Inquiry into liveability options in outer suburban Melbourne

Melbourne — 6 June 2011

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Mr S. Worn, executive officer,
Mr S. Dunn, president, and
Ms S. Stevenson, senior policy officer, Victorian division,
Planning Institute of Australia.
The CHAIR — I want to offer a welcome to Mr Steve Dunn, the president of the Victorian division of the Planning Institute of Australia; Mr Stuart Worn in his capacity as the executive officer of the Victorian division of the institute; and Ms Simone Stevenson in her capacity as senior policy officer of the Victorian division of the institute. I welcome each of you. Mr Dunn and Mr Worn, I will ask you before we start to give your name, your designation, the name of the organisation you are representing and its physical address.

Mr DUNN — My name is Steve Dunn. I am the president of the Victorian division of the Planning Institute of Australia. Our address is 60 Leicester Street, Carlton.

Mr WORN — I am Stuart Worn, and I am the executive officer of the Victorian office of the Victorian division of the Planning Institute of Australia. Our office is located at 60 Leicester Street, Carlton, in the green building.

Ms GRALEY — It is actually a white building.

Mr WORN — I know. How cheeky.

Mr DUNN — It is green on the inside.

Mr WORN — We are the blue office in the green building.

The CHAIR — Before we proceed to hear from you, there are just some formalities for the record and to inform you. In welcoming you to the public hearing of the Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee it is important for you to know that all evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the Constitution Act 1975 and further subject to the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 and the Defamation Act 2005 and, where applicable, the provisions of reciprocal legislation in other Australian states and territories. However, any comments you make outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard, our transcription provider in the Parliament. You will receive a copy of the transcript within about two weeks. You can make changes to spelling or typographical errors, but the context cannot be changed.

I invite you to tell me who is going to start your introductory remarks and make your presentation, which we are looking forward to hearing. However, I want to emphasise that we really want to make this interactive so committee members all have an opportunity to ask questions. Sometimes things cascade as one question is asked, so we would like to keep the formal side of your presentation tight. We might interrupt you at key points for elaboration and so on. If we could look to 10 minutes of presentation on an uninterrupted basis, the rest of the time can be for questions. Mr Dunn, are you going to be the first?

Overheads shown.

Mr DUNN — I will kick off. Thank you for allowing us to speak to you today. I will be speaking, as will Stuart Worn, our executive officer. I would like to cover a little bit about the institute, who we are and who we represent, and then we would like to talk to you about our submission. We have given you a written submission previously, and today we have circulated a copy of the slides we are going to use plus a copy of what we call our Call to Action, which from a Planning Institute of Australia Victorian division perspective is really a summary of issues that we have put to the government that we think need action, and a number of those relate directly to your inquiry. Some are a little bit outside the terms of reference, which we can cover as well if you like, but I think given your instruction that we want us to be fairly succinct and to the point we will keep it that way.

The CHAIR — That would be best given the short time we have.

Mr DUNN — Okay. In that vein, we will kick off. Just a little bit about who we are, the Planning Institute of Australia. We are the only national body representing planning professionals in Australia. There are other bodies within Victoria but PIA is the only national body that does this. We have similar groups, similar divisions in other states and at a national level. We have been serving the planning profession since 1951. We were formerly known as the Royal Australian Planning Institute until we changed our name in 2002. We support our members working in Australia and overseas. We are a nationally registered association.
We have about 5000 members nationally — I think about 1000 of those are in Victoria — and we continue to grow at about 5 per cent per annum. About half our members work in strategic and development assessment or in other planning roles within local government, so we have a strong representation in local government. The remainder work in private consulting, state government, various agencies and academia.

The CHAIR — If I could just stop you at that point.

Mr DUNN — Sure.

