

# **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into the 2022-23 Budget Estimates**

Melbourne—Thursday, 19 May 2022

### **MEMBERS**

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Danny O'Brien—Deputy Chair

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr Gary Maas

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr James Newbury

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor



**WITNESSES**

Mr Shaun Leane MLC, Minister for Suburban Development (*via videoconference*),

Mr Simon Phemister, Secretary,

Dr Emily Phillips, Deputy Secretary, Local Government and Suburban Development, and

Ms Sara Harbidge, Executive Director, Local Government, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

I begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their elders past, present and emerging as well as elders from other communities who may be with us today.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2022–23 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

We again welcome Minister Leane, this time for the suburban development portfolio. We invite you to make a short opening statement, which will be followed by questions from the committee. Thank you, Minister.

**Visual presentation.**

**Mr LEANE:** Thank you so much, Chair, and thanks for the opportunity to present on the Suburban Development portfolio this afternoon. Suburban Development builds on connections between the community and the government to deliver on shared priorities. This is done by engaging to understand community priorities, delivering programs and grants, coordinating stakeholders and leveraging off co-contributors to achieve common goals.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Suburban Development has taken a lead role, working with suburban communities to understand impacts and support community priorities through the response and now for our recovery. I am very pleased that this year's budget commits a further \$24.7 million to the Suburban Development portfolio, allowing further investment and grants through our Suburban Revitalisation program. This investment will support the revitalisation of suburbs across the Melbourne metropolitan area and contribute to the recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 in the hardest hit communities.

The Suburban Revitalisation board program has been extended, with a further \$9.7 million for our eight boards to deliver projects and programs in partnership with the community and local businesses in some of our most disadvantaged communities. The \$15 million Living Local Fund will provide funding for local community projects that promote social connection, enhance livability and revitalise suburban shopping strips. It will also provide grants to community not-for-profit organisations to support our local communities.

In last year's budget the Suburban Revitalisation program supported eight revitalisation boards. Over 150 projects were supported by the boards, meaning some of Melbourne's most disadvantaged suburbs benefited from direct investment in infrastructure, events and community programs. Since 2020 the eight boards have committed a total of \$23 million, leveraging over \$28 million in partner contributions for a total project value of \$51 million. I take the opportunity to thank all the members of Suburban Revitalisation boards, who volunteer their time to improve their local community, and all our delivery partners, including local government. Delivery is underway for targeted revitalisation programs funded previously in Altona and

Springvale which will provide improved public infrastructure for the benefit of the community and the businesses in those areas.

This year's budget builds on the existing strengthening regional and metropolitan partnership initiative, which includes \$10.9 million over two years from the 2021–22 budget for the Suburban Development portfolio to continue in the Metropolitan Partnership program. The Metropolitan Partnerships ensure local voices continue to inform decision-making by bringing together 59 representatives, including experts and leaders from the community, to identify and progress ideas and projects that matter to their region of Melbourne. The partnerships support a range of projects in the region which are taking direct local action to provide job pathways and connections, to progress initiatives, to reduce social isolation and to foster community connections. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the members of Metropolitan Partnerships, who have worked well together in recent times to pivot to virtual meetings and online community engagement and have remained committed and energised to support the economic and social resilience of our regions.

And just if I could, I will highlight a few of the Suburban Revitalisation programs we have been able to deliver through the work of the boards. I have been fortunate enough to visit a number of these particular projects and speak to the people about how passionately they believe in these projects and how happy they are that they are being delivered. The Penrose Community Garden program in Tarneit is supporting the Māori Pasifika community to come together. The Noble Park Big Day Out community and cultural festival in March was conceived and delivered by the Noble Park Youth Committee and the City of Greater Dandenong. Brite, a social enterprise providing training and jobs for people with disability, will expand their nursery in Broadmeadows to increase capacity and create at least 14 new jobs for people with disability. The Reservoir Neighbourhood House will upgrade their social enterprise, the Birds and Beans cafe, to provide training and opportunities for disadvantaged people. In Lilydale local gardening organisations delivered the community garden in Main Street, Lilydale, which I was fortunate enough to be able to have a look at. There was a great bit of work from the Boronia board supporting Knox Infolink to start a community breakfast program to connect vulnerable people to support services, and I also felt very fortunate that I could witness that myself. It is actually fantastic work being done by those boards, and all the boards do fantastic work. I think I will leave it there, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Mr Newbury.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Minister, can I take you to page 82 of budget paper 3 and the 'Our suburbs' subheading at the bottom of the page. Have you got that?

