

CORRECTED VERSION

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Subcommittee

Inquiry into environmental design and public health

Melbourne — 6 September 2011

Members

Mr A. Elsbury

Mr C. Ondarchie

Ms S. Pennicuik

Mrs I. Peulich

Mr J. Scheffer

Mr B. Tee

Ms G. Tierney

Chair: Ms G. Tierney

Deputy Chair: Mrs I. Peulich

Staff

Secretary: Mr K. Delaney

Witnesses

Mr N. Higgins, general manager, sustainable development, and

Mr N. Matteo, manager, community planning and advocacy, City of Maribyrnong.

The CHAIR — Thank you for being with us, Nick and Nigel. Other members should be joining us as we proceed. You have probably done this a few times before, but I am obliged to advise you that your comments, presentation and answers will be covered by parliamentary privilege. Comments you make outside of this forum will not necessarily be covered by parliamentary privilege. The second thing is that the transcript will become available and be sent you in approximately a week. If there are typos or other unresolved issues, could you please make contact and liaise with Keir to sort that out. Before we get into your presentation, I need you to give your full name, the organisation you are representing and the address. In terms of the presentation, I am sure Keir has talked to you about this prior to today, but can we keep it to about 10 minutes so we have maximum time to have interaction and ask you questions.

Mr HIGGINS — I am Nigel Higgins, general manager of sustainable development at Maribyrnong City Council. I have to ask you for the address — I just started there three months ago.

Mr MATTEO — I am Nick Matteo, manager of community planning and advocacy, at the City of Maribyrnong. We are at the corner of Napier Street and Hyde Street Footscray.

The CHAIR — Nigel, are you providing the presentation?

Mr HIGGINS — Nick is actually the expert.

Mr MATTEO — I will take the lead on this. We probably will not need 10 minutes. I had provided you with, really, a summary of our submission. There are four key points we would like to make today. As you are aware, the basis of our submission was around the notion of complex inner city brownfield sites and based on the notion that health outcomes, especially in areas of disadvantage, are often exacerbated by poor planning or the unintended consequences of planning.

You are probably aware that at present some of the planning around brownfield sites for open space and walkability are all good things that have been included in the planning scheme. One of the ongoing challenges we have at council is that we have intergenerational poor health in areas of disadvantage where you have got, based on planning decisions, concentrations of electronic gaming machines, packaged liquor and fast food outlets. All have a cumulative and exponential impact on communities without us having the capacity to balance with fresh food, supermarkets and other things. All of the other good planning elements around walkability and open space have such a marginal impact. We would be asking that in your consideration you think about the good planning aspects but also how do we, in an inner city environment, begin to pare back and reduce that health burden on some of those communities in the long term?

Our submission is really about making sure the Planning and Environment Act is really up-front and clear that its purpose is to ensure the welfare of people and communities. I did a word search on the Planning and Environment Act, and of the 75 000-odd words in that, the words ‘people’ and ‘community’ only appear 47 times. In terms of the balance, I think that is for me a real indication of thinking about rebalancing the intent and language around the act as well so that it is there for people and communities and their ongoing wellbeing in perpetuity.

The CHAIR — How do we make sure that is definitely the outcome and not just a statement?

Mr MATTEO — That it is in the objective, that it is in an up-front, clear statement that it is about communities and people, that it is there in the principles that underpin the act and that it is there so as a real part of the contextual statement around some of the strategies in the act to begin to strengthen that. One of the other elements of our submission is that the Public Health and Wellbeing Act talks about land use planning. It is a recognition that that has a clear role in benefiting the health and outcomes of communities in the long term. There is no reciprocal wording around health in the Planning and Environment Act. Any reciprocity that can occur across the Planning and Environment Act and the Transport Act that really strengthens that mutually reinforcing approach would be beneficial in the long term.