The CHAIR — People in the development community are commenting that planners in local government are being inveigled, poached or persuaded to leave local government as a sector to work in planning in the private sector and that that has a negative effect, from their perception — and they were prepared to place that comment on the record — on the quality of planners within local government and/or the potential for any retention strategies for local government to maintain high-quality planners within that sector.

Mr DUNN — I think it is an issue, and it is an issue because generally there is a shortage of planners and other professional people. Engineers have a similar issue. People move between local government and local government — different councils — and often to the private sector. They move both ways. Generally we say that is a good thing from a professional development, a personal development and a career development perspective, but it can mean there is a lot of churn in some councils as people move through. Perhaps it is more difficult for them to retain some people. If they are good operators and they are exceptionally good at what they do, then perhaps they are attracted by higher salaries and so on outside of local government. It is an issue.

The CHAIR — Are there any professional barriers to entry for people to be planners? There are no quotas on planners as there are in other professions?

Mr DUNN — No, there are not. Obviously they need to be qualified, so there are tertiary qualifications that generally local councils would be looking to have — that they have a certain amount of experience to fill a certain level position. Nationally the institute has introduced certified practising planner status, so we have an accreditation status which requires ongoing professional development plus minimum academic achievements and a professional development achievement within the institute. This is a way for us to create ongoing and continuous education and status.

The CHAIR — How are planners in Australia ranked worldwide?

Mr DUNN — It is a good question, and I do not have a really good answer to it. Generally we know that in Europe and the UK, Australian planners are well sought after, and a lot of young Australian planners now go and spend a couple of years overseas, particularly in the UK and Ireland where they can easily find work, and they are sought after.

Just talking about membership, PIA corporate membership is for individuals. We also have student, graduate, fellow and honorary fellow grades, and we have people who are outside the planning profession — outside planning qualifications — as members as well.

What does our organisation do? We encourage community debate on a number of issues and we seek to make comment in open forums about planning issues. We promote the professional interests of our members. We establish and administer standards of professional competency, and I spoke about our certified practising planner status. We develop and communicate planning knowledge and research and support professional development. We have professional networking opportunities, and we seek to influence planning within the community, government and industry. A lot of our work is around supporting our members through training and education and also representing them at various forums.

We will just talk a little bit now about our submission and in particular our Call to Action role. I will ask Stuart to take over.

Mr WORN — In relation to our submission, we have identified three key areas from our existing policy platform that I think we should highlight to you. In relation to each of these areas we have highlighted flaws in the system as examples. There are others. Then we have identified ways that these flaws can be fixed. Not only will we be saying what is wrong but we will be putting up how it can be fixed.
The first issue I want to talk about is our system; the policy and legislative framework under which planning is undertaken in Victoria. We have titled that ‘Spring clean the planning system’. The fundamental umbrella of the planning system is the Planning and Environment Act, which was formed back in 1987. At that time it was the best act in Australia, and we were all very proud of it then.

I guess it is now a little bit old and a little bit outdated. It does not reflect the issues as the world is structured today but as what it was in 1987, but the world has moved on and we need a reviewed act or a new act. That would be the fundamental flaw that we identify. To illustrate those concerns with our legislative environment, the act does not deal with our own strategies. It did not deal with Melbourne 2030, which evolved into Melbourne @ 5 Million, and therefore it is highly unlikely to be able to create a legislative umbrella to support the new metropolitan strategy that the government has committed to. It does not support things like having effective processes for the developers contributing towards the amenity that the areas they create need. So it does not facilitate a good process for development contribution plans. In fact we saw the government respond to that last week by announcing a review of development contribution plans; thankfully the institute has been invited to be part of that. It does not actually create a good approval process, a best practice approval process. Some of the others who have come and spoken to this committee might have addressed that.

