

CORRECTED VERSION

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Subcommittee

Inquiry into environmental design and public health

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Associate Professor C. Whitzman, urban planning, University of Melbourne.

The CHAIR — Welcome, Carolyn. Some of the committee were most fortunate in attending the Planning Institute seminar that was held in June, so we are a little bit acquainted with your work.

Mrs PEULICH — I was not at the seminar, but I look forward to your presentation.

The CHAIR — You are probably aware of all of this, but I am obliged to advise you that you are covered by parliamentary privilege during the course of this hearing, but those same comments made outside of this hearing will not be covered by parliamentary privilege. In about 7 to 10 days you will be furnished with a copy of the transcript of these proceedings. If there are some anomalies, typos or other issues, please directly liaise with Keir. What we would like is for you to provide your name, the organisation that you are representing and your address. I ask that you go straight into your presentation and leave enough time for us to interact and to ask some questions of you.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — I have 10 slides and 10 minutes but feel free to interrupt me at any time.

Mr TEE — Do not encourage us!

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — My name is Carolyn Whitzman and I am associate professor in urban planning at the University of Melbourne. I do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Melbourne; like most people I am an independent academic.

Mrs PEULICH — You are not sanctioned?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — I am not unsanctioned either; generally we all get along! My work address is the faculty of architecture, building and planning, University of Melbourne, Parkville 3010.

Mrs PEULICH — That is really testing you.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — I have prepared some written comments, and you can look at those at your leisure. There is nothing more boring than having me read from a prepared text, so I am just going to show a few slides. Feel free to interrupt at any time, then hopefully there will be time for discussion afterwards before you break.

My interest for the last 25 years has been in planning health and liveability. Like a lot of Victorians, I am a migrant. I come from Canada. Australians are usually very polite and they ask first if you are a Canadian rather than an American, because Americans never mind being called Canadians but the obverse is sometimes true.

I am on my second career. My first career was I worked for 15 years as a strategic planner; 10 of those years was working for the City of Toronto in the healthy city office, which was actually in the mayor's office and then the chief administrative office. The City of Toronto is one of those big cities with 2.5 million people. I was working on integrated healthy city policy with a particular emphasis on violence prevention, but I should say that some of the responsibilities would be considered local government in Australia and some would be considered state government. For instance, the police force was under the purview of the City of Toronto, as was the transit commission and as was most of the education policy. I worked with all those partners on an integrated approach to violence prevention.

What I am going to talk about today is a really basic model that ties in planning policies with health and wellbeing outcomes.

Overheads shown

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — This is pretty simplistic, but if planning policies have an impact on the built environment and also on the social environment and the natural environment, which they do, and those environments in turn have an impact on people's behaviours, which they do, and those behaviours certainly have an impact on health and wellbeing outcomes, then in some ways we are doing it right and in some ways we are doing it wrong. Certainly in terms of liveability it is great news that Melbourne is no. 1 — Toronto was knocked off that perch a while ago — but in terms of other indices, we are not doing so well.

I do not know if you have seen this particular set of maps. They are about the rate of adult onset diabetes having more than doubled over eight years, and adult onset diabetes is directly linked to regular physical activity, which

links to obesity, which is the biggest risk factor for adult onset diabetes. Heart disease is one of the top killers in the world, certainly in Victoria.

Mr SCHEFFER — If I can interrupt you there, can you give us a bit of a gloss on each of those maps?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — You bet. Whenever I am talking to my students one of the interesting things is that unfortunately living in rural and regional areas there is, as you can see, a little bit more of a risk factor for adult onset diabetes than living in the central city. I do not know why the little north-western corner of Victoria is doing so well. The top map is rates of diabetes in 2001, and keep in mind that the rates of diabetes are going between 2 per cent of the population and 4 per cent.

Mr SCHEFFER — Are these time-specific maps?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — Yes, 2001, 2005 and 2008 on the bottom, and under 2 per cent is green, over 4 per cent of the adult population is red.

Mr SCHEFFER — Is red the darker colour?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — Red is the darker colour, yes.

Mr SCHEFFER — I am colourblind, so I cannot see.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — So is my son. I could tell you funny stories about colour blindness, but I am not going to get into that.