If we start now and build those legislative building blocks, it reduces the amount of legislative ambiguity that we often have. Often some of the difficulties we have at council is where we have a very powerful professional capture between some of our planning areas, some of our health planners and social planners. We will make sure there are no legislative impediments to help us with that better integration at a local level.

Mr SCHEFFER — Just step us through practically. You said health outcomes are harmed by packaged liquor, fast foods and gaming outlets. I think they are the three that you said.

Mr MATTEO — Yes.

Mr SCHEFFER — Then you said the major constraint is the lack of appropriate provisions in the act. If you are looking after that area and you get a planning application, step us through what happens and how that constraint operates to prevent you from protecting the health of the community.

Mr MATTEO — For instance, if we get an application for a packaged liquor outlet in Braybrook, we will make an argument from a health planning perspective. We will do a mapping exercise of the sociodemographic profile of that particular area. We will look at some of the particular notions of disadvantage and health in that area. Then we would try to make an argument that, on balance, another outlet in conjunction with EGMs and other fast food outlets would really reduce the resilience of that community to look after their health. Often what we will find then is when we put that to our strategic planners, their view is that if you look at the Planning and Environment Act there is no provision in that act to support better communities and better balanced communities. At best we have within the organisation a view that the Planning and Environment Act does not have a role or should not contribute or is neutral around that sort of — —

Mr SCHEFFER — The city itself prevents the case that you have just described being advanced? Your own planners say, ‘Don’t go ahead with it’?

Mr MATTEO — Our own planners, based on how they are interpreting the Planning and Environment Act; because it is ambiguous at best, it leads to a point where there is a contested space within the organisation around good health planning and good strategic planning.

Mr SCHEFFER — Why can they not err on the side of following the direction towards good health planning? Why do they have to err, given the ambiguity you have described, on the side of ‘planning caution’?

Mr MATTEO — That gets to the absolute nub of it, Mr Scheffer. There is, at the moment, both at a local government level and state government level, a culture where there is not good, integrated planning and thinking about that together. Often there is that professional capture on either side, and there is not a mechanism or a culture that brings us together on a regular basis to sort that through and on balance come to a conclusion.

Mr SCHEFFER — I do not want to be rude, but what if I said to you that the City of Maribyrnong then does not have the will to push it through, using an ambiguity in the law as a cover for not proceeding with what we know is in the interests of the community?

Mr MATTEO — Can I give you the example then of the recent Edgewater case around electronic gaming machines. Council spent almost \$1 million fighting the relocation of gambling machines to a certain part of the city. We fought that at VCAT, and there is a general view in VCAT, even with council’s strong policy around electronic gaming machines, that on balance the cumulative effect, as they understood the cumulative effect, on that community was not as strong as the argument that we can make.

Mr SCHEFFER — Okay, I can understand about VCAT, but leaving VCAT aside, I just want to go back to the example that you drew before, where it is your own planners that say, ‘Don’t proceed’. What if the city decided that the planners’ view was accepted and understood; however, they were going to change the facts on the ground and actually act as if the health considerations of the community were the priority, and they were to proceed in that direction until someone stopped them?

Mr MATTEO — I understand that, but without that, what we also need as health planners is some support from other parts of the legislation as well. At best we have a line ball. Then it goes back to the organisational culture about: where is there an unwritten hierarchy of legislation? Does the Planning and Environment Act supersede MPPH, for instance? How do we make sure that, irrespective of the changes and organisation, they are contained and sacrosanct?

Mr TEE — At the heart of the question, though, is: is it a question of political will; you just do not want to do it, or is it a question that you do not have the legislation and resources to resist the push for more gaming

machines and more fast food outlets? I suppose that is the critical distinction. Either you do not really want to do it, or you cannot stop it.

Mr MATTEO — Or the costs associated with mounting a case become prohibitive, as with Edgewater. It was \$1 million to fight that case, and if we are going to do that every time, it is unsustainable.

Mr ELSBURY — They are resources you cannot use elsewhere in your community.