We need to review our planning legislative framework to bring it up to date; that would be our first call. One of the things we think could be done to do that would be, clearly, a comprehensive and independent review of the Planning and Environment Act. The previous government in 2010 undertook a review of the act, and there was an analogy in the review about whether the car — referring to the act — needed an overhaul or whether it just needed a good wash or something to that effect. In our response the institute suggested, using that analogy, that perhaps the act should be turned into a tram or a train rather than be a car. Unfortunately the exposure draft that we saw was a very light review and it was done by the department that was the custodian of the review so, to use another bad analogy, it was like asking parents if they have ugly babies — of course they don’t. The department did not have a very harsh view of its own act because I believe it was too close to it. So we would like to see an independent and a comprehensive review of the act.

We believe that planning becomes highly political. Again we saw that last year with the growth area infrastructure contributions and also with the Windsor affair where there was a lot of point scoring undertaken between political parties about the politics of planning. We also see it in local government. We see local councillors, elected officers, getting involved in site-specific decisions and often overruling the recommendations of their expert planners, which again helps to create some of the churn that was touched on earlier in local government. We would like to see the planning system depoliticised. We are not trying to take democracy out of planning — we think there is a key role for elected officers in setting policy — but we would like to then see that policy administered by their expert officers: set the direction and let the troops get on with delivering that. Some of the things we would like to do to see that depoliticisation of the planning system is the creation of a Governor in Council or similar type of appointment, called the state planner. We have seen that successfully instigated in other states — Queensland has a state planner. Victoria has other state officers such as state architects and surveyor-generals.

The CHAIR — I might just stop you at that point, Mr Worn. Is Queensland the only example in Australia, or are there other examples in western democracies that are equivalent?

Mr WORN — Yes, New South Wales and Western Australia also have — what are they called, something generals? What is the head of the department? They do not call them state planners, but they have a senior individual in that state responsible for the administration of the planning system. Director-general is what they are called in New South Wales and Western Australia. The directors-general are responsible for reporting to Parliament on the implementation of the acts and on the appropriateness of the acts and things of that nature. So having an independent officer who can stand up, without fear or favour, without taking a political bent on it, and present to the Parliament about the success of the government in delivering its policies I think is an important aspect missing in the Victorian system. It would also mean that we would not see the potential politicisation of decisions because the state planner would have a delegated responsibility from the Minister for Planning for call-ins, for when the minister calls in a specific decision.

Two weeks ago we saw some media around the minister calling in a development in Footscray. Regardless of whether that was a good matter or a bad matter or whether or not he was acting on the delegation that was created by the previous government, it would be depoliticised and we would not have local councillors and the
shadow minister having an argument with the minister about the appropriateness of this. If it was done by an officer following government policy —

The CHAIR — I might just stop you at that point. Are we talking about a reflection upon a particular period of time, or are we talking about a trend, a negative trend? Things can be sort of episodic, cyclic, in terms of the problems with planning and planning decision making.

Mr WORN — Yes.

The CHAIR — So is this a trend we are talking about? Is it cyclic, episodic around a particular political outlook?

Mr WORN — No, I do not think it is about a political outlook; I think it has become a trend. We have seen it from the pre-Kennett, through the Kennett government, through the Bracks-Brumby governments and now into this government potentially, where the planning outcomes are becoming more political. Maybe it is a function of technology that people are more aware of them. But I think, if we look far enough back in time, the planning of Melbourne was done by the Melbourne and metropolitan authority for a long time, and that meant that we had an independent body doing the planning for Melbourne, so it was not getting the same type of politicisation that we see today.

Mr DUNN — I think there is also a tension between decisions that could be seen to be in the best interests of the state or the region or the metropolitan area — often the local authority is being asked to make those decisions. In some situations there is a conflict there because at a local level there may be opposition around that issue. But at a state level or a metropolitan level there may be good reasons for making that decision and the only way for it to be made is for the minister to step in and make it, and then there will be criticism that the minister has overridden and it becomes a political issue. I guess what we are saying is if there was an independent person, qualified, established by the government, who was empowered to make those decisions in the best interests of the people of Victoria, the state, under policy and under guidance, then it depoliticises that decision making.

