28 April 2011

Mr Vaughan Koops  
Acting Executive Officer  
Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee  
Inquiry into Liveability Options in Outer Suburban Melbourne  
Parliament of Victoria  
Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Mr Koops

Please find attached a submission on behalf of the Building Designers Association of Victoria (BDAV) to the Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee’s Inquiry into Liveability Options in Outer Suburban Melbourne.

The BDAV’s submission covers three aspects of the Terms of Reference:

1. Outline recent state planning policies as they relate to private housing;
2. Classify national and international ‘best practice’ in urban renewal as it relates to established outer suburbs;
3. Recommend options for enhanced liveability of residents.

The BDAV would welcome the opportunity to discuss our submission further at a Committee Hearing and I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Yours sincerely

Brian Morison  
Executive Officer  
Building Designers Association of Victoria
1. RECENT STATE PLANNING POLICIES AS THEY RELATE TO PRIVATE HOUSING

Introduction

Rapid population growth, aging infrastructure, traffic congestion, lifestyle issues, employment opportunities, demographic changes and aging populations are just some of the challenges facing the Victorian community and Victoria’s planning system. With the continued, and often competing, demands of infrastructure development, land-use, employment opportunities and overall lifestyle goals, Victoria requires a strong and forward-thinking planning policy framework in order to address these issues.

The Building Designers Association of Victoria (BDAV) is Victoria’s peak body for building designers and architectural draftspersons. With 1700 members located across both metropolitan and regional Victoria, the BDAV is at the forefront of local and state-wide planning issues and policies. The BDAV believes in a strong planning framework for Victoria, particularly as sound planning policy and management will allow Victorians to maintain and enjoy their quality of life, now and into the future.

With BDAV members designing approximately a significant percentage of Victoria’s residential housing, the BDAV believes it is well placed to make a submission to this inquiry.

Dealing with Melbourne’s burgeoning population

With Melbourne’s population growing steadily towards 5 million, the previous government developed policies focused on managing a city of this size. From these policies, the BDAV supports the principles of designing a more compact city, the better management of population growth, building effective links with regional Victoria, and the renewed focus on improving the natural environment throughout the greater metropolitan area.

It is estimated that 47% of the 600,000 new homes being in built by 2030 will be developed in greenfield sites and approximately 53% of the forecast 600,000 new homes required by 2030 would be delivered in urban consolidation areas.

However, there is no clear indication of the timeline of these developments which could result in greenfield developments being built disproportionately sooner than urban consolidation sites. This is a major concern for the BDAV as pursuing greenfield development too early may result in insufficient infrastructure for the sites, as well as ill-planned community and building design. Whilst the BDAV supports urban consolidation through infill development, it has some concerns regarding the timing of these developments in correlation with the proposed greenfield developments. The BDAV believes that an effective pipeline of activity and land release is needed to ensure that the development of new homes across both urban consolidation and greenfield sites is balanced, and, most importantly, reflects public demand for residential buildings in these areas.
The BDAV notes that a pre-election commitment was given by the now Minister for Planning, Matthew Guy, to review the Urban Growth Boundary every two years instead of five as at present to match land supply with population growth and to speed up land approvals. The BDAV welcomes this initiative, as long as the Baillieu Government also assesses possible urban consolidation sites at least as regularly to ensure a balance between greenfield development and urban renewal.

The BDAV also notes the commitment by Planning Minister Matthew Guy during the election period to work with relevant municipalities for the assessment of logical inclusions in the Urban Growth Boundary to facilitate new housing projects. The BDAV welcomes this initiative, as long as there is an equal commitment to assessing possible urban renewal sites.

The BDAV is a strong advocate for the focus on urban consolidation, including in existing outer suburban areas, as developments within these urban areas are supported with already-established infrastructure and existing communities. Infill development within urban consolidation areas not only creates more accommodation but can also engender lifestyle advantages and substantial cost-savings. Again the BDAV welcomes the pre-election commitment by Minister for Planning, Matthew Guy, to clearly identify areas for urban renewal and future development zones.

**Growth in Activity Centres**

The BDAV supports the concept of activity centres as developed by the previous government. With the correct investment and planning processes, the BDAV believes that there is significant opportunity for these proposed six centres to flourish in terms of social, cultural, and economic advantages and to relieve pressures on inner Melbourne. As the six activity centres are predominantly located in outer urban areas, investment in developing these centres can provide employment and housing options and greater liveability for people in outer suburbs.

