

CORRECTED VERSION

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into environmental design and public health

Melbourne — 23 August 2011

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Secretary: Mr K. Delaney

Witnesses

Cr G. Goodfellow,

Cr M. Mahfoud,

Mr B. Forrest, director of advocacy, and

Ms L. Midolo, social planning coordinator, City of Wyndham.

The CHAIR — First of all, thank you for being here this afternoon and also for your submission. All of our witnesses bring a whole range of issues before us, and we are interested in how your council is dealing with this issue, particularly given your area is a growth corridor. Part of it is in my electorate as well as Andrew Elsbury's electorate. I welcome you. A number of you have been before inquiries like this before. Those who have not, it is opportune to remind you that you are covered by parliamentary privilege, but outside this hearing you are not, so keep that in mind. There will also be a transcript sent to you in the next week or so, which we ask you to proof and if there are any issues, liaise with Keir and it will be sorted.

To begin with, I ask each of you to give your full name and address and the organisation you represent. Then we will go to a 5 to 10-minute presentation. Please allow us time for questions to get to the meat of the issue, so to speak.

Cr MAHFOUD — I am Cr Marcel Mahfoud. I am from Wyndham City Council.

Ms MIDOLO — I am Lucy Midolo, social planning coordinator at Wyndham City Council. My professional address is 45 Princes Highway, Werribee.

Cr GOODFELLOW — I am Cr Glenn Goodfellow, a councillor for the City of Wyndham.

Mr FORREST — I am Bill Forrest, director of advocacy at Wyndham City Council. My business address is 45 Princes Highway, Werribee.

Cr GOODFELLOW — Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to present to this inquiry. Over the next 5 to 10 minutes we are going to talk about some key issues and challenges for Wyndham related to environmental design and public health. Lucy will talk about the things we are trying to do to link public health and environmental design into the context of our community wellbeing, health and safety plan, and Bill will give some practical examples of what council is recommending to the inquiry.

Wyndham City Council's commitment to health is demonstrated in its key policy documents. Our mission is to create a healthy, safe, vibrant, proud and harmonious community while respecting our environment. Our community health, wellbeing and safety plans articulate the importance of health to our future community. Health, wellbeing and safety are central to the future of our community. They are fundamental. They mean that we have a sense of physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing that allows us to be all we strive to be. It is important that the right environment is created for health, that education and activities promote good health and that there is help for those needing to regain health and safety in their lives.

However, sadly, our performance on key public health indicators is below state averages and is deteriorating even further. Wyndham residents by comparison with the rest of Victoria are more likely to be obese, more likely to have poor eating habits and less likely to be physically active. One example I would like to share with the inquiry is the rise of type 2 diabetes in Wyndham. As at 2008, 4126 people suffer from diabetes. While this only represents 3.8 per cent of our population, what the data shows us is that between 2001 and 2008 the prevalence of diabetes in Wyndham increased by 137 per cent. During the same period our population only grew by 52 per cent. In Wyndham we are seeing 6.5 cases of diabetes diagnosed every week.

I also want to touch briefly on two key elements related to healthy lifestyles, namely active transport systems and open space, both public and private. By active transport I mean walking, cycling and public transport. On all these fronts Wyndham is poorly served. The slide shows an 8-kilometre radius around Werribee station compared with an 8-kilometre radius around Flinders Street station. Between Werribee station and the edge of the urban growth boundary there is one bus every 40 minutes. By comparison, between Flinders Street and places like Camberwell, Elsternwick and Coburg there are buses, trams and trains — more modes, more routes and more frequent services. The dark lines on the map show the roads that are maintained by VicRoads. Mr Forrest can point to those for the members. That is Derrimut Road and that one across there is Sayers Road.

As you can see, outer suburban councils have their ratepayers paying for the cost of maintaining major roads, whereas in the inner city suburbs the state government is doing it. This is money council does not have for bike paths and open space improvements. The next slide shows housing.

Mr FORREST — No, there are a couple more here.

Cr GOODFELLOW — There are a couple of comparisons, one is with Bayswater.

Mr FORREST — These are two suburbs a similar distance out in the east, so it is not only an inner-outer thing, there is a bit of an east-west thing too.

Cr GOODFELLOW — Moving on, the next slide shows housing in my ward of Point Cook. There is also a similar picture in our submission of the other part of my ward in Tarneit. These housing blocks have shrunk, but the houses have not. We have a sea of black roofs, black bitumen and concrete.

