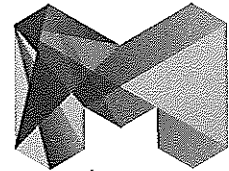


7 July 2011



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

Dear Secretary,

SUBMISSION: INQUIRY INTO ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN AND PUBLIC HEALTH

We commend the Victorian Government on its commitment to inquire into, consider and report on the contribution of environmental design to prevention and public health in Victoria.

We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Environment and Planning Committee in relation to the inquiry into environmental design and public health in Victoria.

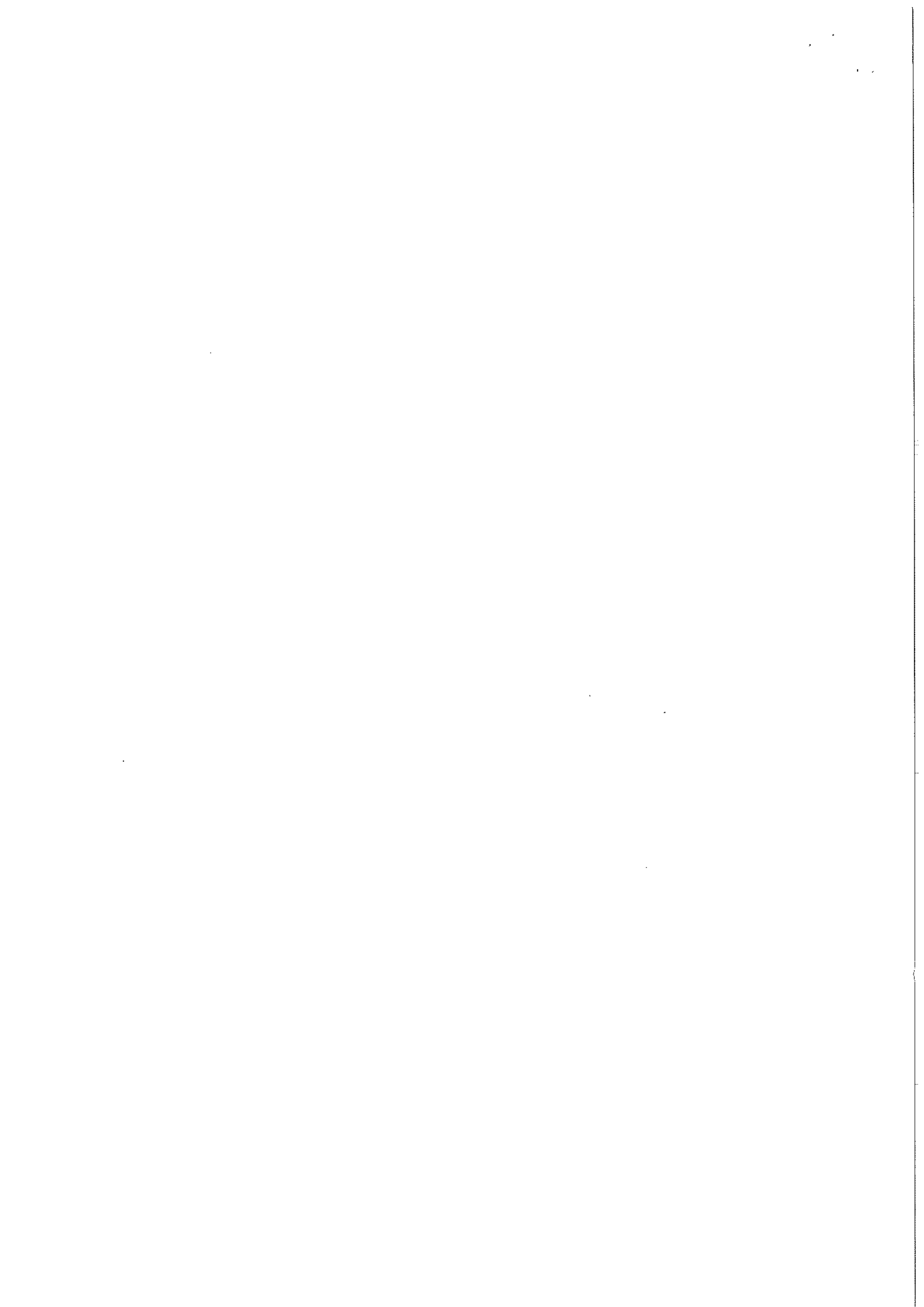
The City of Melbourne management's submission to the Committee focuses on modernising the Act and highlighting the role of planning and the environment in improving public health. Unfortunately we have been unable to offer Councillors the opportunity to have input to the submission. Please advise either Russell Webster or me if you believe a contribution from City of Melbourne Councillors would be beneficial.