The BDAV acknowledges that further clarification is necessary to ensure that this policy is successful. Prior to development, targeted activities to encourage and prioritise growth in these areas should be implemented and could include:

- Involving local councils in the development process;
- Liaising with community groups to establish an idea of the role of the district;
- Building relationships with developers;
- Holding consultations with investors;
- Researching the specific nuances of the district;
- Educating the public about the advantages of living in a Central Activities District.
These activities should be paramount in the process of driving growth to these centres, with consultation and involvement being a key tool to achieving successful outcomes.

The BDAV also welcomes the election commitment of Minister for Planning, Matthew Guy, to define the boundaries of the Activity Centres to give certainty to residents and developers on where new construction will take place as this will ensure better communication with all relevant parties and hence better outcomes.

The BDAV believes that an ongoing communications campaign is required to target both prospective home buyers and business owners, in order to highlight the benefits of living and working in an Activities District. Messages conveying the lifestyle qualities and economic opportunities of these areas would make people aware of the many advantages of relocating to one of the six districts.

In addition, it would be advantageous for the communications campaign to demystify certain anxieties people may have about working and living in a district outside of the Melbourne CBD and its inner suburbs. Some of these anxieties may include: concern over the distance between the six districts and the Melbourne CBD; a fear of whether or not business will succeed in an area outside of inner Melbourne; families who have a pre-disposed preference for wider suburban spaces over moving into a city-like hub; families being concerned about moving into an ever-growing and busy district, and so on. It will be a key goal of the communications campaign to shift existing perceptions of these issues, and promote the benefits of Activities Districts. The BDAV and the building industry in general can play a role in assisting government with relevant communications strategies.

Greater consistency of planning processes across local government
One of the key matters of relevance to the development of housing in both greenfield and infill sites is issues with local government planning processes, particularly around inconsistencies from one Council to another.

Local government is often the primary level of government that the majority of the community deals with on residential, commercial and industrial planning matters.

The BDAV supports a strong policy framework in relation to local council planning procedures. However, more often than not, these policies are not upheld and there exists ‘under-the-counter’ policies. This inevitably complicates planning application approvals and creates confusion regarding the requirements needed to build or renovate a property.

The BDAV strongly believes that local council planning policies need to be streamlined and standardised across all councils. At the moment, each council has a different planning policy and varying requirements for planning
applications. In addition, the ‘fast track’ processes for planning applications differ for every council, and are often ignored. The BDAV feels that councils need to provide clear and simple guidelines and policies for planning applications, which are used across the board. By standardising planning application processes, this will avoid unnecessary confusion and reduce the complexities involved when applying for planning permits across different municipals.

The impact of the various planning administration requirements and confusion across councils often results in unnecessary delays and costs, which impact on the overall affordability of housing. As such, the election announcement by Planning Minister, Matthew Guy, that a Baillieu Government would establish a team of ‘red tape terminators’ to identify state and local government processes that impact on housing affordability, is very relevant in outer urban growth areas - is commendable.

The BDAV would certainly welcome the opportunity to work with the new Government to address some of these planning issues.

2. CLASSIFY NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ‘BEST PRACTICE’ IN URBAN RENEWAL AS IT RELATES TO ESTABLISHED OUTER SUBURBS

As stated earlier in this submission, the BDAV is strongly in favour of urban renewal as a solution to coping with Melbourne’s rapid growth.

Whilst traditionally urban renewal projects tend to be focused on ageing inner urban areas, urban renewal is just as significant for established outer suburbs as part of community redevelopment and revitalisation.

Outer suburban development in Melbourne has generally meant suburban sprawl and individual homes on individual blocks of land. The BDAV believes that effective urban renewal in established outer suburbs should include a mix of building types, and have a focus on vertical use of space rather than horizontal and with ‘walkability’ as a key component – ie the capacity for people to be able to walk/cycle from their home to community and work places. Developments which are designed vertically would allow for retail or office space, restaurants etc with upper floors for residential units. Vertical design also allows open space to be created or preserved whilst still increasing population density. The social benefits of this type of urban renewal are great – greater convenience for people in accessing work, retail, entertainment and, for people who may have always lived in the particular suburb to remain in that suburb as they age but can move to more suitable apartment living closer to services.

‘Gateway’ or Activity Centres as examples of best practice in urban renewal

As stated in the previous section of this submission, the BDAV supports the
Activity Centres concept as proposed in previous government’s policy, particularly for the capacity of such centres to become the focus of best practice in urban renewal.