Mr SCHEFFER — Yes, I could tell you lots too. I will meet you for coffee afterwards.

Mr ELSBURY — You can tell us later, when the Hansard reporters are not around.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — The bottom map is the most recent. The bottom is bad. You can look at a scary but lovely website called the ‘Diabetes Epidemic’ that is put up by Diabetes Australia to find out more. Basically rates of being overweight and obesity have more than doubled in Victoria as well over the last 15 years, and what is particularly troubling for me as a parent is that rates of childhood overweight and obesity have gone up tremendously since the 1970s. I am not saying it is all causational, some of it is correlation, but the fact is that children’s everyday physical activity has gone down precipitously at the same time — I think I have this in a later slide. Whereas in the 1970s about 80 per cent of kids aged eight walked or cycled to school on their own, now it is closer to 10 per cent of kids walking or cycling to school on their own.

Obviously people are complex and a mix of heredity and environment et cetera, but certainly there is a link between planning policies, environments, behaviours and health and wellbeing outcomes, and I thought I would start with the outcomes. If we take a step backwards towards behaviour, we know that everyday physical activity, healthy eating and not smoking are the top three things we can do in terms of preventing chronic disease, but unfortunately the majority of us are not sufficiently physically active on a daily basis — that is, 30 minutes per day, five days a week for adults, and 60 minutes per day, five days a week for kids.

Kids who walk or cycle to school are more likely to get enough daily physical activity than, for instance, kids who do not walk or cycle to school but engage in sports once a week. That is a really important thing to keep in mind for both adults and kids. It is really important that the activity be every day and not just in short spurts and also that it does not have to be strenuous physical activity. It can be moderate, like a moderate walk or cycling in the way that I cycle, which is quite slow indeed.

There are also the social wellbeing issues. The photo at the top comes from a study by Karen Malone, a child researcher. Half of 50 children aged four to eight who were given a disposable camera and asked to take photos of a typical week included a photo of the back seat of their car. We are raising a generation of kids like this — I think this was brought up in the last presentation — because of parental concerns about risk. We have heard about the bubble-wrap generation as having very real impacts not only on kids’ physical health but also in their sense of community and perhaps their mental health. Again I could go into studies about walking to school and readiness to learn, but there is a lot of evidence out there. I am a planner; I am not a health researcher.

Let us take a step backwards and look at the built environment. There is US evidence of a direct relationship between urban sprawl and physical inactivity, being overweight and morbidity through chronic disease and also between urban sprawl, car dependence and road accidents. Australia is now somewhat equivalent to the US in terms of some of the indices of sprawl — for instance, the size of houses. There is also the economic concern that a quarter of low-income houses in outer suburbs with low incomes are running two or more cars a week even when they are paying over 30 per cent of their gross household income on mortgage or rent, which is the definition of housing stress. Certainly a lot of my research in Australia is about kids. There is a vicious cycle of car dependence and increasing safety concerns, so the more parents who are doing the parent taxi — driving their kids to school — the less safe it is for kids who walk and cycle. There are definitely some concerns about the way that we are creating and maintaining built environments.

Now we get to the element that I am most comfortable with, which is planning policy. What can planning do? One of the campaigns of the Heart Foundation, which I am sure you have heard from, is about traffic calming. There is a distinct cut-off point of 30 kilometres per hour where a car accident goes from being likely to injure a person but not severely, to injuring or killing a person. So that is one of the things. The second thing is looking at integrated transport and development, which we have been talking about for many years now in transit-oriented design. This means increasing the proximity of a destination so that you can walk, cycle or take public transport to shops, leisure activities, school or work, especially in relation to affordable housing, because a lot of the affordable housing has been built in places where you have to spend a lot of the money you have presumably saved in obtaining a house on maintaining a car. The final factor, which is hard to quantify but terribly important, is a safe and stimulating interest in an amenity-filled neighbourhood through design for public and open space. All of those are the clear rules of planners.