If you have any further queries please contact Mr Russell Webster, Manager Health Services via email: russell.webster@melbourne.vic.gov.au or phone: (03) 9658 8801.

Yours sincerely

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CoM reference #6576844



City of Melbourne

Submission to the
Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Environmental Design and
Public Health in Victoria

Acknowledgements
Health Services Branch
Urban Design Branch
Urban Landscapes Branch
Strategic Planning Branch

8 July 2011

City of Melbourne

Submission to the Environment and Planning Committee
Inquiry into Environmental Design and Public Health in Victoria

Introduction

The City of Melbourne's submission to the Committee focuses on legislative reform and highlighting the role of planning and the environment in improving public health.

Background

The City of Melbourne covers 37.6sq km and has a residential population of around 89,759. The municipality is made up of the city centre and a number of inner-city suburbs, each with its own distinct flavor. It is estimated that over 770,000 people utilise the city on a daily basis and that Melbourne hosts over one million international visitors each year.¹

The City of Melbourne works with other local councils and the State Government of Victoria to ensure that Melbourne is one of the safest, healthiest, and cleanest cities in the world. It supports Melbourne's position as Australia's pre-eminent centre for arts and culture, education, dining and shopping.

The City of Melbourne has a unique role to play in the capital city context for urban planning and design as it champions people's health outcomes and supports a city philosophy of being accessible for all. It is a place for people to go. As evidence about the urban profile changed, it was realised that Melbourne was developing rapidly from a city to work to a place for work, recreation and residence in almost equal measure.²

The City of Melbourne's strategic policy direction is set out in *Council Plan 2009 - 2013*. This plan is based on the *Future Melbourne Community Plan 2008* which was developed in a collaborative and wide ranging open public engagement with the community.

The City of Melbourne reviewed the practices of the municipal health planning after the revised *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* (the "Health Act") was released. Due to the growing evidence that the local environment in which we live can have a profound affect on health, it was agreed that the health planning had become everyone's business. Consequently, the municipal health plan was integrated with *Council Plan for 2009-2013*. This was the first time corporate planning was merged with the activities of those community partners who had an interest/role in local public health.

The current *Council Plan 2009 – 2013* has a total of 38 public health and wellbeing objectives. These sit across five key Goals:

1. A City of People.
2. A Creative City of Melbourne.
3. Economic Prosperity.
4. A knowledge City of Melbourne.
5. An Eco-City.
6. A Connected City.

To ensure *Environments for Health Framework 2001* creates a system approach to planning and is inclusive of all the essential pillars for health impacting the health and wellbeing of our community, urban profiling is situated within this framework.

The public health and wellbeing objectives have also been developed through consideration of global, national, state and regional health and wellbeing priorities and issues including:

- World Health Organisation's social determinants of health
- National Health Priority Areas
- Victorian Department of Human Services priorities for Integrated Health promotion
- Moonee Valley Melbourne Primary Care Partnerships priority areas (now known as the Inner North West Primary Care Partnership).

Cities and societies are complex and interrelated. Health cannot be separated from other goals. The inextricable links between people and their environment constitutes the basis for a socio-ecological approach to health. The overall guiding principle is the need to encourage reciprocal maintenance – to take care of each other, our communities and our natural environment.ⁱⁱⁱ

Changing patterns of life, work and leisure have a significant impact on health. Work and leisure should be a source of health for people. The way society organises work should help create a healthy society. Health promotion generates living and working conditions that are safe, stimulating, satisfying and enjoyable.^{iv}

Part 1: Review the evidence of the contribution of the natural environments to the promotion of health and wellbeing

Municipal health planning contributes to population health in substantial ways, reducing burden of disease proportional to its capacity to impact decisions and pathways that create healthy communities.