In Dublin, Ireland, faced with a growing urban population and sprawl, the Irish National Development Plan focused on creating nine ‘Gateway’ cities in regions away from Dublin to achieve a better balance between the regions in economic and social development and to ease the pressure on transport, environmental and housing services in Dublin. Hence, Ireland’s population grew by 8.2% from 2002 to 2006 but Dublin’s share of the population remained the same (39.2%) across the time period, indicating the success of developing the ‘Gateway’ cities. The BDAV believes that Melbourne’s ‘Gateway’ cities – ie the six proposed Activity Centres predominantly located in outer urban areas (eg Dandenong, Broadmeadows), could have a similar impact on reducing population pressures on inner Melbourne.

Regional co-operation in Urban Renewal

In North Carolina, USA, the Land-of-Sky Regional Council, a multi-county local government planning and development organisation, is working on urban renewal ‘brownfield’ development across a range of urban centres and small cities. The region is facing population pressures on small towns and farmland because of the attractive rural character of the region, but the all towns have aging infrastructure to contend with. The Land-of-Sky Regional Council has worked with local governments and the development community to look at the barriers, policies and regulations around infill development and then looked at how policy, regulatory and market changes could overcome some of these barriers. They finally developed a set of tools that would allow infill development whilst preserving the region’s cultural and environmental assets. This was an innovative program as it involved a number of urban and rural municipalities cooperating at a regional level to develop appropriate policies and tools to ensure the success of infill development.

Other notable urban renewal projects in Australia include the East Perth Redevelopment Authority’s (EPRA) New Northbridge project which won the Urban Development Institute of Australia’ National Award for Excellence in Urban Renewal. The project saw the transformation of 27ha of vacant and neglected land near Perth’s new Northbridge Tunnel from a community with less than 350 people in the 1990’s to one with 1600 people, 460 new residences and 70,000 m2 of commercial space. As well, streetscapes were improved, public open space and cycle paths were developed and heritage buildings restored. Whilst this project is in inner city Perth, it is a model for urban renewal in aging outer urban areas.

1 Gateways’ to solving city’s gridlock, David O’Brien, The Age, 1 September 2008
3. OPTIONS FOR ENHANCED LIVEABILITY OF RESIDENTS

There are a number of options where the BDAV believes that the liveability of outer suburban areas can be enhanced, and these are particularly related to:

- Good building design, including energy efficiency aspects and environmental sustainability
- Designing homes for the whole life cycle of the building and its residents

**Building design focusing on energy efficiency and environmental sustainability**

1. **Design priorities determine life cycle sustainability outcomes**

   The design stage is one of the most significant in terms of determining how sustainable a structure will ultimately be. Building designers, in consultation with their clients, determine various aspects of the structure, including how best to incorporate energy efficient elements into their designs. Building designers are responsible for determining the life cycle sustainability outcomes of their designs and strongly believe that sustainability goals should form part of the overall building and planning regulations.

2. **Design specifications of building projects impact on the creation of healthy indoor environments.**

   The BDAV supports the principle that environmentally sustainable buildings create healthy indoor environments, and, by extension, healthier and happier inhabitants. This has been evidenced for example in Melbourne office spaces such as Council House 2 and 500 Collins Street, where reports show a significantly lower percentage of people taking sick leave and an increase in work productivity. Here, the design of the structure and the specifications for construction have led to a positive outcome for both the environment and the people using the space.

   This demonstrates the benefits of living and working in sustainable buildings and the BDAV believes that these design aspects are important for enhancing liveability aspects for residents.

3. **Implementation of 6-star homes in 2011**

   In 2005, Victoria was the first state in Australia to implement the 5-star standard as a mandatory regulation for new and renovated residential buildings. This move was fully supported by the BDAV with its members continually meeting this requirement and having a clear understanding of 5-star rated elements and design principles.

   Victoria moves to a 6-star standard from May 2011, requiring all new homes and major renovations to meet this rating with stronger energy efficiency standards for lighting and hot water systems, consistent with COAG’s National Strategy on Energy Efficiency (2009).
The BDAV applauds the move to 6-star rated buildings with many of its members already designing to this standard in anticipation of the 2011 updates. As well, BDAV members are capable of designing homes beyond 6-stars and the BDAV has recently launched a ten star challenge to highlight this capability. With this in mind, the BDAV hopes to see the star rating further raised in future years. Again, the liveability of homes is enhanced by energy efficiency improvements.