The CHAIR — Would you forecast a reaction from local government, no matter how much claim we said there was to depoliticisation and/or the independence of such a person?

Mr DUNN — There would be criticism, that is true, but it is a matter of putting it within boundaries so that it is not able to operate beyond reasonable issues.

The CHAIR — So to have the status like an ombudsman, perhaps?

Mr DUNN — Yes, exactly.

Ms GRALEY — Sorry, Chair, but I have to ask: it would not be as though they would deal with every planning permit?

Mr DUNN — Not at all.

Ms GRALEY — Local government would still — I mean, is it not 95 per cent that is already done under delegation anyway?

Mr DUNN — Yes, and it should stay that way. These are sort of the exceptions to the rule, but often where there is a conflict between a local issue and a metropolitan issue, for example.

Moving on from the state planner but in a similar vein, there are a couple of other mechanisms, such as delegation to suitably qualified and experienced officers and also the implementation of what is nationally called the development assessment framework, or DAF, model. In Victoria that context is called planning referral authority. Again, that was a platform of the newly elected government. That is something that we see as a positive — having expert panels making decisions on issues that would be lesser than what would be considered by the state planner but still under policy frameworks decided on by elected officials — and then introducing code assessment and delegation. Code assessment is for the simpler applications such as ticking a box for, ‘Does this comply?’ — if it complies with all these things — ‘Please proceed’, and if it does not comply, then it needs to go into a different application process. Again, pleasingly, Minister Guy has recently
talked about introducing development assessments in Victoria. That is something that we see as a very big positive.

There are a couple of other things that are missing from our planning system, such as reviews of state and local planning policies: having regulated, regular reviews — let us say every four years these documents need to be reviewed — and a wholesale review of the Victorian planning provisions and planning schemes, because these documents have become quite lengthy over time. No-one has applied the rule of for every word you put in you need to take one out; they have just kept adding words. In fact they are quite contradictory and quite voluminous documents, so they are very difficult to see.

Therefore in a sense we have a complex planning system in Victoria. Our analogy is that it needs a spring clean. The second area we would like to draw to your attention is our population. It is increasing — and we are not for or against negative population growth — but I guess the planning professions look at this and say, ‘Well, it is happening, so we need to deal with it. Where will these people live? How will they live? How will they interact with one another? Do we want to see them continue to grow or would we like to see a more consolidated Melbourne with people living closer together and enjoying high amenities?’.

Clearly the planning institute would like to see a higher standard of living for people, and we consider that to mean people having access to a variety of amenities, services and infrastructure. Urban sprawl does not necessarily facilitate that, because it requires an increased supply of services and duplicated services rather than a greater utilisation of existing services.

Right now we have an urban growth boundary around Melbourne, and we have recently seen that expanded. We are currently having a process of logical inclusions considered, but we would like to see that concept perhaps also applied to our other urban environments in our regional centres and local communities. We would like to see, clearly, higher density zoning, we would like to see people able to live closer together, we would like to see people have greater access to amenities and we would also like to protect farming areas. We think it is very important that people have access to fresh, affordable and locally produced food.

We are very conscious of the kilometres that food travels. I must tell you, anecdotally, that I recently went to Costco and discovered that you can buy fresh lobsters from Canada, mussels from New Zealand and coconuts from Samoa, which all seem very appropriate, but they are all things that we can also produce in Australia. I was disappointed that we have to bring lobsters and those other things in from overseas.

We believe we should develop contributions to help deliver infrastructure more quickly. We see that already taking place with the growth areas infrastructure contribution, but we also believe that development contributions need to be reconsidered so that we can get quicker delivery of public transport and other amenities to people moving into growth areas.

We should also look at other ways of making different types of housing, and hence hopefully more affordable housing, available, particularly social housing and key worker housing. We believe the government needs to look at some new mechanisms and new tools for doing that, whether it is tax incentives for people to build co-rental accommodation or transferable development rights or a variety of other mechanisms that have been applied in other states of Australia and overseas to get different types of housing.