City of Melbourne has focused on the Environments for Health Framework^v for its methodology in developing our Urban Health Profile 2008; reflecting the strong evidence that local environments in which we live have profound effects on health and that municipal health planning contributes at a critical path. A further step taken by Council in 2009 to integrate the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan ("MPHWP") with the Council Plan 2009-2013 has improved the response to emerging natural environmental issues.

An examination of data about health status and health determinants in this urban profile context in the municipality has therefore emphasised the emerging issues with regard to population growth and climate change which are critical areas for all environmental pillars but especially in the natural environment.

In the absence of this local government mechanism the emphasis on health prevention may not have occurred intentionally for health issues such as food security, the reduction of pollution, the creation of healthy open spaces, and developing responsive housing developments to climate change.

The protection of the natural and built environment and the conservation of natural resources must be addressed in any health promotion strategy.^{vi}

Part 2: Those elements of environment planning and design that provide the most promising opportunities for improving health outcomes

In order to environmentally plan and design for improved health outcomes, the City of Melbourne believes that certain elements relating to physical structure (urban form, size, density and configuration) must be met.^{vii} These include:

- inherently walkable
- well-serviced by public transport
- compact and relatively densely populated
- offers within close proximity, a functional mix of land use activities and community amenities (including for example: local shops, schools, childcare, medical centres and parks) that have local resilience and local relevance
- offers a diverse range of housing and commercial premises to purchase and lease (including affordable options) for all members of the community to live, work and study there if they wish to, and so enables diversity in every sense.^{viii}

An urban environment that promotes health is one that meets the above criteria. This is because it will offer:

- Services and facilities within walking distance – allowing all people (not just the young and fit) to integrate exercise as part of their daily activities.
- Opportunities for people to connect with their local community, essential for wellbeing.
- A healthier environment with less noise and air pollution - because destinations will be local and walkable rather than relying on vehicles.^{ix}

To further imbed the health practices of health planning across the urban design brief within councils, the City of Melbourne council has a view that further development for an integrated approach is recommended.

To create intentional rather than accidental planning for emerging natural and built environment health issues, health planning must move towards congruence. As an organisation, the City of Melbourne has promoted discussions about a coordinated response to building healthy cities. This approach further highlights the benefits of a multidiscipline approach. More importantly, this ensures a holistic approach to all Environments for Health Framework dimensions.

The continued review and development of State legislation that informs Council policies such as the Municipal Strategic Statement (the "MSS"), will create positive opportunity for improving health outcomes.

Part 3: Assess the extent to which these factors are currently taken into account and their effectiveness, particularly for new growth areas

Elements such as 'walkability', availability of public transport, functional mix of land use and a diverse range of housing options are all elements that are essential to a healthy urban environment. While they have been recognised since the 1960s^x, they are still not effectively nor consistently applied to the design and development of places in Victoria.^{xi}

Currently, those suburbs that best fit the above criteria are in Melbourne's inner city. These were suburbs that were established in the 19th century when it was essential to create an urban structure that was walkable and connected via public transport. In these suburbs, the establishment of tram services provided the catalyst for development of local services and facilities that were accessible to a relatively high density residential neighbourhood. Parks and gardens were also integrated as accessible places to relax and recreate. General health was at the forefront when planning these suburbs.

Since the 1950s, wider automobile ownership has allowed developers to omit walkability and public transport from the equation. This is clearly evident in the structure of the neighbourhoods that have been created. Not only are suburbs now located further away from principal destinations, but they are developed with very low density and in a way that is inefficient and isolating.^{xii}

Part 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.