4. Transform existing homes into energy efficient structures

The BDAV believes that delivering comprehensive household retrofit programs would reduce energy consumption. BDAV members are well equipped with knowledge and advice regarding energy efficiency measures in the home, and are able to discuss any new sustainability initiatives with their clients.

In addition, the BDAV believes that the government should investigate additional and innovative incentives to encourage consumers to transform their homes into environmentally-friendly buildings, particularly through incorporating effective design elements.

5. Sustainable building designs reduce the demand on public utilities and grid-sourced services, and reduce the cost of supply

As the government is already aware, environmentally sustainable buildings reduce public demands on utilities and grid-sourced services, thus reducing the cost to the consumer. This has several positive outcomes. First, it eases congestion in terms of over-demand and lack of supply (particularly in the case of Victoria’s water supply); second, it opens doors for discovering alternative methods of energy creation and distribution (for example, solar energy); and third, consumers will be reducing their living costs in the long-term.

In addition, as Victoria is growing rapidly, these aspects will become increasingly important in ensuring that Victoria has sustainable services to meet the growing population and maintain the lifestyle which Victorians currently enjoy. Government policy and regulation in planning should reflect this broader sustainability dynamic.

6. Sustainable spaces should reflect modern attitudes to the work/life balance.

The BDAV believes that there needs to be a shift in perception from the government regarding the ways in which people are using the spaces around them. Currently, government regulation on sustainability in building design focuses on commercial buildings and residential structures as two separate and distinct entities. With changing work situations seeing more and more people working from home, there needs to be greater emphasis on creating structures which reflect this shift.
The BDAV sees many opportunities here for creative and sustainable building design which centres on creating spaces with dual functions. This approach will also reduce pressure on transport infrastructure and Victoria’s roads. This is particularly relevant for outer urban areas whose residents often have lengthy commutes to work.

There are many possibilities for the government to implement an agenda for the ‘modern worker’, which the BDAV believes will meet the needs of individuals, address Victoria’s growing population and encourage more sustainable and creative building design.

7. Housing affordability should be considered in terms of the full life cycle cost of living rather than simply the initial cost of land and dwelling.

Housing affordability is a matter of great concern to many Victorians, particularly the many young families moving to outer urban areas. There is no doubt that the cost of purchasing a house is often a great financial burden on individuals and families, and with energy efficiency standards being put into place, many people see the cost of owning their own home rising. Although it has been stated that the cost of building a 5-star rated house is only approximately 2% more, there needs to be greater clarification for consumers.

The BDAV believes that the government needs to factor in the full life cycle cost of energy efficient dwellings in discussions regarding housing affordability, rather than simply speaking about ‘housing affordability’ in terms of house and land prices. By further educating consumers about the potential savings they can achieve by having a sustainable home, there will be a surge in public support for building designs which incorporate energy efficient measures.

8. Sustainability in building design must be seen as part of a broader and overarching sustainable urban planning strategy.

If the six activity centres are developed as stipulated in the Melbourne @ 5 million strategy, implementing sustainable medium-density structures around already established infrastructure would lead to a more efficient use of existing infrastructure.

The BDAV believes that the structures within these activity centres should be designed with the environment in mind, with an increase in the use of clean energy and water-saving elements, for both commercial and residential structures. The BDAV believes that these activity centres will act, effectively, as ‘eco-centres’, and pave the way for future sustainable urban planning.
ABOUT THE BDAV

The BDAV is the peak industry body representing over 1700 building designers and architectural draftspersons across Victoria. Building designers carry out a broad range of roles in the design process including pre-design services, site analysis, schematic design, design development, contract documentation and contract administration and work in both the residential and non-residential sectors. Building designers are responsible for a significant percentage of all residential developments throughout Victoria and many of their members are located in regional centres and rural communities.

The BDAV provides advisory services to its membership on planning and building approval matters, technical information, practice bulletins, copyright, contractual and commercial advice, and also acts in an advocacy capacity on behalf of its membership to promote and protect the interests of building designers and the design sector generally. As well the BDAV runs an extensive continuing professional development program for its members and an annual awards event.

Many BDAV members provided pro bono design work and building advice to the many Victorians who lost their homes in the Black Saturday fires and the BDAV has facilitated displays about their members’ work in the new Rebuilding Advisory Centres in Kinglake and Marysville.

As a thought leader in the building sector in Victoria, the BDAV has prepared a number of policy papers on sustainability in design, planning, disability access in home design and a response to the Victorian Climate Change White Paper. These papers were presented to key Victorian Ministers and Shadow Ministers in order to inform discussion prior to the state election.

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