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The Secretary  
Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee  
Parliament House  
Spring Street  
MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: Inquiry into Environmental Design and Public Health**

Thank you for providing the Greater City of Bendigo the opportunity to make a submission in relation to the contribution of environmental design to the prevention and public health in Victoria.

Please find below from the City of Greater Bendigo's response with respect to the terms of reference.

**I. Review the evidence of the contribution of the natural and built environments that promotes health & well being**

The City of Greater Bendigo (CoGB) through a number of strategic documents including the Council Plan and various strategies focus on a number of key priorities, one of which is the built and natural environment.

Greater Bendigo 2036 Plan represents the priorities and preferences of people from across Greater Bendigo in 2010. This document is being used to inform future planning by CoGB as well as by other organisations which are engaged in future planning.

The Council Plan acts as a charter between Council, COGB staff and the community. The Plan's development was informed by the Greater Bendigo 2036 Plan and a Council Priority Forum; it guides the overall direction and allows for actions and service delivery priorities to be developed through the budget process.

The range of key strategies documents already developed by CoGB have a focus on built and natural environments and contain deliberate strategies which make a clear link between wellbeing and the built and natural environments. They demonstrate our commitment and legitimise the relationships between these concepts – for example the Cycling and Walking

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Strategy, Community Access and Inclusion Plan, Bendigo Residential Development Strategy, Open Space Strategy, Road Safe Strategy, Rural Area Strategy, Natural Environment Strategy, Township Community Plans, Positive Ageing Strategy, Play Space Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Framework, Travel Smart and Child Friendly City. (Documents can be viewed at [www.bendigo.vic.gov.au](http://www.bendigo.vic.gov.au)) .

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

The COGB has many examples of environmental planning and design that we think improves the health outcomes of the Greater Bendigo Community.

The Walking & Cycling Strategy focuses on creating links between suburban areas, connections between townships such as the O'Keefe Rail Trail and surrounding open space networks. The strategy aims further develops linear trails such as the Bendigo Creek and Strathfieldsaye trails, giving focus on promoting physical activity for commuting as well as leisure, and ultimately aiming to reduce reliance on car transport.

The Open Space Strategy provides guidance and direction in the future acquisition, development, use and management of open space. This strategy is a joint partnership between COGB, Parks Victoria, Department of Sustainability and Environment and Sport and Recreation Victoria. It allows for the identification of land for future development for sporting recreation as well as the development of passive recreation facilities such as the Crusoe Reservoir and Park No. Seven. It also includes the development of master plans for the White Hills Botanical Gardens and Lake Weroona.

The Road Safe Strategy guides the delivery of a safe road and path networks, promoting and planning for safe walking and bike paths for alternative road users. Examples of this include the installation of designated bike paths and roundabout upgrades leading into the City centre and education facilities. The City in partnership with Vichealth and local primary schools has run a successful 'Walking School Bus' program with a number of schools in the area.

Township Community Plans or (district planning) facilitates the engagement of small towns and rural areas to set out their community vision and priorities for the future. Many townships have used these plans to identify funding priorities and projects that bring community connectivity and in many cases improvement to recreational facilities that build on the Community's overall health and wellbeing.

The Natural and Environment Strategy provides direction for more sustainable approaches for COGB operations, whilst providing support for sustainable planning provisions and community education. The strategy together with other key planning policies aims to strengthen the protection of biodiversity corridors assists preservation of flora and fauna diversity, which has demonstrated links to ecological sustainability and provides important links for passive recreation activity.

The Play Space Strategy helps to develop play spaces that provide a variety of opportunities and experiences that guide the development, maintenance and upgrade of play spaces. There are many examples of play spaces that have been developed around the COGB, from traditional playgrounds in residential areas to larger play spaces that move beyond the traditional form to recognise landscape, scenery, shade and a combination of natural and artificial features. Some successful examples include the Camp Hill Place Space in Rosalind Park and the Lake Weroona playground; the sites provide a variety of play and gathering opportunities to families.

The Community Access and Inclusion Plan, is a true commitment to community to reduce barriers and respond to legislation. It aims to remove the barriers for those disadvantaged to access goods, services and facilities and to reduce barriers for the disabled to access employment. It commits to promoting inclusion and participation through tangible changes in attitudes and practices. An example of this is through building accessible fishing platforms at the Kennington Reservoir, installing tactile indicators through out the pathways and networks, adopting Disability Discrimination Act principles in our Outdoor Dining and Street Trading Code of Practice and advocating for accessible events.