The principal way in which planning and design may establish healthy places is in the structure of the urban environment. For the City of Melbourne, with its diversity in population needs, 'walkability' is a key indicator for urban planning and design.^{xiii}

In order to promote a healthy urban environment that encompasses social, environmental and economic benefits a certain approach must be adopted:

- A clear, strong and consistent political commitment to re-evaluating the way our cities and suburbs are established and allowed to develop.
- Integrated design strategies and policies founded on high quality research and citizen participation.^{xiv}

The City of Melbourne understands that a multi-disciplinary approach is essential to responding to the challenge of creating more healthy urban environments that are complex, diverse and resilient.^{xv} Health outcomes cannot be ensured by the health sector alone. Health promotion goes beyond health care. It puts health on the agenda of policy makers in all sectors and at all levels, directing them to be aware of the health consequences of their decisions and to accept their responsibilities for health.^{xvi}

The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion 1986 makes a number of important statements that highlight the important link between health promotion and creating healthy urban environments:

- Health promotion policy requires the identification of obstacles to the adoption of healthy public policies in non-health sectors, and ways of removing them. The aim must be to make the healthier choice the easier choice for policy makers as well.
- Health is created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life, where they learn, work, play and love.
- Health is created by caring for oneself and others, by being able to take decisions and have control over one's life circumstances, and by ensuring that the society one lives in creates conditions that allow attainment of health by all its members.
- Caring, holism and ecology are essential issues in developing strategies for health promotion.

Part 5: Provide recommendations for future planning and investment, and that the Committee will consider:

5a) the effectiveness of the Environments for Health Municipal Public Health Planning Framework

Recommendation

It is proposed that a coordinated reform to relevant legislation be acted upon by parliament, providing better traction for those council policies that inform the processes for action around health planning

The City of Melbourne is committed to building capacity between land use planning and public health and wellbeing.

In 2010, the Planning Institute of Australia (the "P.I.A") led a workshop with the City of Melbourne and representatives from the Western Metropolitan Local Government (health) Planners Network to build capacity for health planners' and their understanding of land-use planning. Further, in 2011 the P.I.A held two "Creating Healthy Communities" workshops with 30 council staff. The workshop sought to show how land use planning, community development and/or design skills together with current legislation can provide positive outcomes for community health and wellbeing.

Work is continuing to build the capacity for creating partnerships for improved health planning across a multidiscipline approach.

In the absence of a coordinated approach for legislative reform, the impact on council health planning continues to be ad hoc. The ability for urban planners to respond to the MPHWP so long as future planning outcomes remain reliant on well meaning parties who lack traction and do not adopt best practice and a multidiscipline approach.

The City of Melbourne views that reform to the legislation will support the integrated response to council policies such as Local Planning Policy Framework, MSS, MPHWP and the Council transport plans; which are all essential drivers for an effective health planning approach.^{xvii}

5b) the State Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, the Transport Integration Act 2010 and the Planning and Environment Act 1987

Recommendation 1

It is proposed that 'health' is inserted under section 4 Objective (1)(c) to increase consistency with the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008's emphasis on the built environment in municipal public health and wellbeing plans, and that the cumulative social impact on the community also be recognised.

The City of Melbourne believes that the explicit reference to a "healthy" environment for all Victorians in the objectives of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* ("the Act"), is an important step towards ensuring that the health and wellbeing of Victorians is taken into account in making decisions about the use and development of land and determining the direction of Victoria's planning system.

Evidence is clear that the built and natural environment in which people live can have a significant impact on their physical and mental health and wellbeing, and can either support or create barriers to healthy and active living. We believe that a primary purpose of planning should be to protect and promote the health and wellbeing of the community.

To achieve this aim, we believe that it is important that "healthy" in section 4(1)(c) is given a broad meaning, which recognises the influence of the physical environment on physical and mental health and wellbeing. The meaning of "healthy" should not be confined to ensuring that the physical environment does not place Victorians at risk of illness or injury; rather, it should extend to ensuring that the physical environment protects and promotes the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Victorians – for example, by designing the built environment in a way that provides ready access to healthy foods, encourages physically activity as transport, provides spaces for recreation physical activity, provides for build and natural shade from the sun, and preserves agricultural land to ensure adequate food supplies in the future.

Recommendation 2

It is proposed that the intention of the inclusion of 'healthy' under section 4 Objective (1)(b) is further clarified with the insertion of 'health' under "Definitions" of the Act.