Mr MATTEO — It is unsustainable, and it is going to the lawyers instead of going into what we should be doing. I think it is a really good example of where the good intention of the council, the political will and the amount of money put into that make it difficult, because the interpretation by VCAT of the role — —

Mr SCHEFFER — Is it fair to say — I do not want to put words in your mouth — that your own planners say to you, ‘If you proceed down this path — that is, working towards improving the health of the community — the applicant will raise a legal challenge to it, and we will lose’?

Mr MATTEO — And therefore let us not proceed. Let us cut our losses now rather than go through it. That happens every time.

Mr TEE — That suggests, then, a lack of rigour in the legislative or regulatory framework which puts you at a disadvantage.

Mr MATTEO — A little bit, and a lack of that culture of integration, that also is difficult to try to manufacture. That is at the nub of it, really.

Mr ELSBURY — Thank you for your submission. I am a member for your part of the world, so I know Footscray quite well. You are talking about considering an inclusionary zoning for affordable housing. One of your fellow councils, not too far away, just the other side of the Maribyrnong River, is having some issues at the moment with a development that is being proposed, which uses the words ‘affordable housing’. The community has taken that to mean housing commission. They have taken that to mean rusting cars on front lawns and that sort of thing. But what it actually means is \$450 000 a unit in an apartment block. So what are we talking about when you talk about affordable housing, knowing that the price of land in Footscray is increasing significantly? You have got West Footscray developments currently going on that I doubt I could afford. What are we talking about when you say ‘affordable housing development’ or a zone being declared an affordable housing area?

Mr MATTEO — We are talking about a definition of affordable housing that is not determined solely by the market or the land values. It is about individual income and about what is a reasonable amount that people can either pay in rent or mortgage that does not disadvantage them. There is a broader definition of what affordability is, based on 30 per cent of a person’s, or household’s, income. That, from our point of view, would be the definition of affordable housing, not the market. It is a fight we have with developers all the time.

Mr ELSBURY — Are we talking about a social housing project of some description? We are not going to use market forces, but is it still going to be determined on someone’s capacity to pay?

Mr MATTEO — That is right, and it is not social housing per se. This is about working mums and dads who are now being priced out of the market. These are not people on statutory incomes who are the clients of social housing or public housing. It is a whole new cohort that has now emerged overnight that will not have access to ordinary houses that some others have.

Mr ELSBURY — It is almost the working poor scenario.

Mr MATTEO — It is.

Mr SCHEFFER — I am not clear on the area. Are you talking about the Maribyrnong defence land that is being developed?

Mr MATTEO — I am talking about across the board, in any major development having a policy where at least a percentage of that should be affordable housing.

Mr ELSBURY — We have a number of major redevelopment projects that are being proposed in and around Maribyrnong as we speak.

Mr MATTEO — Yes.

Mr ELSBURY — It is not necessarily being pushed by the government either. I cannot remember what road it is on, but a former theatre is being converted into apartments.

Mr MATTEO — In Barkly Street.

Mr ELSBURY — Yes. So you have those sorts of developments going on through private enterprise, but by the same token there is the issue of not having a unit that someone can actually afford at \$350 a week or something like that.

Mr MATTEO — That is exactly right.

Mr ELSBURY — If that is what they can afford. I have not done the numbers. I have not rented for a while.

Mr MATTEO — You have now the federal government with its social housing proposals where the affordability is only there for 8 to 10 years. Again, they are buying time. It is not affordable housing in perpetuity or over a generation where people can lift themselves up. It is not long enough.

Mr HIGGINS — All of the large state government initiatives tend to have 15, 20 per cent affordable housing units in them, so we are saying why should all the other larger scale developments not have a similar commitment to a proportion of the housing units? The defence land will have 20 per cent. Why should the larger scale developments that might produce 100 or 200 units not have a commitment to that affordability?

Mr TEE — When you are talking about affordability, is it affordability so that teachers can afford it, nurses can afford it, ambulance officers — it is that kind of market?