Mrs PEULICH — There are three red ones.

Mr ELSBURY — Four.

Cr GOODFELLOW — We have no canopy trees, no backyards and, according to a report released two weeks ago by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, comparatively low provision of public open space. There is ample evidence to suggest that a lack of shade, a lack of greenery and a lack of private or public space for activity is having an impact on the public health of our residents. I will now hand over to Lucy to continue.

Ms MIDOLO — As has already been mentioned, Wyndham City Council has adopted a community health, wellbeing and safety plan. This is a three-year strategic plan based on the Environments for Health framework. The key factors in the built, social, economic and natural environments are key determinants for health and safety. The plan has four key focus areas around: people and place; promoting healthy lives; target priorities for health and safety gain; and lead and partner for future health and safety. A key message of council's community health, wellbeing and safety plan is that it is important that the right environment is created for health. It should be noted that good environmental design is not just nice to have; it is actually vital.

As has already been stated by Cr Goodfellow, Wyndham has high rates of obesity and diabetes, and this can be said to be a direct result of poor environmental design in parts of Wyndham which are car dependent, unwalkable and poorly connected. All communities deserve walkable neighbourhoods, easily accessible and quality parks, and good-quality, frequent and connected public transport, as well as high-quality recreational facilities. These are all key objectives of council's health, wellbeing and safety plan.

The community safety survey has also highlighted the impacts of poor environmental design. Road safety was once again identified as Wyndham's key major safety concern, especially for those living in Wyndham's growth fronts of Point Cook, Tarneit and Truganina. Comments from these residents were on the poor road design, poor quality of the roads and poor connections, which provided them with a sense of feeling unsafe on roads.

Some of the things that council has been doing, especially in and around road safety, in trying to promote walking and cycling has included working with some of the local schools. The council has actively participated in three TravelSmart programs, with Bethany primary, Thomas Carr secondary college and currently with Truganina South Primary School. We also actively promote safe walking and riding to school days and try to provide incentives for the schools to participate in these days by providing a healthy breakfast and raffling off bicycle helmets and vouchers from one of the local shops for whoever rides to school. We are working quite hard to try to increase our rates of walking and cycling, but the feedback from parents is that they are reluctant to allow their children to do so because of a sense of the roads being unsafe.

Another interesting result was that those living in Wyndham and Hoppers Crossing felt unsafe at night in public places, whereas those in Point Cook felt the safest. A question to ponder is: does this have to do with the design of our public places in these areas? Another key action in the community health, wellbeing and safety plan is to look at developing health and safety guidelines to assist us in achieving a better urban design.

Cr GOODFELLOW — I will now hand over to Mr Forrest, who will make a few comments in relation to Wyndham's recommendations.

Mr FORREST — The first couple of recommendations in our submission were around regulations and minimum standards. You will see we looked through some of the planning criteria and planning policy that is so

heavily qualified by ‘you might do this’ and ‘you may consider this’. The first thing we talked about was some of those minimum standards and regulations being a bit more strongly worded than they are at the moment.

I come to private open space as a particular example. If we go back to these slides, you will see this picture and particularly that picture in terms of what we have. The planning scheme for units — not houses but units — says the objective is to provide adequate private open space for the reasonable recreation and service needs of residents, and then it says family homes, which are currently averaging over 250 square metres, are required to provide 25 square metres of open space as the principal open space, with a minimum dimension of 3 metres. That is the same standard that is prescribed for the units, and that is to meet an objective of providing adequate private open space for the reasonable recreation and service needs of residents.

As Cr Goodfellow said, we have no capacity for canopy trees. These spaces often are fully paved, have synthetic lawns or no permeability whatsoever, notwithstanding a requirement at the time that the building surveyor issues the building permit that 20 per cent of it remains permeable. Obviously you then see the urban heat island effects compounding, and there is little capacity for physical activity.

In Point Cook 52 per cent of households have a child at or under the age of 14 in them — that is, 3 out of every 10 people in Point Cook are aged under 15. Given the demographic profile of Point Cook — and we have the same things in Tarneit and in newer parts of Wyndham city — it is simply not possible to form the view that the standard outline of 25 metres of private open space with a 3-metre dimension is capable of providing the reasonable recreational needs of young families.

