

## **Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Environmental Design & Public Health**

**City of Ballarat, June 2011**

### **1. Review the evidence of the contribution of the natural and built environments to the promotion of health and wellbeing.**

The City of Ballarat's Health & Wellbeing Plan 2009-2013 (Appendix 1) provides an overview of health and wellbeing issues for the Ballarat population and the link between these issues to the natural and built environments (Vol 2, pgs 11-28) (1).

In 2006, life expectancy for males born in Ballarat was 77 years, three years less than the Victorian average for males. Life expectancy for females born in Ballarat was 82 years; two years less than the Victorian average for females. Life expectancy is an indicator of mortality conditions and, by proxy, health conditions in a population. The top ten causes of disability and death in Ballarat include: heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, mental illness, and road injury. This chronic disease and injury is overwhelmingly linked to: physical inactivity, poor access to healthy food, smoking tobacco, inappropriate consumption of alcohol, social isolation, motor vehicle use and inadequate attention to road safety. Low incomes, unemployment and financial stress are also contributors to these factors (1,2).

There is widespread evidence that environmental factors do link to health-related behaviours and peoples' living and working conditions (1,2). Healthy communities instigate health protection measures such as regulating access to unsafe products like alcohol, tobacco, electronic gaming and environmental pollutants. They also promote health through enhancing access to:

- adequate and affordable housing;
- physical activity opportunities;
- social connection opportunities;
- local, healthy food; and
- safe, active transport modes (1,2).

A healthy community also values the environment (and its health), minimises its impacts, uses resources wisely, and protects biodiversity (1).

Healthy communities are more resilient and hence more likely to adapt to the global challenges of climate change, peak oil and resource depletion (3,4)(see also Appendix 2).

### **2. Identify and report on those elements of environmental planning and design which provide the most promising opportunities for improving health outcomes in Victoria.**

The elements that offer the most promising opportunities are outlined in the following table; these elements interact together to promote health and wellbeing outcomes. Successful implementation of these elements requires concerted, whole of government and cross sector collaboration.

Element	Impact on health/wellbeing
<p>1. Plan, design and retrofit neighbourhoods and activity centres to prioritise walking, cycling and public transport (5,6)</p>	<p>Increase physical activity in everyday life</p> <p>Increase social connection</p> <p>Increase passive surveillance and safety</p> <p>Decrease traffic pollution, including green house gases</p> <p>Provide resilience to challenges such as climate change, peak oil and resource scarcity</p>
<p>2. Reduce traffic speed to 30km/hr in neighbourhoods and activity centres (5,6)</p>	<p>Improve road safety</p> <p>Reduce road injury and death</p> <p>Increase physical activity through increased walking and cycling</p> <p>Decrease traffic pollution, including green house gases</p>
<p>3. Improve public transport services (frequency, reach and affordability)(6)</p>	<p>Increase physical activity through walking</p> <p>Increase equitable access to employment, goods and services</p> <p>Increase passive surveillance and safety</p> <p>Decrease traffic pollution, including green house gases</p> <p>Provide resilience to challenges such as climate change, peak oil and resource scarcity</p>
<p>4. Stop urban sprawl through increasing housing density (26 dwellings/hectare), mixed land use improved access to a variety of destinations/services (5,7)</p>	<p>Increase physical activity through increased walkability of neighbourhoods</p> <p>Increase passive surveillance and safety</p> <p>Increase equitable access to employment, goods, services</p> <p>Increase social connection</p> <p>Provide resilience to challenges such as climate change, peak oil and resource scarcity</p>
<p>5. Ensure adequate supply (closer proximity) of quality,</p>	<p>Increase physical activity via walking if open space is within 400m of housing</p>