_The CHAIR_ — If I could just interrupt you there, you used the term, ‘key worker housing’. Could you expand on that?

_Mr WORN_ — This is housing for people who deliver services that the community needs but who sometimes cannot afford to live in the community where they are delivering those services. They might be people who are paid average or below-average wages and therefore cannot afford to necessarily live in those areas. They have to live in places that are relatively cheap. They are the people who cut your hair, make your coffee and clean the buildings you work in — —

_Ms GRALEY_ — Overseas-trained doctors.
Mr WORN — Yes. It is accommodation for people who are not making a lot of money and who cannot afford high rents or large mortgages. Sometimes that is rental accommodation, and sometimes it is cheaper or smaller types of housing that people can buy and transition through as they climb the economic ladder. We need to ensure that there are different types of housing and that we do not build suburbs that are all the same, because then only one type of person can live there. We need to create suburbs where people can age in place so that as their lives progress they do not move away from their friends and family, they just change the type of house they live in. At some point in your life when you have an expanding family you will need a larger house, but at other points when you are young or more senior you might need a smaller house.

People should have the capacity to stay in the place where they live and where their friends, family and employment are but just move between houses. We need to create diversity in what is being built in our suburbs. It just comes back to this idea of diversity for many reasons.

We need to have a strategic land use policy. Pleasingly, the government is talking about a new metropolitan strategy, but that needs to apply to all urban environments, not just Melbourne. It needs to apply to Geelong, as Ian Kett before us would have said, and it needs to apply to the Bendigos, the Ballarats, the Wangarattas and the Wodongas — all our regional centres. Everywhere we live needs to have a strategy. We cannot let places happen by accident, because then they are not well-planned places.

The third component that we thought we needed to talk about under your terms of reference was the environment that we create. Clearly it needs to be a sustainable environment and hopefully it is a healthy environment as well, because we have to prevent preventable things from happening. We need healthy places for people to live, where they can exercise and where they are socially connected, but they also need to be attractive places. We need to ensure that Victoria is creating places that people find attractive, that people want to live in and where the built environment inspires them.

Early last year the Victorian government introduced a charter for urban design, and this charter is a wonderful document. The institute endorses it, but it just has not been implemented. We have this wonderful charter — a best practice charter in Australia for urban design — but it is just collecting dust. We are not doing anything with it. We could be creating a much more attractive place for people to live.

The CHAIR — Are you talking about other bodies and entities, such people in government and so on, in terms of the uptake of the charter?

Mr WORN — It is the Victorian government charter, so — —

Ms GRALEY — Who does it apply to?

Mr WORN — It does not apply to anyone, because the government created an urban design charter but did not mandate it and did not say people have to apply the urban design charter. If the government builds something, it can choose to apply its own design charter or, as it does now, it can choose to ignore it.

The CHAIR — When was the charter actually formulated and released?

Mr WORN — It was released early in 2010, I believe. I cannot be precise on that date, but the government came to the institute, presented it to our committee meeting and asked us to endorse it. We thought about it and debated it, and we wrote back and said, ‘We endorse this charter. We think it is a wonderful thing’, but it is not doing anything.

The CHAIR — Have you raised this with the new government?

Mr WORN — Yes, we have. We have raised these matters that we are discussing today with the government and also with the opposition.

Ms GRALEY — Who did you think it applied to?

Mr WORN — We had hoped that it would apply to everyone.

Ms GRALEY — To me, or others, building a house?
Mr WORN — Yes. Why not? It should be pretty easy to have it apply to you, and at the same time it should not have any impact on you. Urban design is more than just about what your house might look like. It is more about what the places we create look like. The images that we used in relation to this tell the story. We talked about bridge pylons and large community infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and things of that nature. Urban character is something that everyone concentrates on all the time, and that is maintaining historical character and heritage buildings. But it is also about making sure we create vibrant and attractive new places as well.