**Mr LEANE:** Yes.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Why are all of those suburbs in Labor seats?

**Mr LEANE:** If you could assist me a bit, Mr Newbury, are you referring to the—

**Mr NEWBURY:** The revitalisation boards—apart from one suburb, they are all in Labor seats.

**Mr LEANE:** Yes. Well, I think that—

**Mr NEWBURY:** Is that just luck?

**Mr LEANE:** That is where you threw me, because when you said 'All of those suburbs'—

**Mr NEWBURY:** No. There is one token one that is not.

**Mr LEANE:** because actually that is not true. But thank you for correcting yourself to say that one of them is not actually in a Labor-held seat, and I appreciate you winding that rhetoric back to the point that you did.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Not much.

**Mr LEANE:** The selection of the suburbs that support revitalisation boards is based upon socio-economic needs, principally measured by the socio-economic indices of the area, and also the willingness to form partnerships of local government, the community and businesses to support a coordinated approach in setting local priorities and a demonstrated need for coordination of government investment. The suburbs selected

within the Suburban Revitalisation program represent some of the most relatively disadvantaged areas within greater Melbourne. They are areas where disadvantage has unfortunately sometimes been entrenched and concentrated. Those living in the suburbs that have boards as part of the Suburban Revitalisation program experience low educational outcomes, higher unemployment, lower income, housing stress and are comprised of a higher number of newly arrived migrants and refugees. The activity centres within the selected suburbs have often been neglected over decades, and that is why this government wants to make sure that there is emphasis in revitalising those particular areas. We do go by their SEIFA scores. You know, you can see that all of the eight fall in areas that, as I said, based on socio-economic needs but also conversations and approaches by local government and community groups that are keen to grow these areas where these revitalisation boards have been centred. As I said in my presentation, they are doing fantastic work.

**Mr NEWBURY:** On that same reference, Minister, the budget notes the provision of money is in continuation. Why weren't different suburbs identified to receive support?

**Mr LEANE:** I am not too sure if I said this in my presentation, but there were originally, for the past few years before last year, two revitalisation boards, in Broadmeadows and Frankston. We increased that by six new suburbs in last year's budget given that these revitalisation boards in Broadmeadows and Frankston were so successful. I think what has driven us is we have proven that it is a good example of how to get the community together—there are a lot of people doing good work in these suburbs—and how to actually help identify and support them. Some of the funding programs support them with funding as well, which we have shown actually works. As I said, some of the examples from the funding have been absolutely fantastic.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Minister, with that same reference: for the Boronia board, which was established in 2021 and received continued funding, on the 'Revitalising Boronia' link on the suburban development website no projects have been completed. What works will be completed and when?

**Mr LEANE:** That is an anomaly on the website that can be and will be fixed. As I stated in my presentation, there is the Boronia community breakfast program in partnership with Knox Infolink that was funded for \$148 000, which has actually been up and running. We believe that people that are using the breakfast service are actually being linked to a lot of services via that interaction. They have found it to be very successful. There is \$250 000 for a shared zone and a creative public art project in Lupton Way; \$120 000 for the green spine corridor to link key local destinations; \$150 000 for a large-scale mural in Boronia; and \$50 000 for the first round of business facade upgrade grants. One thing that has clearly gone ahead is the \$80 000 for the Boronia Big Flix Festival near one of the local cinemas. That was a great success. There is \$100 000 to replace major road streetlights and \$200 000 for a program of pop-up events. There have been a number of those pop-up events. If it is not identified on the website what has been delivered, then we will be happy to fix that.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you. Perhaps if you do not mind, either yourself or if I can direct it to the Secretary, can I have a breakdown of funding being provided to each of the boards listed on page 82, on notice, and also how much has been spent by each board to date, if that is okay, Secretary.