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council has made recommendations in relation to increasing public open space. Wyndham City Council is struggling to get adequate provision of public open space, and those numbers are in that report. Particularly at the regional level we have a debate between the notion that ‘You cannot put it into the developer contributions model to get that regional open space’ and the state struggling to find the resources to support that as well. Therefore it does not happen. This even relates to things like getting funding for swimming pools and netball, basketball and volleyball facilities. Those sorts of things are regional-scale infrastructure for which you are not entitled to make an application for developer contributions. We simply do not have state revenues or grants programs — and we are talking in the hundreds of thousands rather than the millions for this sort of infrastructure — so we are struggling to get any support for them.

In contrast, some planning schemes do have things like a canopy tree density specified, and they have building envelopes on every lot, which is about protecting not only orientation but the capacity for some open space. In relation to active transport, we are struggling to secure sufficient road reservations on our major roads to have off-road bicycle paths and decent tree reserves and to deal with all the infrastructure requirements. There are some interesting challenges around the demands for road width and space and the standards for setbacks for trees, including what that does to generate speed and to take up land, and the issue of still not being able to get in canopy trees and adequate space for services. There is not enough allowance — for example, in Manor Lakes we cannot get enough space in the reserves for a third-pipe system for water. We cannot get that in with everything else and still have a footpath and a tree. There are significant issues around those things. The first thing that gets compromised is the tree canopy; we cannot actually put canopy trees down the median. The second thing that gets compromised is the bicycle paths.

I think there are arguments for a much more concerted statewide effort and a significant increase in resourcing for targeting walking and riding to schools. There have been efforts of a little bit here and a little bit there. I think there could be substantial increases there. Some more consumer and community education about the relationship between environmental design and public health would be a good thing as well. I do not think there is much point going through all the recommendations, other than opening up for questions.

The CHAIR — I go back to the second or third slide, where there were a number of statistics, particularly ‘Psychological distress, low level’. The whole slide is quite startling, but in relation to the figure for males of 75.3 per cent, how is that played out? And what sort of strategies does Wyndham have for trying to address that?

Mr FORREST — The footer in the submission says:

The Kessler 10 (K10) scale is a set of 10 questions designed to categorise the level of psychological distress over a four-week period (low, moderate, high and very high).

I think things like that have supported programs like men's sheds and the provision of support for adult education programs, and we have certainly been involved in those.

Mrs PEULICH — Lower rates?

Mr ELSBURY — I will vote for that!

Mrs PEULICH — That might reduce the distress level.

The CHAIR — In your view, why does it play out more in Wyndham compared to even Melton?

Mr FORREST — Than those other regions?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Ms MIDOLO — One of the other things that council is currently doing is looking at attracting more service providers. We have had notoriously low numbers of service providers, especially in mental health. One of our key target areas is increasing services around mental health, not only for youth but also for adults. We have notoriously low numbers of service providers in mental health. I think at the moment we have only one psychiatrist.

Mrs PEULICH — Do you have a very multicultural community? Would they have a low uptake level of those type of services?

Ms MIDOLO — Yes, and our community is actually changing. We have quite a large intake of refugee and humanitarian entrants as well as skilled migrants, and we also cater for our older, more established communities.

Cr MAHFOUD — I think a lot of it is also related to car dependency, with low levels of local employment and low levels of public transport. You heard Cr Goodfellow mention that it is 40 minutes between bus services. People simply are not using public transport, so they are then using cars more, walking less and being less active. With less open space there is less opportunity to get out and walk the dog.

Mrs PEULICH — You are a time constrained, anyway.

Cr MAHFOUD — There are time constraints, yes. You have smaller backyards, so you are not even out there doing those things you are forced to do sometimes, like getting out and mowing the lawn. You simply do not have that with paved backyards.

Mrs PEULICH — All they are exercising is PlayStation fingers. A quick question: how did we get to where we are? Where are the regional parks? Where are the linear parks? Where are the pocket parks? Where are the road reservations? Why the lack of shade?

Mr FORREST — There is a set of standards in terms of the local open space and the links, so we have a bible of infrastructure standards that fits into what the Growth Areas Authority is on about. We end up with the 8 hectares; there are some standards around having 8 hectares that is still a local park within a kilometre of 95 per cent of the dwellings and a local park — I cannot remember the minimum size for the smallest neighbourhood park — within 400 metres.