Element	Impact on health/wellbeing
diverse, public open space; protect green open space (1,5)	Increase recreational opportunities for all abilities Increase social connection Protect and enhance biodiversity Increase peoples' connection to nature
6. Food-sensitive planning and urban design (3)	Increase supply of local and sustainably produced, healthy food Protect agricultural land for food production Improve access to healthy food choices Increase people's connection with food Increase local employment opportunities Reduce resources needed to grow, produce and transport food Reduce greenhouse gases associated with food Improve local food security Provide resilience to challenges such as climate change, peak oil and resource scarcity
7. Regulate access to unsafe products such as alcohol and electronic gaming machines (8,9)	Better balance of access and supply of unsafe products Reduce harm from consumption of alcohol and use of electronic gaming machines
8. Incorporate targets for social housing in new developments and growth areas (1)	Improve housing affordability Reduce housing insecurity Reduce housing stress
9. Improve ways in which community members can have input into land-use planning (1,10)	More open and inclusive community input Local solutions for local problems

**3. Assess the extent to which these factors are currently taken into account in environmental planning and design in both the public and private sectors, and their effectiveness, with particular reference to new growth areas.**

There has been some progress in raising awareness and discussion of these elements by planning and infrastructure staff at the City of Ballarat. There is broad recognition and acceptance of the importance of these elements in the health promotion sector both within Australia and internationally.

The implementation of these elements in Ballarat is constrained by a number of factors:

- Victorian planning legislation does not specifically articulate health and wellbeing as a key objective.
  - Australian culture is heavily car reliant and, in general, is not supportive of medium to high density living. This is particularly the case in regional centres outside capital cities. In 2006, 73% of people living in Ballarat travelled to work by car compared to the Victorian average of 66%. In 2006, 12% and less than 1% of dwelling structures in Ballarat were classified as either medium or high density; this compared to 16% and 4% for Victoria as a whole (1).
  - Limited state and federal government investment into public transport, especially in regional centres.
  - Jurisdictional issues between state and local governments in relation to road management often results in fragmentation in decision making resulting in community frustration and inability to meet community needs.
  - Short-term economic activity often drives decision making at the expense of longer-term health, social and environmental considerations.
  - A complex planning process that limits meaningful community input by hard to reach groups such as children, young people, people on low incomes and those that do not speak English fluently.
  - A lack of dedicated infrastructure funding for local government to retrofit existing communities and develop best practice in growth areas.
4. **Determine opportunities to influence environmental planning and design for health, including consideration of the role of legislation, guidelines, and public-private partnerships, and the costs and benefits of various options**

A concerted, whole of government approach across three tiers of government is needed to create healthy environments in local communities. The following areas provide opportunities to influence environmental planning and design for health:

- Review key legislation such as the Planning and Environment Act 1987 to incorporate health and wellbeing as a key objective and explicitly define environmental planning and design elements for health in the State Planning Policy Framework.

- Develop easy to use guidelines and tools for land-use planners, infrastructure designers/delivery staff and land developers. These guidelines should explicitly define environmental planning and design elements for health and could include easy to use Health Impact Assessment check-lists (11). They should also be linked to the State Planning Policy Framework.
- Increase training and awareness of land-use planners, designers, developers, decision makers and the general community about environmental planning and design elements for health.
- Develop public-private partnerships in regional areas to demonstrate best practice urban development and design including medium density living, access to public space/active transport/open space and food sensitive urban design.
- Provide a state and/or federal government dedicated infrastructure fund to enable local government to rapidly expand infrastructure that supports walking, cycling and public transport and improve the quantity and quality of public open space. The City of Ballarat has a significant footpath retrofit program and principle bicycle network to install; both need a significant investment of funds.

**5. Provide recommendations for future planning and investment; and that the Committee will consider:**

**a. the effectiveness of the Environments for Health Municipal Public Health Planning Framework;**

This framework has been a useful resource to inform the development of the Municipal Public Health Plan at the City of Ballarat. It has supported community/ social planners to raise awareness of the importance of environmental planning and design for healthy communities across Council departments. It has not, however, led to incorporation of health and wellbeing principles into the local planning scheme (review of state-wide legislation is required, see section b below).