Mr HIGGINS — Yes.

Mr MATTEO — Because if you look at the level of social housing and public housing in Maribyrnong, I think we have got our fair share. It might be overly concentrated in one area, and we would prefer to see it spread, but I think that in terms of having resilient communities, you cannot have pockets of disadvantage over time because it really reduces people's hope. It is not a normal way for people to live.

Mr SCHEFFER — That is right, and it has been shown to work across the city.

Mr MATTEO — Yes.

Mr SCHEFFER — It is very clear, and it is an excellent policy.

Mr MATTEO — So let us use this as a mechanism to have affordability spread across the board in much more normal communities.

Mr TEE — Your submission talks about a number of policy platforms, including transport options, recreational opportunities, choice and so on. I am conscious of the fact that, whether it is the defence site or Fishermans Bend, which is not in your bailiwick, there are number of inner urban areas that are on one level greenfields but not on another level in that they are incredibly polluted. The defence site is an example of that. The question is, in terms of those requirements, would you like the government to ensure that it adopts those requirements that you have set out as the tools or the guiding parameters within which those developments occur?

Mr MATTEO — Yes, and for inner city developments the notion of recreation being open space or green, I think is different. I think there is a whole new paradigm about how we recreate in complex, high-density cities — about having greater height. We cannot have the same sorts of open space, so what else should we think about when we are looking at recreation, about people being on the street and being together as communities?

Mr TEE — I am approaching it on the basis that you have a number of issues that you would like to see addressed; you have proposals for development that the government is pushing, and I am just trying to marry those two parties, effectively, together, and it might be that it is something that we would ask the Urban Renewal Authority to ensure that they implement as part of the development. Would that be the sort of thing that would be helpful for your community?

Mr HIGGINS — Absolutely. We would like to see those benchmarks set up-front and obviously URA showing the leadership, and then that becomes almost a code or a requirement across the industry that sets the way.

Mr TEE — Because if you start off with those projects, whether it is Fishermans Bend or the defence site, that are government led, as it were, that then sets the benchmark, as you say, for other private sector developers.

Mr HIGGINS — To show that it is possible.

Mr MATTEO — I think it is important that the government sets the tone for the Urban Renewal Authority, because they will take that on board; otherwise they will just act like ordinary developers. It is incumbent, I think, upon the government of the day to ensure that those principles and those values are reflected really strongly through those corporate arms and that those competing objectives about affordable housing and recreation are clearly up-front.

Mr TEE — I suppose that is probably to a degree the role that VicUrban played in terms of the communities on Melbourne's fringe where they started more dense or more community focused rather just the dormitory suburbs. It seems what you are saying is let us have a model of a good community based around these sorts of principles but in the inner urban area?

Mr HIGGINS — Yes.

The CHAIR — I notice that males in Maribyrnong have the lowest life expectancy in the state. What sort of practical interventions has council undertaken to try to address that issue, and what in your view are things that could be looked at in terms of improving that statistic that relate to better planning?

Mr MATTEO — That is a big question. The mortality rate for males has been poor for over 30 years. Council's contribution towards health promotion, towards programs and services has had a really marginal effect. We are not going to make systemic, long-term health changes based on small investments in health promotion. Here is an opportunity, by using the Planning and Environment Act, to build a platform of giving council the tools to make sure that we can plan better balanced communities where people have access to fresh water, affordable food and have a different point of view for their communities so that in another generation we actually begin to make some of those changes to life expectancy. It is not going to happen overnight, and that is the difficulty. Give us the tools now to help us make some of those generational changes, because even state and federal governments' investments in that are proving to be really difficult; whether it is obesity, diabetes, heart disease, it made hardly any inroads into those health burdens.