Mrs PEULICH — So you meet all that?

Mr FORREST — We do meet that. I do not think we are very good at the links that are off road. I think that has been a struggle to get in. The off-road links are not as good as they probably should be, and the on-road stuff by and large ends up being painted on the road. I think that has been a cheaper and easier way of doing it.

There is the way we do subdivision on the urban fringe. When you go to a place like Wyndham, where it has all been cleared or was never heavily vegetated in the first place apart from native grasses, you do not have a tree canopy that you are trying to protect as you build around it. That is unlike the Plenty growth corridor, where

they still have some reasonable stands of river red gums that have survived over a period, and they design around that. We have had a situation where there is no vegetation to protect, and then people have come in and it is not easy to establish it. We have had 10 years of drought as well.

I know the committee is going to come and do a tour in October, so you will see parts of Point Cook — notwithstanding the fact that the view you see in the aerial shot can be a bit deceptive, because sometimes the view as you drive along the road is a bit better and feels a bit better than it does just looking straight down. We are starting to see a bit of a tree canopy at Point Cook. I do not think we are doing so well in some of the other parts of the municipality.

In relation to the built form, I do not think people understand the relationship between how much house they are consuming, how much energy they are using and how inefficient those houses are, and I do not think there is a lot of consumer education. If you go and buy a fridge, it tells you how much power that fridge is going to use in a year. If you go and buy a house, it does not tell you how much power it is going to use, under whatever assumptions that might be, over a year. Houses are going in, and they all have double garages. They all have two bathrooms. It is very hard to purchase a house does not have those things. I do not think people are well educated or informed in terms of making those choices. As a result, they are buying big houses with very little yard, as they try to consume as much house as they can, at quite an expensive rate. It is \$1500 per square metre. That is a lot for a garage under a roof, when you could park the second car outside.

Mrs PEULICH — Is there any evidence of more than one generation living together — apart from mum, dad and the kids — such as a grandma and grandpa living there as well? Is there any evidence of that?

Mr FORREST — Off the top of my head I do not think there is much.

Ms MIDOLO — There is anecdotal evidence. It is known that with some of our refugee families you could have up to two to three families living in one house. It is also because of their income; they notoriously find it very difficult to enter into the public rental market. We do not have accurate statistics or data around that, but it is known that that happens as well.

Mr SCHEFFER — I absolutely accept and appreciate what you are saying about the tree canopy and one thing and another, but if you look at the inner city, not so long ago Fitzroy and Brunswick had no trees. They had the wall-to-wall terrace houses, and that was it. They have done the planting of even quite large trees in those 2-metre yards in the front that have provided a canopy for the footpaths, so the whole area is very green. What is the difference there? Why is it allowed in the inner city and not in the areas you are talking about?

Mrs PEULICH — I think it is concern about foundation.

Mr SCHEFFER — Yes, I understand that.

Mr FORREST — I think there is a range of things. When you are doing the new areas and the growth areas there is a drive to adhere to engineering standards. There is the notion that if this is an 80-kilometre-per-hour road, you cannot have anything within 5.5 metres of the edge of the curb. Even if you reduce the speed limits, you still have very wide buffers. Those standards, when you are trying to retrofit the inner suburbs, do not apply. I know, because I live in the inner suburbs, that they will stick obstacles right in the middle of the road reserve in amongst the on-street parking. I think there are some issues about how we apply standards. It is a bit of a problem. I also think there is an issue about cost; it is an extraordinarily expensive process to retrofit that —

Mr SCHEFFER — So you are saying in the inner city it is a big investment?

Mr FORREST — They have the resources to do it, and they have the property values to justify it. I think they do invest significant sums in trying to deal with that. There is a combination of issues. The MAV submission, which you will have, has some evidence that high levels of public transport generate active transport, which means people actually walk more. The capacity to walk and feel good about your environment is one element, but the inner suburbs also benefit from transport.

Mr SCHEFFER — Could I ask you a final thing on that? Is there also a cultural dimension to it? It seems to me, having lived in Melbourne all my life, that in the west — I do not know whether it is to do with soils or

whether it has to do with people's approach to urban design — there have always been fewer trees than in the northern, eastern and southern parts of Melbourne. Is that just a geographical feature?