I have been in Australia since 2003 and I have been involved in a number of research projects. I am going to talk about three of them. The first was the gender, local governance and violence prevention project, known as GLOVE. Part of the reason we focused on that was that VicHealth had study in 2004 that showed that along with those other risk factors that I talked about earlier, violence against women is a leading risk factor for death and disability amongst adult-aged women. We worked with four different local partnerships between local councils and community organisations. In some ways the most successful was the one in Maribyrnong. The ones in Casey, Bendigo and Loddon were less successful for a number of reasons. Certainly in Maribyrnong, and to some extent in Casey and Bendigo, local partnerships were able to come together and provide effective and coordinated programs, but they do need consistent state government support.

One of the things that happened in the GLOVE project was that the previous government had two programs that were really exciting — the safer streets and homes program and also the women's safety strategy, both of which were launched in 2002. By the time the GLOVE project had started in 2006, they had both been rolled back. I have written a little bit about why those programs were rolled back, but the bottom line is that local governments were very interested in working with community organisations, particularly health-promoting organisations, on violence prevention and were doing interesting work. There is certainly evidence from other cities that a coordinated strategy can prevent rates of violence and insecurity and that is a big focus of my international work, but it was not really given a chance to work.

The work continues in Maribyrnong. They continue to do great work and they continue to inspire other municipalities in the western regions just as Darebin continues to inspire some municipalities in the northern metropolitan region, but they simply do not have the state government support that they had under the first phase of the Labor government or even the Kennett government under the safer cities and shires program, which was the predecessor of safer streets and homes.

Mr SCHEFFER — You really do not know why it was rolled back? Was the evidence coming in?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — I do not know why it was rolled back. There is no sort of hidden body or anything like that, but my suspicion is that it was rolled back because the state government was using the wrong indicator. When the Labor government got in in 1999 and had the Growing Victoria Together program, they had reducing violent crime and fear of violent crime as two of their key indicators that they were going to be checking every year. At the same time, working with Christine Nixon and the police, they were trying to increase the number of mostly female victims of intimate partner violence reporting their crimes to the police and trying to encourage the police to take it more seriously. So what happened would be considered a policy success, I think, which is that the rate of assaults reported to the police started going up slightly. The problem

was that the indicator was reducing violent crime and they were using police statistics instead of victimisation surveys to get at that. In around about 2005 Growing Victoria Together quietly dropped that indicator of reducing violent crime and replaced it with crime. At about the same time Crime Prevention Victoria and the Victorian Community Council against Violence, which were two state-level supports for local initiatives, were not providing the kind of clear evidence that things were working, so it was almost an evidence-led roll back, where they just were not getting the results they wanted. It is really simple to get results on things like home burglaries. You just change locks and you get results.

Mr SCHEFFER — Could it also be a reasonable conclusion that, as you were saying, it was working, but the evidence was that the measures indicated it was not?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — I would say it was promising, but not proven good practice. I say my assumption is that support for it failed, because it was not getting the simple wins that the government wanted. That is my reading of it. Nobody ever came out and said that.

The second project is on kids, particularly kids' independent mobility, which just means their ability to walk, cycle and take public transport without adult supervision. The focus internationally is on upper level primary school kids where we see the most rapid loss in kids' independent mobility and also active travel. We looked at policies and then we did a small project with kids living in high-rise housing downtown, both in privately owned housing and in public housing downtown. What we found was local government is doing some really good work around child-friendly cities, and the number of cities that are now involved in the Child Friendly Cities network, for instance, has rapidly grown to almost half the municipalities in Victoria. That is fantastic.

The problem is that there is a lot of work being done in the social and health planning field, but it is not percolating into land use planning and design. Land use planners need easy tools to consult with kids about public space. It is not just a matter of playgrounds, skate parks or anything like that. It is a matter of all kinds of public space. It is the road to school but it is also the road to the corner shop, getting to friends' houses and using all of it.

When we talk to kids living downtown, shops came up again and again. When they were talking about playgrounds and parks, they were talking about it as a place to meet kids and not necessarily to use the playground equipment. They might be sitting at a basketball court listening to their iPods together, but it is a place to get together with minimal adult supervision. That was a part of all of our childhoods. We do not want to rob kids of all of those opportunities.