**Mr LEANE:** I can jump in there. We are happy to supply a breakdown of projects that have been funded by the revitalisation board. Given that this is a new round of funding, we need to respect that those boards are made up of volunteers of, as I said, high-level people from the community, and they will have to determine how the funding announcement in this budget will be best utilised in those suburbs. So we will not be able to forecast at this point what they are going to try to utilise that funding for, but we can give a breakdown on spending in all the projects that have happened from last year's funding, and I am happy to do that.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Mr Maas.

**Mr MAAS:** Thanks, Chair. And thanks, Minister. If I could take you to the topic of the suburban revitalisation program and refer you to BP3 at page 73. It shows that there is \$24.7 million allocated to the portfolio. You did explain in your presentation that \$9.7 million of that was being allocated to the suburban revitalisation program. How will this recent investment support current activity centre renewal programs in our growing suburbs?

**Mr LEANE:** Thanks, Gary. The allocation of the funding of the Suburban Revitalisation program in this year's budget will continue to support communities to deliver vital projects and programs, fostering social connection and also driving the creation of new jobs. That has actually been a priority of both the revitalisation boards and the Metropolitan Partnerships, I have got to say, that job creation. As I said, Gary, in the previous answer, the people that volunteer their time on the boards are some pretty high-level, highly skilled, fantastic types of people. We are really lucky they volunteer their time to advise our government not just on the spending in the revitalisation or the Metropolitan Partnerships for the funding they have got, but they advise government in a number of areas and on a number of portfolios about government initiatives and on how we should be [Zoom dropout] in a number of areas.

I think I touched on a few of the aspects of, when we are talking about the revitalisation boards, some of the funding that has gone out—and it has been through revitalisation boards and the partnerships. Frankston is an amazing example of the work of a revitalisation board, and so is Broadmeadows. Frankston has a well-known Big Picture Fest, which has delivered these amazing murals in the laneways. I do not know if you have had a chance to check them amount, Gary, but it is actually a tourist attraction there—there is a tour taken to those particular murals—which was born out of the revitalisation board, which Paul Edbrooke has chaired for a number of years. There is also the Fuse festival in Darebin, and I spoke to the acting CEO and the mayor of Darebin only a few weeks ago—and how fantastic that that festival went ahead. I spoke about the Boronia festival, Big Flix, and Noble Park Big Day Out, which, as I said, was organised by a youth committee. That particular revitalisation board, at Noble Park, set up their own youth committee aligned with the board. The youth committee was the one who suggested this great cultural event, which by all reports was absolutely fantastic. As I said in the previous answer, Gary, we really respect the boards' decisions into the future about how they are going to utilise the funding they have afforded to them out of this budget. I just think 'more in the same' as far as the projects that I spoke about go—the garden in Tarneit and other projects.

I just want to go back to the Brite social services in Broadmeadows. Sometimes, as we all know, certain entities may not necessarily fall into easy spaces when it comes to different funding buckets of money, if I can say that, whether it is federal or state. So for the Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board to identify close to \$1 million for the Brite social services in Broadmeadows, which amongst other things is an enterprise that has a nursery—that nursery employs a number of people with disability, and I was privileged actually to go there and meet a number of them—and for \$1 million from that board to extend that particular enterprise so they can, they reckon, employ at least 14 more people with disability through that funding through this board, I think, just goes to show it is a credit to getting back to people that know their area and know where there is going to be some greater good from the Metropolitan Partnership or the board. So I am just nothing but impressed.

I gave particularly the Metropolitan Partners some challenges to identify: there are a lot of good people doing good things, and are there ways for us to help them through suburban development? The long-winded answer to your question, Gary, is I am hoping for more of the same of what we have already had.

**Mr MAAS:** Excellent. Thanks, Minister. There are certainly some excellent initiatives that are taking place as part of that program that are really having very strong impacts on our communities. Thank you. If I could take you to the Living Local Fund, you mentioned in your presentation that there was a \$15 million allocation towards that fund. My question to you is: what will that \$15 million that has been allocated go towards, and could you speak to the benefits of what that will provide to our suburbs?