Cr GOODFELLOW — That is because you are on the basalt plains, and it has basically been dry farming since 1823. It is the flattest part of Melbourne.

Mr SCHEFFER — So you are saying that is the primary reason for it?

Cr GOODFELLOW — That is the primary reason. As you move around to Point Cook, where the RAAF base was, there was a plantation undertaken by the air corps, when that became the Royal Australian Air Force. The Chirnside family, which owned all that property plus Werribee Park, also did some planting. As Werribee grew, it was the flat plains that meant it was so good for dry farming, so naturally we have not got the same greenery out our side. We are also in a rain shadow.

Mr FORREST — We do have some opportunities, which are basically some third-pipe systems. As I was saying, we are getting the stuff up to Manor Lakes. If there is enough room in the road width to put the pipes in, we will have water that we can use for some of these things.

Mr ELSBURY — Thank you very much for the presentation. As a local, I fully appreciate the issues that you are telling us about today. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the council on some of the plans it has put forward for the Werribee city centre. You have got rid of a lot of the planning restrictions that are being placed on development in the town centre and are allowing for greater and better use of land in the town centre.

You have talked about service provision, the difficulties we are facing with regard to public transport and the fact that one bus every 40 minutes goes out into the Wyndham Vale area. It is one bus every 20 minutes out where I live. Is there any consideration by council that perhaps an increase in the density of buildings could be allowed in the outer areas, which would provide greater floor space for actual living while at the same time opening up more land to be used for recreation or communal outdoor living as well? Basically what I am saying is that traditionally there has been a two-storey limit right across the city of Wyndham outside of the CBD. Is there any scope for higher density housing to be developed?

Mrs PEULICH — Or is this a political question?

Mr FORREST — I do not think it is.

Mr ELSBURY — I just wanted to know because, as we keep hearing, if you have a certain population density, you can provide trains — I will not mention trams, as that has been a bit of an issue for the City of Wyndham in the past — and buses. There are trams and buses, being able to provide the health care that is required and being able to provide a police force, et cetera.

Cr GOODFELLOW — I would say that, from a council perspective, yes, that would be good, but there is no point just making higher density housing out in the regions — for example, Tarneit, west of Wyndham Vale or anything like that. We have to have the basic infrastructure there. It is all right putting in a 100-unit development three storeys up out at Manor Lakes, but if there is no capacity to actually move a reasonable amount of people from point A to point B, it actually defeats the purpose of putting high-density housing up in that area.

Mr ELSBURY — With respect, Cr Goodfellow, I am just pointing out that you have also got the regional rail link that will be going through the Manor Lakes area, out through Tarneit and down through Truganina, which opens a great ability — —

Cr GOODFELLOW — You are quite correct, and it will open up a great ability if we can actually get developers to look at building over stations and having activity centres around those areas. I agree with you. There is an opportunity for that, but rather than just putting them out in that area, ad hoc, there needs to be a well-defined precinct structure plan that addresses those issues but also has a transport plan attached to it so we do not find ourselves in the same position that we in are now. If I can be frank, there have been 30 years of underinvestment out in the western suburbs which has led us to the position we are in now.

Mr FORREST — Can I also follow up on Andrew’s question? I will take the second one first. Around the RRL stations, and with the landowners around those stations, our challenge is to realise the opportunities and not build a Bunnings backing on, which is what we have got with some challenges around William’s Landing. Part of that is that we are ending up with the back end of Bunnings or hard-top centres, with the sea of car parking. Your last witnesses talked a bit about the experiences in America with that. That is one issue we have in terms of getting the densities up. Point Cook is up there because that is a main street town centre that works really well. Anecdotally, our communities in Point Cook are feeling safer than the other communities where the hard-top centres are surrounded by a sea of car parking.

Lots are getting smaller, but we are just not getting more efficient with how we use space within houses to work with those lot sizes. That is the issue we have there. We do have medium-density sites in those new areas, and companies like Burbank, which builds 7-star-rated houses, are building terrace-style housing. It is affordable: \$150 000 and you will get a 22 or 23-square house that is 7-star-rated. It was in the local paper last week.

Mrs PEULICH — I would have thought after 5 stars everything loses meaning.

Ms PENNICUIK — Five stars does not have any meaning.

Mr FORREST — Five stars has lost all its meaning, with respect. Five stars means nothing. They do not have to work out which way is north to get 5 stars. They do not have to work out which way is north to get 6 stars.