We just hope that maybe we can become a bit more design focused in the places we are creating. We did identify some issues that we have not spoken to you about — we believe they are outside your terms of reference — but we are happy to talk to you about them because we think they are very important.

The CHAIR — Do they relate to the geographical areas that we are focusing on?

Mr WORN — Yes.

The CHAIR — Outer suburban areas?

Mr WORN — Definitely. They are about integrated land use and transport planning. They are also about sustainable development and making sure we reduce our footprint and also about how the community participates in the planning process, so I would suggest they all apply to the outer environments. We just did not feel they fitted inside your terms of reference.

The CHAIR — We do have another reference that will be in the public domain in the second half of this year, which will be ‘Growing our suburbs’.

Mr WORN — Right. We can save them up for then, if you like.

The CHAIR — It is probably an opportunity for you. I will give you a heads-up on that.

Mr WORN — They are in our presentation — the next six slides — and they are also in our Call to Action document that we have identified to you, so I will now hand over to Steve.

Mr DUNN — We have just got a couple of points that we think are relevant to close on — some key issues that we would stress for your inquiry. Stuart has touched on a number of these. For the reasons you just heard we believe that we should be promoting greater housing diversity so that we can basically provide for the full range of household types and people as they age and so that people are able to remain in place or live in the suburb that they are currently in but look for a different housing type. The growth at the edges of Melbourne tends to be very consistent in its housing type. The market is very good at delivering family housing. Often the subdivision pattern — the suburbs we create — makes it difficult to go back and change some of that or to retrofit different housing types.

The CHAIR — In terms of housing affordability, some of the terms we hear used include the ‘salt-and-pepper approach’, with social housing interspersed within large-scale developments, and diversity in terms of building stock, such as terraces with rear loading and a range of different sizes and mixtures. We have actually seen some; we went to Western Australia and saw some estates there. Taking into account the issues to do with return on investment, expediting projects and the logistics of streaming trades to a point where there is a template approach, what needs to be done in Victoria to get all developers to look at it from a mixed approach instead of a few footprints just rolled out for all? We understand those principles, but what can be done to encourage developers to offer diversity within that stock?

Mr DUNN — I think one would be a clear message from the government that that is what we are seeking. At the moment we probably do not have a very strong message in new suburbs that the government actually wants to see a diversity of housing product. It does want to see housing types that are on small lots and large lots and housing of single and double storeys stratified into multi-unit housing as well. We need to be very clear that that is what we are looking for.

We say that the planning system can probably be simplified in some ways to facilitate that. For example, there is the case of building on small lots. At the moment the planning system requires planning permits for building on lots under 300 square metres. In many situations that then adds additional time and cost to the developer to
be able to deliver that, whereas the standard house on the standard lot does not. It just proceeds as of right, so there are those sorts of changes. Then it is going a little bit further. It is actually using demonstration, identifying good examples, talking to the industry, saying, ‘We would like to see that reproduced’, and then finding ways of facilitating that happening.

We are seeing some land development companies that are quite good at delivering housing diversity and others that are lagging behind and are not that interested in providing diversity. It is not a simple answer. There are a number of things we have to do.

The CHAIR — Deputy Chair, do you want to ask a question?

Ms GRALEY — Yes, I would like to ask a question. Stuart, you talked about creating attractive places and about how the built environment inspires people and probably inspires you, too, as a planner. I just wondered if you could give me some examples that you know of in the outer suburbs or some local or international examples that you would say were great examples of what you would consider to be livable suburbs and how you think they should be funded to create that sort of thing. There is all this stuff about the developers’ contributions and the GAIC funds and things like that, but how do you think we should fund a livable suburb right from the start? I think you say in here that you would like to see them livable right from almost the start.