What we found was that kids living in those high-rises have as much and more mobility as kids living in traditional suburbs, but it is a poor fit right now. There are very few two or three-bedroom plus apartments. There are no public schools and only one private school in the CBD. There are more and more kids who are living in Docklands, Southbank, the CBD and, presumably, in Fishermans Bend. If you look at places like Vancouver or Singapore, they have guidelines for family-friendly medium-density housing. I think the market for family-friendly medium-density housing is largely untapped in Victoria at present.

Part of the reason I was interested in research is that I was brought up by a single mum in a flat and I had, I think, very happy and physically active childhood despite not having a backyard. There is virtually no research on the experience of kids living in high-rises, particularly research that separated out public housing kids from private housing kids. That is really quite a different experience.

Mr SCHEFFER — Are you saying there is also not the housing stock in high-density houses?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — There is not the housing stock, because — —

Mr SCHEFFER — I mean in terms of the number of bedrooms and that they are too small.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — Yes, that is right. The buildings are too small. The assumption that both developers and planners had around Southbank — the second stage of Southbank, not the first stage of Southbank — and Docklands was that it would be DINKs and empty nesters, but DINKs move in and they want to stay there, and they want to stay there when they have kids. That is the bottom line.

Mr TEE — So there is just not the housing choice is that what you are saying?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — There is not the housing choice.

Mr TEE — There is not the diversity.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — Yes. There are really easy ways. There are guidelines that have worked; there is the post-occupancy evaluation of False Creek North in the city of Vancouver that showed there were very high levels of satisfaction amongst families living there.

Mr TEE — What would go in the guidelines? What sorts of things?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — Access to basic social infrastructure, including schools, a kind of hierarchy of play spaces, traffic measures — —

Mr TEE — Guidelines were kind of to have a sort of model community saying, ‘We will have schools within this walking distance and parks within a certain distance’.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — That is right.

Mrs PEULICH — Fairly easily disseminated.

Mr SCHEFFER — What do developers say about the three-bedroom or four-bedroom apartments, because now, I think it is fair to say, those kinds of apartments are luxury, high-end apartments when they are available. But the availability of them is extremely limited, because developers clearly do not see there is money in it. Is that the reasoning?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — In my first career as a strategic planner I spent some time working for a developer in Toronto talking to other developers. This is about 20-year-old research that I did, but I think the developers like certainty. If you say, ‘This proportion needs to be family housing’, then they will build it into their models. Most developers — and this is absolutely the way the market works — are going to be looking for not just profit but also certainty. One of the broader issues in the planning system in Victoria is that we have moved so far away from prescriptive planning into performance-based planning that it is sort of like, ‘Give us the best ambit claim, and then we will bargain it for two years’.

Mr SCHEFFER — So what you are saying happens in Toronto is that in Toronto they are saying if a developer wants to put in an apartment block, then there is a requirement that X percentage of the apartment block has four, three, two or one-bedroom apartments. They just accept that?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — Yes, if we are going to talk about Toronto, this was before I started working as a planner there, but if you look at the St Lawrence community, which is right downtown and was one of the first urban redevelopments over a former industrial rail line area built in the 1970s under a conservative local government, the social housing went before the condos; the schools were on the ground floor of the social housing, the community centre was on the ground floor of a social housing project and then came the condos. That was a very financially successful as well as socially successful project.

Mrs PEULICH — In relation to cost, however, I have had a look at some of the data which shows that high-density construction and dwellings are not cheaper. In actual fact they are pricier, so at the end of the day families are going to, in many instances, go for what is affordable. Instead of buying a \$750 000, \$850 000 or \$950 000 three-bedroom apartment, they will buy a \$350 000 home in Cranbourne, because it gives them more space for their kids and also it is more affordable. How do you get over that? Where does that intersect with your — —

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — I think it is not so much a consumer issue. I think it is a producer issue, and again it comes down to the certainty. If you are a developer and you have a choice between a greenfield development where you can just flop out more or less your old plan with some new tweaking, you do not have to deal with angry residents associations, you do not have to deal with two years at VCAT et cetera, you are going to go for a suburban development over an urban development.