Mr ELSBURY — My house is 5 stars, and it does not even have eaves. It is ridiculous.

Mr FORREST — That is the issue about standards. Beyond two storeys, if they are cleverly designed and they are in the roof spaces or things like that, I do not think there is a lack of appetite for it. I think Glenn’s point is legitimate; it is not just about having density, it is having the services and the transport around it is well.

I would stand corrected, but I am not sure that there are blanket prohibitions. The more likely scenarios for blanket prohibitions are in covenants, and an issue for us with the parliamentary committee on liveability, which we are meeting with tomorrow, is that private planning under the guise of covenants does things like demand certain built form, demand double garages in some instances and mandates that you cannot go higher than two storeys. It demands all of this and that. Sometimes that is a bit of an issue with this, but I am not sure there is a lack of willingness on the part of council to consider, within those parameters, much more intense development.

This is clearly evidenced by Werribee central, where we put out structured planning processes. They have 6, 8 or 10 storeys, and they look good. We do not have much of a historical legacy that means we have heritage overlay concerns that you would have elsewhere. I think it has been fairly warmly embraced by the community as what we would like to see in central Werribee.

Ms PENNICUIK — Thank you. I found your submission very interesting. In fact I think you used the word ‘frankly’ before — I think the submission is very frank. I also sort of picked up a tone of frustration in that submission, and I sort of get it a little bit from everyone who is here today as well. I think there is so much to say about what has been presented in terms of, as Inga said, ‘How do we get there?’. I can give my theories on the powers of developers et cetera as to how we get to situations like this, but I think Wyndham is emblematic of the sort of issue that we are trying to deal with here in this committee about how not to do what has happened at Point Cook. I remember Point Cook when there was nothing there and Werribee was a small town.

In your submission you talked a lot about how while it is all very fine to have all these strategies and guidelines and policies et cetera, if they are not implemented — and you talked about the old chestnut of vertical fiscal imbalance and the fact that you are not getting enough support from the state. I just wanted you to make some more comments about that and what you need in terms of more support from the state to achieve the objectives that you need to achieve.

Cr GOODFELLOW — Where do you want me to start?

Ms PENNICUIK — I said that might happen!

Mr FORREST — Council last night considered a proposal for a redevelopment at 80 Derrimut Road, which is where we currently have an indoor aquatic centre and an events centre that is about 30 to 40 years old. At the

moment we have a library across the road in leased premises, so we want to build the library and renovate the other two buildings. It has a \$50 to \$60 million price tag on it. It will service new communities as well as the current community. If we say, 'We would like to see a third of that cost in terms of a contribution from central government to help us with that', and if you then divide that and say, 'We can get half of that from the states and half of that from the feds', it is a \$10 million price tag for the feds and for the state.

For the state, the challenges around that are that SRV majors are still at \$500 000. There is a bed of pools which is about \$3 million. From time to time we have a bit of CSF money — a million dollars here and there — although we tend to put that into the community centres that we are building, which are costing \$6 million to \$8 million a pop. We are only getting 60 to 70 per cent of the cost of those new facilities out of developer contributions; the ratepayer is picking up the rest if we do not get government grants for it. Finding a standard pool of funding at the state level for \$10 million, which is 15 per cent of the cost of that project — there isn't anything.

Mrs PEULICH — How big is your budget?

Cr GOODFELLOW — Our capital works budget this year — —

Mrs PEULICH — No, the total budget.

Cr GOODFELLOW — It is \$250 million.

Mrs PEULICH — Two hundred and fifty? And what is the size of the population?

Cr GOODFELLOW — It is 160 000 plus.

Mr FORREST — So we are taxing at \$1600 odd per person. The rating effort is 30 per cent above the state average — rates as a proportion of property values. People look at the bigger urban fringe councils and say, 'They have a lot of money'. They do not have a lot of money. They are asking their local taxpayers to pay proportionately more than people do across state averages for a fairly significant demand in terms of meeting growth.

Mrs PEULICH — In which lower house state seats do you cap it?

Mr ELSBURY — Tarneit, Altona and Lara.