Mr WORN — There is the component of market forces. Developers will tell you that they build what the community wants. The opposite argument to that says that the community gets what the developers build. I think best practice will lead the development industry to build better places that are more sustainable and more attractive and that create better and healthier communities.

I think the big developers will start to do that, but that will not compel the smaller developers to follow that lead, because there is no requirement. There is no minimum standard. When we talked about spring cleaning our planning process, we talked about not only the way the system works but also what the system compels people to do. We do not necessarily want to create a greater legislative burden, but we want legislation to reflect what is best practice or what we think the minimum standards for practice should be.

We should be building. We are in the first world. We are one of the most livable places on the planet. We should be building highly attractive places where people actually interact with one another — healthy places for people to live that are, of course, sustainable, places where there is local employment so people do not have to travel too far to work, and places where people can have water-sensitive designs so that they can reuse their stormwater or have a third pipe bringing back recycled water. There are many things we could have.

The comment about what makes a place attractive is a little bit subjective, because what I think might be wonderful clearly might not be the case for others. However, I do think that places need to exhibit good urban design, and I think the government’s charter about that gives a framework to be applied. It is disappointing that we have a framework that has not been applied. I will cite two cases for you, not as examples but to provide a contrast, and those are the two latest stadiums to be built in metropolitan Melbourne on a mass scale — the Docklands Stadium and the new Rectangular Stadium. The Rectangular Stadium down near Melbourne Park is a very attractive building. It challenges people aesthetically, and it works functionally. The Docklands stadium works very functionally, but is it attractive? I think it is — —

Ms GRALEY — It is in the wrong direction.

Mr WORN — There are many things wrong with it. You are not going to see it on a postcard like you see the Sydney Harbour Bridge or the Eiffel Tower, are you? I guess I wonder whether we should be producing attractive places as well as functional places.

Mr DUNN — Can I add, just to answer your question seeking examples in the Melbourne context, I think you could look at Caroline Springs as an area. It is perhaps a little bit more expensive in terms of its house and land costs, but in terms of starting with a very dry — —

Ms GRALEY — Volcanic base.

Mr DUNN — A volcanic base — not a terribly effective environment. By using water and trying to create a more dense sort of centre through the shared use of sporting facilities, a library and school facilities, they have
created quite an attractive and interesting suburb. It is an outer suburb where they have created enough amenity and attractiveness in it that they are building medium-density and high-density housing quite successfully. It can be done. I think that in some of the suburbs to the north through the Plenty corridor, particularly where they have used the existing trees and the topography as a base, we have created some very attractive new communities out there that are also very attractive places to live. So it can be done.

Ms GRALEY — And funding it? Who should fund it and when?

Mr DUNN — There are a range of costs. There are costs that developers need to provide as part of the development costs. I think developer contributions in these new suburbs are an integral part of funding that local infrastructure in particular. There is a lot of discussion and controversy about how much those contributions should be and who pays for what, and there is a review of that now under way, but I guess what we would say is that it is essential that they pay for that early infrastructure, otherwise there can often be a lag of many years before some basic infrastructure is provided.

Mr WORN — On that, when we talk about the supply of transport it is very important that public transport be supplied early in growth areas, because if people do not have access to buses or other forms of public transport, they make decisions that can then discourage them from using that transport when it might arrive later. For example, you arrive in a suburb and you buy the second car, so suddenly when the bus arrives the bus is not needed because there is a second car, and therefore because there is no demand for the bus service, it takes even longer for the bus service to arrive.

It is chicken and egg. We need to put public transport and other infrastructure like that in there early so that the communities do not find alternative solutions to the problems they face in living in these new areas. I appreciate that therefore it means that the demand might not be there on day one for the bus service, but it will be there a lot quicker if the bus service is there rather than waiting for the people to actually be there before the bus service, if that makes sense.