Mr TEE — And you do not have to factor in the cost of the two cars that the family is going to have to run for the next 20 years.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — No, I think if you look at the end of it from the perspective of the individual householders, I believe, as some of the Grattan Institute reports indicate, there is an unmet demand for family-friendly housing. I think the issue is more at the developer end of things. Just this week Grocon stepped back from the Coburg initiative. There you have a good developer and an innovative developer and a pretty good council, and with the best of intentions it has not worked out, and I think there are a whole bunch of issues ranging from third-party objections to financing models that mean that even with developers who want to do the interesting, innovative stuff, it becomes progressively more difficult.

Mrs PEULICH — Can you just clarify that for us? You are saying that family-sized apartments can be built if the planning process is streamlined and fast-tracked; is that correct?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — Yes.

Mrs PEULICH — And that will translate into a more affordable outcome?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — If it is simple.

Mrs PEULICH — And that will translate into a more affordable outcome?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — That would be my assumption, and I would love to test it.

Mrs PEULICH — Is it tested? Is there any data?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — As I say, if you look at St Laurence from the 1970s or if you look at False Creek from the 1990s, and you assume that Canada and Australia are roughly similar, then they are examples of two fairly large-scale brownfields projects where the developers were happy, the governments were happy and the residents were happy. If you look at some European redevelopment models, you will see a similar situation in hand, so I think there is international evidence. I do not know of an Australian study. I think the closest might be a kind of Subiaco situation under the Better Cities program in the 1970s in Perth. I would not say that that is an affordability win, frankly, but I would say it is a win on some other criteria. Those places in East Perth are very popular, and it was in a time of federal government active intervention in health for innovative models as well. Even though there is a Better Cities unit, it is still a little hard to get that federal stuff. Boy, am I getting off my presentation!

The final piece of research goes back the furthest, so when I started in Australia I immediately became involved in the planning institute's planning for health and wellbeing project — the first phase of it — and it was a really successful project except for the outcomes. We had wonderful education, we had great partnerships with public health and we had these remarkable numbers. Over 50 per cent of the planners that we surveyed — and we surveyed about 200 planners out of a professional organisation of 1000, so it was a pretty high sample — said, 'Yes, we learnt a lot. We understand a lot more about health', and indeed they did understand a lot more about planning for health. So you see 'Planners have a role in creating a healthier community'. Before the project 89 per cent said yes; after the project 98 per cent said yes. It is a bit of a motherhood statement. 'Whether they consider health in their day-to-day planning frequently' did not change at all. 'Whether they consider health in their day-to-day planning work infrequently or never' went up a bit. Why was that? The remarks were really clear, and I had one of my students come in and interview more planners just to make sure. Individual planners do not have much influence. It has to be in the legislation. What we need to do is get the strength of legislation. If it is not in the policies, it has to be legislated by the state, et cetera. So with all the will in the world they were not getting anywhere with the planning act 1987.

Mr TEE — Certainly we have had a fair bit of evidence that the issue is the laxness in terms of the regulation, but there has also been a fair bit of evidence that the problem is too many planners, so the Urban Renewal Authority or the GAA do not have health people on their boards.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — Yes, that is too many actors.

Mr TEE — They do not have that expertise and they do not impose that discipline in terms of the developments that are created.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — There is a bit of a knowledge gap, but I would say that the legislation gap is even more problematic. The Public Health and Wellbeing Act is pretty much a good piece of legislation.

Environments for Health in its evaluation found that council plans had been improved in terms of including health determinants, certainly public health plans, or health and wellbeing plans, integrated with council plans in some cases, and in many cases those two plans were talking to one another. The MSS was not talking to those two plans and that is a big issue.

Mr TEE — I suspect there is a bit of integration that needs to occur with the planning legislation and the health legislation.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — And even if you look at the three acts that you mentioned in your terms of reference, the Transport Integration Act 2010, the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 and the Planning and Environment Act 1987, there is a little bit of an issue.

Mr TEE — And the only one that does not mention health is planning.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — And the only one that does not mention health is planning, and until planning catches up with the council plans and the public health plans, I think we are going to continue to have a bit of a problem.