Mr TEE — Like Ms Pennicuik, I found your submission very interesting and quite sobering in many ways, because we have had a lot of evidence about the importance of urban design and health, and you very adequately demonstrated what happens on the ground and how lives are literally affected by some of these outcomes. I thought it was very interesting — the precinct structure plan example. It was a bit like reading one of those sort of old Soviet country constitutions that promise a workers paradise — a sort of workers' utopia. However, reading them and the way they are being translated by developers — the implementation on the ground is very different to the reality the growth areas authorities promised when they devised them. Your recommendation is if it is going to be in the precinct structure plan, do not leave the wriggle room but make it mandatory. If you are going to have these standards, you have got to implement them, and that means you have got to be able to enforce them. Any slipperiness in the language means that they just do not get delivered, and then you have got the examples that you have shown there.

The takeaway I got, and I just want to make sure I am right, is that it is about enforcement, but the other thing is that if the state government is going to open up more land and more development, make sure that it is going to deliver the infrastructure in terms of public transport, roads and so on. I am assuming that, and it is pretty much what I took away, but I just want to make sure I have got it right.

I want to tease out this issue because the government has announced that it is going to reduce block sizes so that we are going to get even more of that effect as we go forward. It is about teasing out this dilemma of smaller block sizes versus the issue of it being easier for developers to put up a house on a smaller block size than to do what Mr Elsbury suggested, and that is perhaps to have a couple of storeys in terms of the planning regulations that we need to go through. I want to unpack that a little bit because I want to get your views on that.

Cr GOODFELLOW — My view on that is that you are quite right. My personal view, it is not council's, is that there is a little bit too much greed on the part of development. We are seeing more houses being squeezed on per hectare than possible, but people are still buying the same standard house and, as I said before, putting them on small blocks, thus reducing backyards for kids to play in. I can remember as a kid that you would go out into the backyard, climb up a tree and have fun. That has all gone.

All governments, previous governments going right back, talked about wanting to provide affordable housing and stuff like that — and that is good; we need affordable housing — but we also need to provide proper choice for people, and we have to ask the question, 'Why are people moving out to the outer suburbs?'. And some of the responses that we get, and I get it all the time in my ward which is Point Cook, Tarneit and Truganina, the fastest-growing ward in Wyndham, is that people go there because they want to have their backyards, have their little bit of utopia, because a person's home is their castle, and that is where they want to live.

If we try to have one model that fits all, it does not work. We need to be flexible in the delivery of housing that we want to achieve because people want different types of housing. In saying that, I draw your attention back to the photo that we had up of the sea of black roofs. To me that is not really a community in building, that is just 'build it and worry about the problems later'. We need to worry about how we build a community first, build it from the ground up, not plonk houses in there and then expect councils to try to find land to build sporting fields and things like that. That is the problem that Wyndham had.

Wyndham council underestimated the amount of growth that was happening in Point Cook and Wyndham, but also the previous government underestimated it as well. It is one of those things: you do forecasts, but sometimes your forecasts go out the window. That has taken both government and local government by surprise. Wyndham is in catch-up mode trying to provide those services. There are 59 babies born per week in the city of Wyndham — two kindergarten classes per week. These are the things that we have got to try to do.

Getting back to your point in regard to the smaller blocks. Yes, there is a need for smaller blocks, but we cannot just say, 'No, the blocks are going to be 300 square metres' and that is it. There needs to be a variety to allow people to have that variety of choice, and I think you actually build better communities. As a ward councillor I can bet my bottom dollar that every week we get about four or five complaints in regard to building development in areas like this where there is a vacant block and there is about 400 square metres and they are trying to squeeze in five units because the ResCode says it complies. You have to try to then argue the point to those people and say, 'Hang on, that is part of our planning system'. We need to probably re-look at all that.

Mr TEE — I have another issue, which is again picked up in your submission. It is one thing to open up the land. It is important to put in the infrastructure with it — the kindergartens, the buses, the roads and the bike paths. The other aspect that I think is picked up in your submission is the lack of employment opportunities, which is a particular problem for you, which means you spend longer in the car. We have just heard evidence about how the amount of time you spend in your car reduces the amount of exercise you do, and there is a mental health component to that, coming back to the other issue. A harder thing to grapple with is how to generate employment in your area so that you do not have people travelling for an hour and a half.

Cr GOODFELLOW — A great opportunity for the government is the Werribee employment precinct area. It is the biggest parcel of land that the government owns in metropolitan Melbourne. Here is an opportunity to actually develop that correctly.

