even know that Pakenham central exists which is very interesting to note. That is not the case, I do not think, in Heritage Springs because that estate there is south of the town, essentially between the railway line, the existing CBD and they say #(indistinct) with each other. There is a reasonable traffic flow so that people recognise that they are in the centre of Pakenham. However, with the coming of Arena at Officer, with the coming of Lakeside, Devonia Park et cetera, increasingly I think a lot of those residents do not carry through in recognising that former Pakenham, or the existing Pakenham is a reasonable place for them to go and engage in business.

The CHAIR—What do you put that down to? Is it lack of opportunity, lack of transport, lack of branding on behalf of the original Pakenham itself, or that people like the idea of being in a neighbourhood precinct and are quite neighbourhood focused?

Ms STAINDL-JOHNSON—I think all four of those factors have a role in it because obviously there is never one factor that determines how people shop and interact with businesses. Even on the Mary Delahunty 2030 Strategy where you can see that Pakenham essentially is the end of that corridor of growth, if you will, which is almost like a peninsula with Pakenham at the end of it, Pakenham has forever been mainly populated by people that have grown up and continued to work and engage in areas east of Pakenham, the Melbourne side of Pakenham, for quite simply your traffic flow. I had this conversation with Dorothy Thomas, the owner of the Pakenham Gazette in the 80s, when she used to talk about Pakenham behaviours being like a dormitory town in that people come into Pakenham, they purchase a house but they continue to have family in Dandenong, or they continue to have family in Narre Warren and they work in Mulgrave et cetera. For a lot of people there is physically no reason for them to continue to travel beyond Pakenham to discover what it has to offer them. Therefore that leads reasonably to your suggestion that maybe it is a question of branding, maybe it is a question of awareness.

When I talk to people and they say, 'Lakeside is Pakenham, isn't it?' They are not being facetious either. I say, 'Well, no, there is an entire shopping and business area in Pakenham itself.' The lights go on and they say, 'We'll go down and have a look at that one day.'

The CHAIR—That is a very interesting comment. Do you see that people would therefore not see that they would want to access amenity, ambience, services, facilities and therefore provide increased patronage for a town centre like Lakeside, or see it as an opportunity for themselves or their children to get a job in those new areas?
Ms STAINDL-JOHNSON—I think people are quite willing to head the two K's down the road. I do not think they have a problem with that, except in this day and age we all want things easy, don't we? We want it home delivered or we want it online or whatever. But if they recognised that there was a business, a service or an opportunity then I do not think they would have a problem per se with coming out of this estate and driving into the established area of Pakenham, but it is about knowledge.

Kathy Burgstahler, who is the head of the Lakeside Residents Forum, is very proactive and she is very committed to the idea of the notion of Pakenham as a whole. She is not Lakeside-centric and when she and I have met—which has been a number of times—we have discussed how we can assist, for example, the Lakeside residents. Whilst it is not only about Lakeside, Lakeside—by the time it finishes it is going to have 9½ thousand houses there, so it is worth talking about. She keeps saying, 'Joanne, what can we do to get people out of Lakeside and into Pakenham?' We have discussed it and continued to work on formulating an idea of a former Pakenham expo to be held in Lakeside, former Pakenham coming out of its little boundary and coming into Lakeside and saying, 'This is what we have to offer.' You can only do that with the support of the businesses. That has not happened yet but we are continuing to work on that idea.

The CHAIR—You used some interesting language there when you said, 'People coming in and out of Lakeside, in and out of that estate.' Listening to that, it implies that people are contained in those communities and if so what do you think is the reason for that containment?

Ms STAINDL-JOHNSON—You have physical geographical features, heavily bounded on one side by #((indistinct) Gully Creek, very obvious in that side of town where that boundary is. You have the highway. You do have very obvious physical distinctions as to where Lakeside is. Delfin's entire branding and marketing is about community. 'You are Lakeside, you are Delfin, you are community. Move here to this community lifestyle.' Their provisions there are fabulous. I do not live in Lakeside, but I am there a fair bit and there is a lot there. People can operate quite pleasantly and never go outside their community of Lakeside. They have the lake, the have the sports stadium, they have the football ground. They have recreation taken care of. They have the cultural centre for cultural interests. They have supermarkets. They have Aldi, they have Coles. They have quality restaurants, they have cheaper restaurants. Fast food is about to come to their boundary at Cardinia Road.

They actually have very little need to access to the south-west. Obviously they do not have every single business and when it comes down to the brand names—in the heart of Pakenham we have Inception, Pakman, quality clothing stores. We have the new marketplace. Up to date, of course, if they wished to go to a shopping centre they went to Fountain Gate. I personally am delighted—on behalf of the business group—that the Pakenham Market Place has come because that has offered a viable alternative. Instead of people heading down the highway to Fountain Gate, they can turn right and go into Pakenham itself. More needs to be made of the opportunities, and not even have to go to Fountain Gate. If you work in Mulgrave, you work in Melbourne, you work in Dandenong, do not go back down that highway again, turn the other way at the weekend and come shopping in Pakenham.

The CHAIR—Thank you very much. I think we might have come to the end of our need to put questions to you, Ms Staindl-Johnson. Thank you for making yourself available to us today. We appreciate the fact that you have been able to take this call at this time and I would like to wish you and the other members of the Pakenham Business Group my best wishes for increasing prosperity and success in your business endeavours there.
Ms STAINDL-JOHNSON—Thank you for your flexibility and thank you for the opportunity.

Witness withdrew.

Committee adjourned.