Mr ELSBURY — Where this question is coming from is related to the private developments that are currently occurring in the West Footscray area where once you had factories and now they are turning into high-density housing. Has council been able to work with those developers in providing open spaces in the development of those areas, considering that we are talking about, from what I have observed, basically townhouse-style apartments being built side by side, constantly? Has there been any ability of the council, through your legislative ability, to ask these developers to provide an improved space in that area? Considering we are talking about suburbs that were built as factory workers' suburbs, so you have already got high-density houses in those areas, have you been able to convince the developers of the need for parklands, whether it be a swing set or a football field or something like that?

Mr HIGGINS — Council has an open space strategy, so it has identified where there are gaps and opportunities for more open space and where there should be higher quality open space that is developed to meet local needs. Whenever there has been a small development we have obtained a contribution, which is mostly limited to 5 per cent, and that has gone towards either capital upgrades in local parks in some kind of nexus or connection to that site or some contribution to purchasing new open space.

Obviously we are a brownfield, already-developed site, so trying to find a brand new site is not that easy, but we have identified some sites and are in the process of trying to, in Footscray in particular, create some new parkland. We have been getting a contribution from almost all of those developers, although it is a modest amount compared to what is required to actually get new parks established.

Mr MATTEO — And to remediate the land; that is the issue. The developers will say, ‘Why do we have to pay any more than anywhere else, just because you have got dirty land?’, and they have got a point.

Mr ELSBURY — Because they are going to get a monte out of selling those units.

Mr MATTEO — Yes.

Mr HIGGINS — That is right.

Mr ELSBURY — Correct me if I am wrong, but I think I read somewhere quite some time ago that the council had gone through and had a look at the possibility of localised food production in the area reusing some areas of land that are underutilised now. Would you care to comment about that? I did not notice it in your submission, which I thought was a bit odd, considering it was a major investigation, from what I recollect.

Mr MATTEO — It was, and at the time of writing that it was still going through the council process. Council has now committed to an urban agriculture strategy; we have identified 15 sites across the municipality to develop community gardens. It is really in response to people in high-rise developments who do not have a garden who actually want their hands in the soil. It provides a subsidy to low-income people. It is not a lot — we cannot have big gardens — but it does contribute to their community development. It is important that, in the future, we do have an urban agriculture framework to offset some of the poor outcomes previously. Again, part of that is making sure we have raised garden beds, because as soon as we try to dig down it becomes really problematic. It is about making sure that the models reflect the actual soil environment of the time. That is a key strategy by council and an investment they are making towards that.

Mr ELSBURY — I just did not see it in the submission and thought, ‘What has happened to that?’.

Mr MATTEO — It was a good governance thing, that is why it was not part of that.

Mr SCHEFFER — We have received quite a lot of submissions and we have spoken to quite a lot of people, and many of them have talked about the connection between the urban design and health outcomes. Stepping back from that, I assume that there is a demonstrable and causal connection between the two. We had SunSmart here just before talking about the lack of shade and the incidence of various types of skin cancer, and yet you say in your submission that there is a dearth of evidence that demonstrates a strong causal link between good integrated planning and health outcomes, especially in complex urban environments, which is kind of interesting given what we have seen. Could you just explain what the underpinning of that statement is about?

Mr MATTEO — When we have a look at the evidence and all the research, there is an emerging bit of work around some good examples of that, but as a solid piece of research about which we can say, hand on heart, ‘This is a good model’, there is not that much.

Mr SCHEFFER — Is it ever possible, given the breadth of what we are talking about here, to have a holistic causal connection? Is it not really a cumulative aggregation of that lack of shade is directly related to the increase in various skin cancers, along with more lanes, streets, walkable distances and more walking meaning more exercise? Is it not an accumulation of all those small observations rather than one big causal connection?

Mr MATTEO — That is absolutely right, but on top of that is the other side: the poor outcomes. What are the cumulative impacts around electronic gaming machines and concentrated liquor outlets? How do we undo that? Where is the research that says this also has a poor cumulative effect that is not able to be rebalanced by this other stuff? Where is some of that work that we need as planners, that really strong evidence base?

Mr SCHEFFER — Do you think that kind of work would be usefully commissioned?