The CHAIR — That has been the consistent voice coming through from the planning institute, the Heart Foundation et cetera; a whole range of organisations are singing from the same song book on that one.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — One of the great things about the health and wellbeing project and really a decade's worth of work is that we are all singing from the same song sheet, definitely. We have all drunk the Kool-Aid, however you want to put it. It is a wonderful opportunity that the current state government has with the Planning and Environment Act, the metropolitan strategy and the overhaul of the planning system all kind of hanging fire. It is a terrific opportunity to look at all three together because all three are really part of the same thing, but it is also a real challenge because all three of those have to be sorted relatively soon.

Mrs PEULICH — It is a bit like the re-write of the Education and Training Act; it covered everything except the requirement to learn.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — Yes, and sometimes getting the basics right. I am sure you have heard about the difference between 'should' and 'must' consider. Sometimes little words like that 'should' versus 'must' are terribly important. I think you have already heard this. The new Planning and Environment Act needs to have health as a planning objective and mandate integration of local land use planning instruments. After eight years of working with MSSs, I still think it is a really clunky planning instrument.

Precinct structure plans have a lot of potential with health and wellbeing goals. There is a huge public transport and social infrastructure gap, and I am sure you have been hearing that again and again. My concern is that we are continuing to build ahead of our capacity to build social and public transport infrastructure, and that is a real concern.

My colleague, who I think has already submitted, Billie Giles-Corti, who is a public health researcher, has just been talking to the heads of the growth councils. We were having a chat about it yesterday, and she said she just hears from every single CEO of a growth area municipality that the growth used to be incremental and now it is exponential. They just do not know what to do. It is really bad out there.

Mrs PEULICH — Yet middle Melbourne is up in arms over high-density development.

Mr TEE — You cannot win.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — I know. It is a huge issue of public will, and I do not want to simplify it. A lot of my international work is around participatory planning and very little of my Victorian work is around participatory planning, because internationally people want change and improved communities and in inner and central Melbourne change is almost always seen as a bad thing.

Mr TEE — Why is that? That's the rub.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — I know it is the crux.

Mr TEE — People do not like change in Melbourne.

Mrs PEULICH — It is more than that. It is the nature in which consultation is done and the way that structural plans are often devised. The community ends up being in many instances incidental to the process.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — I have to agree with you on that. When I came here and I looked at Melbourne 2030 it was almost ridiculously idealised. There were people in these four-storey walk-up apartments happily waving their baguettes down at the street and it looked really lovely, but none of the development actually happened that way. I think if it had happened that way, with a certain degree of certainty, with people happily waving baguettes down on the new open space, it would have been one thing. But what has happened instead is very point-by-point development; a 16-storey building here, a 12-storey building here and an 11-storey building here. I was recently talking to a City of Yarra councillor and the Collingwood and Abbotsford Residents' Association which, in my previous experience, has been one of the more furious residents associations; I have to be absolutely up front with you. There was a studio done by my colleague Ian Woodcock, and the students came up with these really fun four to six-storey buildings that had all kinds of interesting activity — child-care centres et cetera — in the ground floor. Whether those could get through the actual building code is another slightly different issue. But the residents association said, 'Yes, we like that. We don't want the 16-storey building on Johnston Street, but we'd be willing to take a whole block's worth of that. That's okay'. So I do not think that people are being offered the menu. I think there has to be a certain amount of certainty in dealing with the public too and saying, 'You know what? There is going to need to be intensification where there is already existing public transport and social infrastructure. We'll work on improving more tram services and more train services et cetera. In return, here's a menu of choices'.

Mrs PEULICH — Often there has been a growth in the distrust of strategic planners in municipalities. All you need is one really bad outcome like, for example — and I have got absolutely nothing against social housing; I grew up in social housing under a communist regime — building an eight or nine-storey social housing block on a parking lot behind the town hall and the arts centre so that no-one can park anywhere, adjacent to a railway station and two major roads, without any consultation, and that is the sort of stuff that really leaves a bitter taste in people's mouths. It was really a process of subterfuge, deception and manipulation to drive an agenda. I am not surprised that people become distrustful.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — I think you are right. I think at a certain point people get burnt out. I live in Brunswick. The Brunswick structure plan is a beautiful thing and I loved it, but I am still waiting for a better corner store than the 7-Eleven on my corner. It is still looking more like, 'How high can you go with your 11 or 12-storey buildings on Lygon and Nicholson streets?', and not enough is coming back in terms of neighbourhood amenity. Having said that, it is clear that Lygon and Nicholson streets are very logical places to have redevelopment.