Our status as the first Australian Child Friendly City recognised by the UNICEF in 2009 demonstrated our commitment to the health and wellbeing of our younger citizens. The CoGB Bendigo recognises children as equal citizens, asks their opinions and ideas, and seriously considers these opinions and ideas in order to provide the children with feeling of safety within the workplace. As adults it is our responsibility to care for the environment for our children. Activities include community awareness raising, child friendly leadership with our public and private partners, consultation with children, a children's web page and research partnerships.

The Health and Wellbeing Framework recognises the role that we must play in developing and implementing local policies for health and wellbeing for the benefit of the community. It acknowledges a broad range of determinates of health and recognises that many can be addressed across a range of dimensions. With respect to environmental planning and design the Framework focuses on developing livable, lined and sustainable towns, building social capacity and strengthens service delivery.

The Domestic Wastewater Management Plan is a planning and management document developed to minimise the impact of domestic wastewater on human health and the local environment using a risk management approach. The Land Capability and Mapping Tool developed as a part of this process allows for the land capability of unsewered areas to be clearly identified on a GIS mapping layer and identifies suitable wastewater disposal options to minimize the impact of wastewater on the environment we live in.

**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.**

When planning for new growth areas the CoGB refers to a number of strategies, local policies as well as the traditional planning tools. This allows for the following factors to be considered through a structure planning process.

Structure planning assesses the following points which are guided by the previous plans and strategy:

- Pedestrian / Cycle access – usable / aesthetic value
- Walkability; creating connections between places
- Local Community preferences & priorities- such as greater Bendigo 2036 and local Small Town and Neighborhood Plans
- Environment Protection / features valued by community
- Empowerment – community participation in decision making
- Identifying gaps – need for community facilities etc
- Emerging issues
- Sustainability
- Creating useable spaces and linkages to encourage exercise and walkability.

The good design of public space and the built environment carries tremendous potential to be effective in promoting health and well-being by, for example:

- Enabling casual surveillance of public areas and creating sense of personal safety security;
- Provide physical connections to important civic and cultural institutions such as schools, hospitals, community centres and museums.
- Reducing the risk of personal injury;
- Encouraging human observation and social interaction;
- Creating positive and pleasurable experiences of the urban environment and life in that environment.

**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 cost and benefits of various options.**

a. Existing legislation and guidelines

The philosophy expressed in some existing legislation is valuable, but planning tools that are available (and are the required reporting framework) are often an impediment to increasing the local environmental considerations. For example Local Structure planning priorities and preferences do not translate into the local Planning Scheme framework.

b. Private/public partnerships

Local Government has an increasing role in advocacy across a spectrum of community issues. This includes working in partnership with other tier of Government, business and agencies in private and non government service sectors to improve delivery of major projects, services and amenities for our City. Within these partnerships we have been able to contribute to better environmental planning and design that provides better health outcomes, for example the Bendigo Hospital redevelopment, the provision of reticulated sewerage to fire affected areas, Epsom Huntly Recreation Reserve and Child Friendly City status.

c. Cost and benefit

The benefit of developing and implementing strategies and plans that promote health and wellbeing has been valuable to the Community, however Local Government must balance service delivery, renewal and infrastructure development within budget considerations. Local Government is a large and complex organisation with a multitude of roles and responsibilities which are required to be balanced across Council and community priorities and service delivery. Therefore we believe that the CoGB is limited to opportunities in participating in influencing environmental planning and design, by budget constraint and other factors listed below.

1. Allocating to Capital Works Program in yearly budget, money spent on roads compared to money spent on Walking & Cycling Paths.
2. State Government Funding specifically for health and wellbeing preventive approaches (as distinct from interventions and care) is limited.
3. Seasonal weather issues associated with climate change have necessarily diverted volitional funds for wellbeing initiatives to emergency management priorities.
4. Increasing demand on areas of service delivery responding to population and legislative changes.

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

a. The effectiveness of the Environments for Health Municipal Public Health Planning Framework (MPHPF)

The CoGB MPHPF is a thorough and well researched framework which gives a good theoretical and practical base for planning across four environments: built, natural, social and economic.

In its current form it is more effective as a way of documenting how COGB and its partners can contribute to the health and wellbeing of the community, rather than influencing other strategic planning. It is good broad plan that considers all environments for health and is based on an understanding of the social determinants of health.

It provides important high level or philosophical advice. However it is sometimes difficult to garner and sustain across-organisational ownership and commitment. There are also local financial barriers to be able to implement the items that are desired and planned. Unfortunately due to the timing of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 and the preparation of the CoGB's current Municipal Public Health Planning Framework (MPHPF), the link between the framework within our current Council Plan is not as strong as it could be.

By providing a stronger link with our Council plan, our internal capacity to really drive the MPHPF objectives and actions across the organisation could be strengthened allowing all units understand how they contribute to health outcomes. This will allow for better reporting on how the COGB influences health outcomes and build on the health promotion activities across service delivery and the community safety function we deliver through our statutory functions presently.