Mr MATTEO — Absolutely, and I think at the moment there are really good examples of good planning for greenfield sites where you start from scratch. But where you have got some existing poor health outcomes

and when, on planning application after planning application, we are struggling with some of those contested spaces, we need more evidence to make the argument to ensure that we can have those balanced communities.

Mr SCHEFFER — How would putting health provisions in the act help that?

Mr MATTEO — It would hopefully provide a recognition that there is increasingly a public policy responsibility around land-use planning as a contributor to health. If we start from that basis, we are also able to attract tertiary institutions around beginning to explore and unpick what that means — that is, to really deconstruct that whole idea and begin to give us information back. Again, it is a long-term piece of work, but we need to start somewhere. However, without the starting point of that public policy recognition around land-use planning, it makes it a bit harder to unpick.

Mr TEE — I want to come back to that shared policy platform which you identified as nature and recreation opportunities, quality public realms and range of housing options. We talked about government projects and we talked about the role of the Urban Renewal Authority Victoria, and Mr Elsbury raised the issue where you are dealing with private sector developers, and I suppose the question is: do you have the tools to ensure that those shared policy platforms are delivered by those developers, and if you do not, what tools do you need to make sure that those outcomes are implemented when you are dealing with private sector developers?

Mr MATTEO — Often we find ourselves in a new role as matchmaker. We might match some private developers with affordable housing associations and get them talking about how they may share the costs in a development of having some affordable housing and management options. As much as we can we might also try to broker a conversation to influence our state government colleagues around transport, education and other areas to try to build in that infrastructure. It becomes difficult, but our job is to at least try to get them in the room talking together and making those connections.

Mr TEE — That is an important role. In terms of our role as a committee, the question is whether there is anything that you need to assist you in developing those relationships or those outcomes. I suppose the question is: are you doing a good job, tick, and we should just leave you alone, or are there recommendations that would assist you in delivering those sorts of outcomes that you are looking for?

Mr MATTEO — The only advice I would want to give the committee is to try to think about reducing or diminishing the silos that currently exist — that is, the bureaucratic silos that occur in the state. We are lucky in a sense that local government can plan holistically better around place. The state government's strength is not place based; it is really good around the programs. If we can find a middle ground here, where we can both meet our policy objectives together — I am not sure what the answer is, but at least — —

Mr HIGGINS — I think in terms of bringing together public transport walkability and access, we might have the development before us, but if VicRoads or the Department of Transport have not got their program aligned, then it means that public transport and those walkability issues cannot go in at the same time. If there are 200 houses coming in now, there may be no network except for immediately going to a private car-based transport solution when you are away from the existing public transport network. In helping broker a transport solution then, whilst you are trying to consider a growth corridor or something at the same time, that is probably where the state government could assist in giving a direction — that is, before we say yes and green light all of that development out there. I think that is an age-old issue; there is nothing new about that.

Mr TEE — It is about bringing infrastructure to the table as part of the development process, rather than afterwards as an afterthought, so it is an up-front issue rather than a back-end issue?

Mr HIGGINS — That is right. You might have a likely five-year program, so that developers can be aware of it and be forewarned about how they can link into that.

Mrs PEULICH — My apologies for being late, but I have a very keen interest in how local government works, how it delivers its outcomes and how well and effectively it takes its community with it. I would like to pick up on one observation. I note that some of the councils — I think we have had a couple at least — from the northern and western parts of metropolitan Melbourne seem to have these positions, at either manager or above, that include the word 'advocacy'. That is an observation that I have not made on the other side of town in relation to the southern and south-eastern suburbs. You might care to comment on why that is emerging.