Ms McLEISH — Earlier you said that one of your key roles was supporting members through education and training, and I wonder whether through that function you provide any education or training around livability or whether there is a role for you to perhaps do more of that in the future.

Mr WORN — We accredit all the university courses that teach planning. The institute has specific criteria required to be delivered by each of the courses we recognise for membership, so we make sure the courses address social, environmental and a variety of areas to make sure the planners who are being produced have balanced experience. We also run a very active professional development program and have a requirement of continued professional development on our members, and in addition to that we provide a certification called certified practising planner, which Steve touched on earlier.

We are trying to make sure we have a well-skilled workforce, but there are still areas where we could do further. I would like to see — and I have raised this with some of the universities — a TAFE program introduced so that we can produce what we call paraplanners or create another pathway for people to enter into the profession, because you often see TAFE graduates then move on to undergraduate or masters programs. It also creates a great opportunity for people who are career changers and want to have a dip in and see what the profession is like. I often say that it provides another pathway for those who probably did not pay enough attention in year 12 to enter the profession.

I believe there is a gap in the pathways to becoming a planner at the moment, and that is a TAFE program. There is a Swinburne certificate IV course, but it is very restrictive in that it is small and requires those participating to already be working in local government. It is not at all addressing the skills shortage that we believe exists, particularly in local government. If we are successful in seeing code assessment introduced, there will be a greater demand for people who have an understanding of the planning system but are not necessarily qualified planners to be participating in that process. There will instantly be a new workforce required, and they will need some education. That is where a TAFE program could fill another niche.

I would love to see one of the outer metropolitan TAFEs involved in delivering that. I think there are great opportunities there. Pleasingly Deakin University, which was here before us, has just applied to have a new masters program in planning introduced, and it is currently going through our accreditation program. That will be exciting because it will be delivered out at Geelong, so we will have La Trobe delivering a regional planning
program out of Bendigo and Deakin delivering a masters program at Geelong, and then we will have RMIT and Melbourne delivering programs at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in Melbourne. I feel that we will have a very good set of academic programs in Victoria that will all be accredited.

Mr DUNN — I will say one thing we have not talked about — and you are no doubt thinking about it as well — and that is local employment in these areas and how important it is to create local jobs just to reduce travel to work. We know that people in the outer suburbs travel much further to work and are disadvantaged through that, so the planning system needs to identify and facilitate opportunities for working from home, working in local centres and working in local employment areas and make sure that we have the planning right so that we have road, freight and transport systems that facilitate all of that. No doubt that is something you have already heard about or talked about.

Ms GRALEY — We have heard a lot about it.

The CHAIR — We have one formal question to put to you. Your submission states that there is a need for a spring-clean in the planning system and recommends a number of actions, including various changes to the Planning and Environment Act 1987. In your opinion, which reforms will have the greatest impact in terms of: boosting the supply of housing in outer suburban Melbourne and in Melbourne overall; and improving housing affordability for the first home buyer?

Mr DUNN — In terms of spring-cleaning the planning system?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr DUNN — As we said, we believe to begin with the planning act needs to be updated and that its objectives need to be quite clear about what it is we are trying to achieve in these areas. There are some aspects of the planning system that add time and cost — some of the planning approval processes, even structure planning processes, subdivision and basically bringing land onto the market. We believe there are ways of reducing that time and cost element, and that will have an impact on housing affordability. They are probably the key actions.

The CHAIR — Mr Dunn, Mr Worn and Ms Stevenson, thank you very much for coming along today. The quality of your submission is excellent. I have very much enjoyed immersing myself in your submission. We take note of your Call to Action document as well, and we thank you very much for your participation today. We may well be in contact with you again as we refine our response to this, just in case we need some fine attention to detail. That would be through our executive officer in the first instance.

Mr DUNN — We would be happy to do that.

The CHAIR — Thank you to each of you for coming along today.

Witnesses withdrew.

Proceedings part in camera [Confidential Material Redacted] follow.