29 April 2011

Dr Vaughn Koops
Outer Suburban/Interface Services & Development Committee
Parliament of Victoria
Spring Street
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Dear Dr Koops,

PIA Victorian Division Submission into the
Inquiry into Liveability Options in Outer Suburban Melbourne

The Planning Institute of Australia’s (PIA) Victorian Division welcomes the opportunity to make a submission into to the Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee’s Inquiry into Liveability Options in Outer Suburban Melbourne. Please note that the Planning Institute intends to produce a separate submission for the second Inquiry into Growing the Suburbs, due to commence in the latter half of 2011.

As noted in Jan Kronberg, MLC’s letter of 23 March 2011, the Planning Institute of Australia has a strong interest in this inquiry, as planners are an integral part of creating liveable communities by addressing issues such as population, housing and health services, among other things. Last year, the PIA Victorian Division Committee created a ‘Call to Action’ document (enclosed) the purpose of which is to highlight 6 key planning issues for Victoria. PIA believes the following three issues from the document are particularly relevant to your inquiry:

1. Spring Clean the Planning System
2. Where and How We Live

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1. Spring Clean the Planning System

The Terms of Reference for the Inquiry are asked to outline recent State planning policies as they relate to private housing. PIA is of the position that an overhaul of the Victorian planning system, both policy and legislation, could have significant positive impact on the liveability of Victorian communities. The *Planning and Environment Act (1987)* in particular is outdated in a number of ways:

- It lacks relevance to current planning policies such as 'Melbourne@5 Million', or the proposed new Metropolitan Strategy.
- It creates an unnecessarily complex process of development contributions and does not adequately address a number of issues including health, wellbeing or liveability.
- It provides for a planning approval process which is not best practice, and does not provide for transparent, consistent, expedient outcomes.

PIA recommends the following actions:

a. Undertake a comprehensive, independent review of the *Planning and Environment Act (1987)*. Appropriate bodies to review the Act include the State Services Authority, Victorian Competition & Efficiency Commission, or an independent expert panel.

b. Establish a 'governor in council' appointed position of Victorian State Planner, who would be delegated the Planning Minister's 'call in powers', and would oversee, direct and report on implementation of planning policy throughout Victoria, in a similar fashion to other statutory officers such as the Auditor General, or Ombudsman.

c. Introduce expert decision making panels across the State (Planning Referral Authorities) with members who have planning expertise and are independent from political influence for all significant developments.

d. Introduce 'code assessment' and delegation of decision making to suitably qualified and experienced council officers.

e. Review all State and local planning policies every 4 years, applying the principle 'if 1 word is added, 2 should be removed'.

f. Review of the Victorian Planning Provisions to remove provisions that do not add value, are duplicated by other controls and/or are unnecessary for inclusion in planning schemes.
g. Simplify the application of development contributions to fund local infrastructure.

2. Where and How We Live

The Terms of Reference also refer specifically to population growth trends and impacts, and the provision of housing and services (specifically medical/health and support services). Victoria is undergoing unprecedented population growth which is expected to continue as a result of increasing birth rates and immigration. The Planning Institute of Australia strongly believes that population growth cannot be considered in isolation of where people will live, housing affordability, employment and essential infrastructure. Planning is an essential element in accommodating this growth and to ensure the availability of affordable housing, employment, appropriate infrastructure (including health services) and the creation of liveable communities. The expansion of Melbourne’s fringe needs to be minimised and attention directed to infill development within existing urban areas.

PIA also believes that planning in Victoria needs to mitigate the likely effects of future natural disasters and climate change. A more proactive approach to disaster planning and response needs to be considered by the State Government.

PIA recommends the following actions:

a. Determine long term urban growth boundaries for Melbourne and Victoria’s regional cities that will provide adequate future land supply, serviced by appropriate infrastructure and local employment.

b. Introduce higher density zoning to facilitate more compact cities and direct growth.

c. Protect farming areas to ensure the availability of fresh and affordable food.

d. Use developer contributions to ensure key infrastructure, particularly public transport, is available from the establishment of growth areas to enable healthy and sustainable communities to develop.

e. Increase the diversity and affordability of housing (including social housing) by introducing inclusionary zoning, transferable development rights and tax incentives.

f. Strategic land use plans need to be developed for Melbourne’s peri-urban areas.
3. A Better Built Environment

The Terms of Reference also ask for information regarding urban renewal, international best practice and recommendations for enhanced liveability of residents. PIA would like to draw attention to the role that good quality urban design plays in creating places that are liveable, functional, attractive and sustainable. The Institute actively promotes and advocates the values of good urban design, and continues to foster, promote and acknowledge high quality and innovative urban environments.

PIA recommends the following actions:

a. The 12 Principles of the Victorian Urban Design Charter should be included in the State Planning Policy Framework of planning schemes.

b. All State and local government building and infrastructure projects should meet the 12 principles of the Urban Design Charter.

c. A body similar to the independent UK Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) is established in Australia.

Enclosed with this submission is the full Call to Action document, along with relevant PIA position statements on growth management, planning for healthy communities and affordable housing.

The Planning Institute would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of these issues further. If you require more information or a meeting, please contact the PIA Victorian Executive Officer, Stuart Worn on 9347 1900 or at sworn@planning.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

Steve Dunn, MRIA CPP
President
Planning Institute Australia, Victorian Division

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