**Mr LEANE:** Yes. Thanks, Gary. The \$15 million for the Living Local Fund will provide funding for local community projects that promote social connection, enhance livability and revitalise suburban shopping strips—and we have already done a bit of work on that, and that will be available through this fund. Also it will provide grants to community not-for-profit organisations that support local communities.

Going back to my previous answer, if you do not mind, Gary, one thing that the Metropolitan Partnerships have done really well—and I challenged them to do it when I first came into this position—was, you know, there are a lot of good people, whether they be individuals, groups or organisations, that do a lot of good work supporting their community in the areas that these partnerships cover. Once again this is advice from that group of very clever people that we are lucky to have to advise government. They advised us that it would be great if there is a vehicle, if there are small grants for these community groups to just help them do the work that they are doing—and sometimes it is just hard-core. And as you know very well, Gary, for some of these small organisations, it is hard to fund equipment that assists them in what they do. This is from the advice from the

Metropolitan Partnerships that there could be a vehicle to assist them, for our government to assist them to do the great work that they do.

Getting back to the other component, when I was talking about funding community projects, we talk about parks and other really critical social infrastructure that I think in the last few years communities got to know really well and got to appreciate really well, so there is the opportunity for enhancement, there is opportunity to increase those sorts of facilities, which we see as really important. That comes from Metropolitan Partnership advice as well. I think we will produce the guidelines and hopefully have applications for that particular fund ready in the next few months. I think it is a great bit of advice from the Metropolitan Partnerships and I think that it is going to go a long way to supporting particularly groups—or individuals or groups, I should say—that do magnificent work in the community, and we all know them. So I think it is a great opportunity.

**Mr MAAS:** Thanks, Minister. I will leave it there. I am out of time.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Hibbins.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thanks, Chair. Minister, I want to keep with the Living Local Fund. You have indicated that that is both for capital works for shopping strips and livability and what have you but also then for not-for-profit organisations and local community groups. Can you give the committee an indication in terms of what the size of the individual grants will be?

**Mr LEANE:** Thanks, Mr Hibbins. We are still working through what would be the best quantum. I can tell you that it will be around a smaller figure rather than a larger figure, because from the conversations that we have had, and as I mentioned to Gary, sometimes a few thousand dollars—\$5000 for equipment—can change the way some of these really good organisations operate going forward as far as buying equipment rather than going without goes. So I think we are looking at it as a lower level of grant rather than anything in the hundreds of thousands.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay. Is that for the community groups? What about for the capital works for, say, shopping strips and what have you?

**Mr LEANE:** For the capital works of course we will be looking at larger quantum. We are not looking at a million dollars per project; we are looking at, once again, probably smaller amounts in the hundreds of thousands that can go a long way in enhancements.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Yes. Okay. Thank you, Minister. I think previously we have discussed the 20-minute cities. I understand your office oversees that particular project. I understand you did some pilot projects—or are they underway? Have they been completed? And then what is the next step for 20-minute cities—or 20-minute neighbourhoods, I should say?

**Mr LEANE:** Yes, 20-minute neighbourhoods. Yes, we did discuss this in the last Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and I do appreciate and understand your interest in this. We have done some really good work with the Metropolitan Partnerships in that we went for a period of time where everyone was actually within 20 minutes of their house, whether they appreciated it or not. So I think that there were a lot of learnings that we took from that. And I think that we have had some really good advice from the Metropolitan Partnerships when it comes to what should be available for someone within 20 minutes of their house. I have spoken about it before: recreation, particularly parks and other facilities that are really important. The suburban shopping strips became very important, and we are doing work around that too. We have already done some work in another program about improvements to shopping strips; you know, it seems to be a pretty popular request. Particularly some of these shopping strips look very tired, but once there is a bit of work done they just take on a whole new atmosphere and get a lot more people actually using them, which is important to that 20-minute neighbourhood aspect. Can I take it on notice in relation to the completion of those trials? I will get that to you as soon as possible.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay, and any next steps being taken. Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Hibbins.

That concludes the time we have set aside for consideration of the suburban development portfolio today. Thank you for appearing before the committee. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing and responses will be required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee will take a short break before moving to consideration of the veterans portfolio with you at 10 past 5. I declare this hearing adjourned. Thank you.

**Witnesses withdrew.**