Mr SCHEFFER — I agree with what I think Ms Peulich was driving at, which is that planning in Victoria, at least in Melbourne, is a political vector, but running stormwater drains is not. So they can dig up my road and put a pipe down it, and my only problem is where I park my car. I do not go and worry about it.

Mrs PEULICH — That is well said.

Mr SCHEFFER — I am agreeing with that. I suspect when I look at some planning things in other jurisdictions around Australia and overseas that planning does not have quite the same cogency where there is greater compliance in the community with people saying, 'Well, they're organising it. Let them do it'. Is what I am saying that?

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — I think that you can have a strategic plan that is really simple in its aims and structure and then, if the development follows those clearly stated aims and structure, you are likely to have less community opposition. Let me give an example. Just towards the end of the time that I was working at the City of Toronto we did our last official plan, which was an MSS — a master plan and strategic plan — for the honking big 2.5 million-person city that the city of Toronto is. It was really simple: there was green for go-go, yellow for slow-go and red for no-go.

Mrs PEULICH — I think the previous government tried to do something similar.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — Some of those ideas did percolate into the government, but Melbourne 2030 is the classic case of implementation failure. I think there were some great ideas there, but the way it was rolled out was just shambolic. I do not know whether a metropolitan strategy can be that much different in this day and age from some of the things that are in Melbourne 2030; I mean the notion of there being activity centres, the notion of there being some sort of linear development.

Mr SCHEFFER — What we want to get right now is the implementation of that. If the framing of that does not change, then we end up in the same place.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — My colleague Ian works with Kim Dovey, and I think there are some interesting ideas percolating around — for example, about building along the tram lines. I know this particular plan was not very popular with the current government, but this could work out so that it was not such an affront in terms of loss of sunlight or of in terms of high-rises or whatever to people living there. I think there has to be a certain consistent message that change is inevitable, but change is not necessarily bad. Part of the trick is making sure that the community infrastructure is improved as the population increases. You would want to think that as demand increases there would be better schools, more local shopping and a better transit service.

Part of the trick is just going, ‘You know what? We ain’t gonna budge that urban growth boundary until our infrastructure has caught up with the growth boundary. That means we can’t actually close the gates and say that nobody else is going to move in and no-one is going to have any kids. That means that we’re going to have to be intensifying in the central city. Here’s a menu, and you can have some input on the menu, and then we’re going to be reviewing the development by this criteria, and this is what is going to happen’. But to go back to what you were saying earlier, is there an easy answer? No. I think that if there were an easy answer, then people would have come up with an easy answer.

Mrs PEULICH — I think your general proposition is a good thing — that a community should have input into deciding on the shape of their natural or built environment within certain principles and imperatives, and that once you have actually decided that then perhaps you need to streamline and expedite it so that it does not translate into inflated costs for a community. I think also there are simple things that can be done to build more trust — that is, in the current Planning and Environment Act there is a degree of discretion in relation to consultation on which we perhaps need to tighten up. That especially applies to municipalities that border onto one another. You may have a structure plan that actually crosses three municipalities. There is no requirement under the current Planning and Environment Act to actually consult with the surrounding municipalities to develop a coherent vision. There is also the use of 3-D imagery online, where people can actually visualise what something looks like. There are lots of things that can be done.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — There are a lot of really great consultation things and some wonderful people who are good at consultation.

I have just a couple of other ideas. There are some very easy health impact assessment tools that can be used by planners, and at the moment Professor Giles-Corti and myself and the departments of health, human services, planning and community development and transport are working together on a project that is around a livability index, in which we are using GIS. We are going to be looking at the social determinants of health, on the one hand, and some of the health outcomes from DH and DHS data on the other hand. That we hope will add to the evidence base available to you folks.

That is about all I wanted to say today, except that I am absolutely open to continuing to assist in any way that you wish.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for that. As you did at the seminar, you have provided lots of food for thought. A lot of the things you have mentioned today have been consistent with a number of other organisations that have presented, so thank you.

Assoc. Prof. WHITZMAN — Thank you very much.

Committee adjourned.