**b. the State Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, the Transport Integration Act 2010 and the Planning and Environment Act 1987;**

The Planning and Environment Act 1987 requires a comprehensive review to enable local communities to meet key health, social, environmental and economic challenges particularly those relating to chronic disease, social justice, climate change, peak oil and resource depletion. In particular, the Planning & Environment Act should:

- clearly articulate health and wellbeing as a key objective and explicitly define environmental planning and design elements for health in the State Planning Policy Framework;
- require local government to integrate the goals of the Public Health and Wellbeing Plan into the Municipal Strategic Statement; and
- Include Health Impact Assessment as a tool for planners for assessing land use plans (and develop guidelines for the use of HIA) (11)

**c. international experience such as the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Healthy Cities initiative**

**d. the consistency of policy approaches across the Victorian Government to promote health through evidence based environmental planning and design measures; and**

Policy approaches have not always been consistent especially in the areas of agriculture, housing, transport, land-use planning and regional development. The state government could consider adopting the World Health Organisation's 'health in all polices' approach (12).

**e. the role of public open space in promoting health;**

The role of public open space is critical to promoting health and wellbeing, not only through provision of opportunities for active recreation and social connection but also to enhance and protect the natural environment (1). Increasingly, community members are seeking access to open spaces for a diverse range of activities such as unstructured recreational opportunities and community food projects (i.e. community gardens, orchards). The City of Ballarat currently has two community gardens which play a significant role in not only reconnecting people with food and developing new skills but also provide outdoor physical activity and social connection opportunities.

Current issues in relation to open space provision in Ballarat:

Issue	Possible solution
<i>Supply</i> Ballarat Open Space Strategy has identified inadequate quantity and quality of open space in some areas of Ballarat	A federal/state infrastructure fund would assist local governments to purchase and improve land for open space in areas with poor supply and quality.  Increase minimum requirements in the State Planning Policy Framework for developer contributions for provision of open space in new developments.
<i>Quality/amenity</i>	A federal/state infrastructure fund would assist local governments to improve public open space to meet more

<p>Renewed emphasis on community needs assessment such as provision of facilities for unstructured physical activity for all ages and abilities (e.g. circuit paths, adult exercise/play equipment, amenity improvement); community food projects and access to at least one natural public open space.</p>	<p>diverse community needs.</p> <p>Endorsement of forthcoming Open Space Planning and Design Guide (Parks and Leisure Australia).</p> <p>Reference key design principles in the State Planning Policy Framework.</p>
<p><i>Access</i></p> <p>Ensure access to open space via active modes of transport</p>	<p>Reference key access principles in the State Planning Policy Framework.</p> <p>Provide a state and/or federal government dedicated infrastructure fund to enable local government to rapidly expand infrastructure that supports walking, cycling and public transport to open space.</p> <p>Reduce traffic speeds in and around open space; improve safety via walking and cycling to open space destinations.</p>

## References

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12. World Health Organisation, Government of South Australia. Adelaide statement on health in all policies: moving towards a shared governance for health and well-being. Adelaide 2010.

### Appendix 1

City of Ballarat. Health & Wellbeing Plan 2009-2013 Volumes 1&2.

### Appendix 2

Regional Sustainability Alliance Ballarat. Collaborating for Regional Sustainability. Direction statement: 2010-2012.

### Submission prepared by:

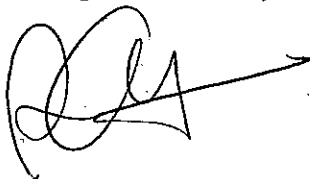
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Signed: 

Date: 30/6/2011

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Signed: 

Date: 30/06/11

\*This submission has been prepared in consultation with staff at the City of Ballarat from the following areas: Community Development, Strategic Planning, Statutory Planning, Infrastructure Development/Delivery, Traffic Management, Open Space and Recreation Planning, Economic Development and Environmental Programs.