Potential sources for the definition of 'health' include the World Health Organisation or other Victorian Legislation and Parliamentary documents.

The simply inclusion of 'healthy' into section 4 (1)(c) has the potential to be misinterpreted and thus not have the ultimate impact intended with its inclusion. Therefore, an appropriate definition should be included within the Act which reflects the meaning explained in Recommendation 1.

Recommendation 3

It is proposed that 'health' is included under section 60 (1A)(a)

As mentioned previously it is proposed that 'health' is also included under Objective (1)(c) and therefore this should also be reflected under the matters to be considered by the responsible authority.

Recommendation 4

It is proposed that health impact assessments are included as mandatory.

The new proposed process will use an 'impact assessment' to determine what is appropriate for the assessment of projects that have the potential for significant economic, social or environmental impacts. To ensure consistency with the proposed inclusion of 'healthy environments' in the objectives of the Act, developments which are to be subject to this process should also undergo a health impact assessment.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that Section 12A(4) is amended to include consistency with the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and thus close the loop and ensure consistency within relevant legislation.

Section 26 of the Health Act requires all councils to prepare a MPHWP. The Health Act specifies the MPHWP must be consistent with the MSS prepared under section 12A of the Planning Act, as well as the Council Plan prepared under the *Local Government Act 1989*. However, the MPHWP is not required to inform the local planning scheme, or be considered in the planning process. Section 12A of the Act requires MSSs to be consistent with the current council plan prepared under section 125 of the *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic), with no mention of the council's MPHWP.

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that any proposed changes to the Planning and Environment Act aligns with the *Transport Integration Act 2010* (Vic).

Land use planning and development is intrinsically linked with transport needs and requirements and there is a need for consistency between planning and transport legislation.

The *Transport Integration Action 2010* (Vic) explicitly references individual and community wellbeing (section 8)^{xviii} and "health and wellbeing" (Part 2, Division 2(13)).^{xix}

5c) International experience such as the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Healthy Cities initiative

We draw on others' experiences that can provide leadership for developing healthy cities.

"It is no coincidence that cities with a long tradition of applying land-use planning, public transport strategies and a focus on public green space are among the healthiest cities in the world. Portland was rated number one of the 100 largest USA cities in meeting Healthy people 2000 goals...Vancouver is first amongst the Canadian cities...Copenhagen and Munich rank amongst the top 10 healthiest and safest cities and Melbourne among the healthiest and safest in Australia".^{xx}

The City of Melbourne understands that a multi-disciplinary approach is essential to responding to the challenge of creating more healthy urban environments that are complex, diverse and resilient.

5d) the consistency of policy approaches across the Victorian Government to promote health through evidence based environmental planning and design measures

Recommendation

It is recommended that any proposed changes to include health at the forefront of planning is consistent with or leads the national agenda for preventative health and social inclusion

In the National Preventative Health Strategy that was launched in September 2009, there were many explicit references to working with urban planners and the need for a supportive environment to sustain any investments in prevent to increase the health and wellbeing of Australians.

Further to this emphasis on health, the Commonwealth Government also recognises the impact of social inclusion with a vision of a socially inclusive society is one in which all Australians feel valued and has the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our society. The Australian Social Inclusion Agenda calls for significant changes in the way government works and in the way in which government interacts with other sectors in society – again with an emphasis on the impact of the built environment and its influence on accessibility and inclusion.

5e) the role of public health space in promoting health

Recommendation

It is recommended that mechanisms for local government be introduced to strengthen planning for open spaces

There is a growing body of evidence showing the importance of public open space to people's mental and physical wellbeing.

GreenSpace, a UK charity which aims to improve parks and green spaces, has recently produced a draft report *Blue Sky Green Space* which provides a comprehensive list of the benefits of parks and green spaces. This document focuses on the latest research around open space provision in the UK, however much of the evidence would be applicable to Australia.