Whilst I agree with you in terms of breaking down silos in order to be able to deliver holistic outcomes which require a degree of integration rather than just a checklist approach — which I think all levels of government have tended to do — how do we then deliver accountability and transparency as well when we do try to break down those silos? That is one question. The other question is, whilst I accept and recognise the fact that local government tries to be the matchmaker, the advocate and the broker, some, who perhaps do not necessarily share the same objectives or the agenda, may see it as ‘the fixer’ and feel alienated by the process. How do we get around that? In terms of your role in community planning, how do you make sure that the objectives and goals that you set at your municipal level are goals that the entire community has buy-in to?

Mr MATTEO — Part of the advocacy agenda and part of my role is, and one of my staff works full time in, around citizen engagement. During every census period in Maribyrnong we have 75 per cent of our people move either out of or within our municipality. We have a highly mobile population.

Mrs PEULICH — Seventy-five per cent? That is extraordinary.

Mr MATTEO — Yes, 75 per cent, and that is because of an increase in rental properties. It is incumbent upon us to keep communicating with our communities at all levels, all the time, to ensure the relevance of our policies. You will see that often our policies are only 12 months long because things change so quickly, and they need to continue to be relevant. Our annual residents survey is of 800 door-to-door, not the state government phone call.

Mrs PEULICH — That is impressive.

Mr MATTEO — We believe that the investment in that face-to-face conversation is absolutely important.

Mrs PEULICH — A random sample?

Mr MATTEO — It is a random sample, but every five years we will get round to every single household in the municipality. The fine-grained quality comments that we get back are really important. That then provides me with my platform for advocacy — what are the key things that we need to then ramp up and advocate for on behalf of our communities? That is the investment that we make to ensure that we are relevant and that we have our finger on the pulse, as well as all the other evidence that we have.

Mrs PEULICH — If I may have just one follow-up question, I noted your comments in relation to public transport and your general comment about silos. Are you talking about silos within a single level, across levels or both? And, perhaps stating the obvious or asking the obvious question, do you believe that local government and councillors have a legitimate role in advocating for better public transport outcomes?

Mr HIGGINS — Absolutely. We obviously know the local network, but obviously we also have to rely on our state government agencies to help us because they are experts as well. But we think we have a role to play in assisting in planning for local neighbourhoods, absolutely.

Mr MATTEO — I think that joint accountability question goes to the heart of it. Let us at least have the conversation. In my time in local government we have never had the conversation. How can you be jointly accountable to different objectors and different masters? Where do we have that?

Mrs PEULICH — Or better still, how can local government be better accountable?

Mr MATTEO — Where do we have that conversation? I do not know.

Mrs PEULICH — Do you have any suggestions? MAV or VLGA? They seem to have been shying away from those issues for a number of years.

Mr MATTEO — Maybe not. Maybe it is about something else.

Mr ELSBURY — Just a quick question, going back to the provision of parks and such, is there a way that you think you could incentivise developers to put in a park or something like that at the sacrifice of three or four extra units or even incentivise for other businesses to move into an area so you that you do not have the bottle next to the fish and chip shop next to the pub with the pokies? Is there anything that would be able to be offered to try to benefit the community by way of providing alternative options to developers and business?

Mr HIGGINS — Yes, I think obviously increased density. I mean we are already looking at — —

Mr ELSBURY — We were talking earlier on about how it was very adversarial the way we were looking at this, because we had to spend \$1 million to fight it out in VCAT. Could we avoid those sorts of costs that council are copping but get a good outcome by saying, 'Instead of using the \$1 million in court, how about we use the \$1 million to do this'?

Mr HIGGINS — An improvement to a park, absolutely. In that case we would have much preferred to spend that \$800 000 on a park in that location that we knew the gaming machines were going into. We had to fight it. We lost it. We could have had a win-win by having fewer gaming machines and a higher quality parks system in that one neighbourhood.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Nick and Nigel. That was a very good presentation, and it covered a whole range of areas within your local government area, in particular the work you have been at the forefront in doing in terms of the health plans and acknowledging the issues you have in your municipality, like the very low life expectancy for males in your area. Congratulations on the work you have been doing, and thank you very much for being here with us today.

Witnesses withdrew.