Strategic planning has already commenced to rectify this within the next Council Plan so that a strong link to MPHPF is made and indicators that measure health outcomes are developed, allowing for more comprehensive reporting to be undertaken. Further work is also required to improve knowledge and coordination of health promotion both traditional and community safety models.

b. The State Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008

The overall objective of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (PHWA) is valuable in its intention to effectively contribute to health outcomes through a number of areas and does so, through regulation of business, provision of immunisation, infection disease surveillance and the power to respond, abate and prevent nuisance that may cause harm or injury to a persons.

The registration, monitoring and where necessary compliance action of certain business such as prescribed accommodation, hair, beauty and skin penetration premises allows for the community who use these facilities to be protected from disease and injury that could possibly occur. This is an effective mechanism for ensuring community safety.

Immunisation provision through the COGB has been seen a high percentage of children and young adults protected from vaccine preventable illness. Infectious disease surveillance allows for the COGB to identify where possible source and work with our partners to reduce the spread of infectious disease.

The Nuisance provisions of the Act allow the COGB to respond to actions or things that impact on the residents. The new legislative tools introduced in the new Act allow not only Council to direct the rectification/ceasement of nuisance but also now allows to prevent nuisance where they may be likely to reoccur.

The Act will allow for a stronger link to be made between the Municipal Public Health Planning Framework (MPHPF) and the Council Plan, which if established will allow for the inclusion of measurable health and wellbeing indicators to be included within the plan.

Whilst the legislation is relatively new and the City has not used or assisted the State in other provisions, the objectives and content of the Act are effective to contributing to the overall health of the community, it is however not the only means to do so but rather provides a suite of tools.

#### Planning and Environment Act 1987

The Planning and Environment Act 1987 has the potential to be effective however as mentioned earlier it has a high focus in statutory planning, but needs appropriate tools to implement. The tools designed to guide implementation of the Act are limited or are not effective. Thus it is considered as a statutory requirement rather than an overt commitment to its contribution to wellbeing.

Health & Wellbeing given lower priority in the Act to economic outcomes which are seen to be of more urgency and higher importance

The Subdivision Act however does take into consideration open space planning when determining development applications. Whilst the 5% open space contributions derived from the subdivision of residential land goes towards contributing to open space it limits the total quantity of open space that can be provided. The provision of 'raw' land for public open space by most developers creates a long lead time for capital works by CoGB to make the space functional and beneficial.

#### Transport Integration Act 2010

No evidence as yet (new legislation)

Principles are good.

Needs to be embraced, but successful implementation will need partnerships between sectors, including community, right from the commencement of planning.

To support its stronger adoption and consideration in planning consideration should be given to a requirement that it is considered by all planning partners.

- d. The consistency of policy approaches across the Victorian Government to promote health through evidence based environmental planning and design measure.

Generally policy initiatives are consistent; the documents are clear and provide useful guidance to those undertaking planning.

However there is sometimes inconsistency within and between government departments when specific advice is sought about a local issue related to supporting health and wellbeing. This is clearly a problem for integrated planning and implementation and adds to community dissatisfaction with local government planning activities.

- Structures designed to assist adherence to policy advice seem to have fallen down.
- Practical tools designed to assist implement are limited and more would be useful.
- Support from State Government Agencies, to deliver, reinforce or review policy direction could be stronger for example demand for carparking not consistent with government policy directions.
- Government should extend investment into public transport and infrastructure to regional cities, to promote accessibility, walkability and investment in growth areas.

e. The role of public open space in promoting health.

This is a critical element in a number of our strategic planning documents. The importance is reflected clearly in the Strategies and Annual Actions in the Council Plan.

Community members strongly expressed the importance to them of open spaces for maintaining their health and wellbeing, and this is set out in detail in the Community Plan – Greater Bendigo 2036.

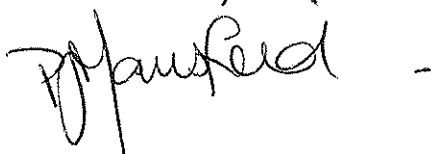
The question of public open space contributions is also relevant here.

The CoGB experience finds that it is much easier to obtain funding support for active sport than for passive recreation.

Open spaces should be developed to ensure that all members of the community have a place for engaging in active and healthy lifestyles. Key linkages such as accessible and safe footpath within open spaces to promote mobility of the older and younger generation should be considered. Further investment should also be given to the importance of open space and mental health (well being) as well as physical health.

If you have any further questions in relation to this submission please do not hesitate to contact me on 5434 6356 or [p.mansfield@bendigo.vic.gov.au](mailto:p.mansfield@bendigo.vic.gov.au) .

Yours sincerely



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