Blue Sky Green Space cites research which shows:

Where people have good access to green space they are 24% more likely to be physically active, this is regardless of people's income or social group, those who live furthest away from parks and green spaces are 27% more likely to be overweight or obese. A brisk walk every day, in your local park, can reduce the risk of heart attacks by 50%, strokes by 50%, diabetes by 50%, fracture of the femur by 30%, colon cancer by 30%, breast cancer by 30% and Alzheimer's by 25%.^{xxi}

Blue Sky Green Space outlines the benefits of open space to children, older people, and the community as a whole. It also summarises the important environmental benefits such as improved air quality and temperature mitigation which in turn provide health benefits.

The City of Melbourne is currently developing an Open Space Strategy which will highlight the role of parks in improving people's health and wellbeing. An Issues Paper (Internal document; 10 February 2010) has been developed which cites further research:

Parks Victoria and Deakin University have undertaken research into the benefits of green space on people's mental and physical health. The study identified that city living involves a disengagement of humans from the natural environment and this is likely to be detrimental to health and wellbeing, with parks one of the only means of accessing nature for people in urban areas. The results indicate that green parks can reduce crime, contribute to general wellbeing, reduce stress and enhance productivity and promote healing. Other studies demonstrate that plants and nearby vegetation can have positive benefits including healing, improved mental capacity and productivity, improved

job and life satisfaction, attracting consumers and tourists to shopping centres and aiding community cohesion and identity (Deakin University, 2008).

Other research indicates that spaces with trees and grass offer more diverse play opportunities and in particular higher levels of creative play for children than places without these natural landscape elements. There is also evidence to show that people use their local public spaces more and are more satisfied with them if they include natural elements, which in turn increases the amount of socialisation amongst neighbours (CABE Space, The Value of Public Spaces, undated). This research also indicates that well maintained open spaces increase people's use and value of them.

Natural elements in open space (including grass, plants and trees) contribute positively to improving the local microclimate in built up areas. Studies have revealed that places with a greater number of trees had better carbon-storage capacity, lower level of surface runoff entering drains, and were cooler where vegetation cover was greater than 50% of the space (CABE Space, The Value of Public Spaces, undated).

In summary the intangible benefits of natural features in open space include:

- *improved mental health and wellbeing*
- *improved sense of community cohesion and reduced crime*
- *increased social opportunities by encouraging people to regularly use the open space*
- *play opportunities for children, particularly creative play*
- *improved air quality and localised microclimate through reduction in reflective and hard surfaces*
- *visual and physical relief from the built form.*

In recognising the importance of public open space to people's health and wellbeing, the City of Melbourne Open Space Strategy is seeking to address a number of issues:

- Protection of existing open space to ensure it isn't eroded or lost to other functions
- Adequate provision of open space to allow safe and easy access for all
- Increased intensification of urban densities and living will need to be offset with adequate open space to ensure future communities are happy and healthy
- Mitigate the impacts of urban heat island effect on the frail and elderly.

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- i City of Melbourne Council plan 2009-2013
 - ii Places for People 2004 City of Melbourne
 - iii Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, 1986
 - iv Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, 1986
 - v Environments for Health, Dept of Human Services 2001
 - vi Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, 1986
 - vii Urban Design and Health, DOH (2010)
 - viii Comments Urban Design City of Melbourne
 - ix Comments Urban Design City of Melbourne
 - x The Death and Life of Great American Cities by Jane Jacobs (1961).
 - xi Dan Hill's critique in "Same Old New World Cities", in Architecture Australia, March-April 2011, pp. 37-44
 - xii Comments Urban Design City of Melbourne

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- xiii Places for People' Melbourne 2004 Prof Adams, Ros Rymer et al
 - xiv Comments Urban Design City of Melbourne
 - xv Comments Health Services City of Melbourne
 - xvi Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, 1986
 - xvii Comments Health Services City of Melbourne
 - xviii The *Transport Integration Action 2010* (Vic) Section 8: "The transport system should provide a means by which persons can access social and economic opportunities to support individual and community wellbeing".
 - xix The *Transport Integration Action 2010* (Vic), Part 2, Division 2(13): The transport system should be safe and support health and wellbeing".
 - xx Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication 2011 pg 469
 - xxi <http://www.green-space.org.uk/downloads/GreenLINK/BlueSkyGreenSpaceFullReportDraft.pdf>