Mr TEE — Can you tell us a bit about it?

Mr FORREST — It is 700 hectares basically between Wyndham and Hoppers Crossing. At the moment there is a health precinct in there. It has a justice precinct, but it has only a police station at the moment. There are food technologies in there. There is agricultural science in there. It is about trying to build off that. The GAA is doing some structure planning at the moment. There has been work done in terms of a development authority to develop it, build up super lots and see that as a major employment precinct.

Mr TEE — What do you need from the state for that? What do you need from the Victorian government?

Mr FORREST — Basically we need the GAA to get the structure planning done and some sort of mechanism through the Urban Renewal Authority Victoria for a dedicated group within the Urban Renewal Authority to have carriage of the land and see it developed and staged and then use proceeds from the land sales

to fund the infrastructure going forward. There are significant funds for the state in that as well. It will be a major employment precinct targeting 50 000 to 60 000 jobs and 30 000 residences in a St Kilda Road-style of development.

Cr GOODFELLOW — You will probably need to get Treasury to see the value in it, other than just the monetary — —

Mr ELSBURY — That land was earmarked as being a technology precinct by a previous government, and then the whole thing about the employment precinct actually came up under the previous government and nothing was done. We have the opportunity now, and the people in Wyndham are very vocal about it.

Mr TEE — I think we are all on the same page. Now let us do it.

Cr GOODFELLOW — It is about connecting that employment precinct to the Werribee CBD. It is about creating, if you like, as Mr Forrest said, a St Kilda Road-style of boulevard. For your knowledge, every little piece of food technology that you see at the supermarket comes out of the Gilbert institute there in the employment precinct. It is a very important area for Victoria's economy as well as Australia's.

Mrs PEULICH — You made comments in relation to people opting for more compact block sizes but not compromising on the size of the house, and I note Ms Midolo's earlier comments about there being a sizeable multicultural community. Those who have lived in, say, the high-rises of Russia, China, communist Yugoslavia or Hong Kong, let alone India, do not place as great a value on the sizeable backyard as perhaps we who have enjoyed that in Australia do, because they have never had it unless they have come from an agricultural setting, so I guess it should not be a surprise to us. However, what they do value are things like the building of more promenades and public open space.

Clearly the council does have a role to play there, and obviously you have had enormous amount of challenges. The fact that you have a director of advocacy I think highlights the level of those challenges that you have, but I guess the opportunity is there before that land is developed, when the land is still cheap, to purchase where possible land for sporting and other infrastructure purposes. The City of Casey has done an amazing job in purchasing large tracts of land for those purposes when it was absolutely dirt cheap. Notwithstanding that the comment that you make about obviously having to put council money into the development of large regional infrastructure sporting projects is a valid one, and I think it would be the size of those funds are probably certainly much smaller than what is realistic, at the same time I think there has to be an onus on council to purchase that land when it is available for future planning.

Mr FORREST — We have been.

Cr GOODFELLOW — We actually have done that: We have purchased 140 hectares of land that has become available, but what we are finding is that when a developer does take over the development or the farmer sells it to them the delivery of quality useable open space by the developer to council comes towards the end and it is really not suitable for a sporting field or anything like that so we get the leftovers, and I think that needs to change and developers need to start to talk at the start to say, 'What is it?', and I think structure plans moving forward should actually set those ground rules in place to say, 'This is what we actually need here', and what we are doing as a council is trying to co-locate those open spaces next to schools, so there is a win-win for the schools to be able to use it during school hours and after hours the community can use the oval that we provide plus the school oval. We are conscious of it, and this council has been, I think, one of the most strategic councils that we have had. We have made a commitment to go out and purchase that land, which we did. There was a big uproar about it, but at the end of the day we see the need as we move forward to provide for open space, so we are being proactive.

Mrs PEULICH — We look forward to coming over and visiting and seeing how you do things.

The CHAIR — Yes, and that is a good ending point. We are looking forward to that very much and looking hopefully at the different types of development that have happened, what works and what does not work.

Mr ELSBURY — I am looking forward to going to Wyndham.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Lucy, Glenn and Bill.

Cr GOODFELLOW — On behalf of Wyndham City Council, thank you very much for the opportunity to present.

Mr ELSBURY — I look forward to going to Wyndham very soon — in a few minutes.

Committee adjourned.