

Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc. (PPL VIC)

Ms Gayle Tierney MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Planning
Parliament House
Spring Street
Melbourne
East Melbourne VIC 3002

8 July 2011

Attention: Mr Keir Delaney Committee Secretary

Dear Ms Tierney

Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Environmental Design and Public Health

Introduction: I am making a submission on behalf of the Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc. and would like to address the following terms of reference namely:

(1) review the evidence of the contribution of the natural and built environment to the promotion of health and well being; (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; and (5) provide recommendations for future planning and assessment; and that Committee will consider (e) the role of public open space.

Our Position: PPL VIC considers that public parks/gardens and public open space, easily accessible from home without car travel or public transport travel, in easy walking distance from home, within in one's neighbourhood, is a citizen's right and essential for good health. This applies especially for families with children and the aged. There should be social equity in the provision of open space for recreation. It must be available to all regardless of suburb and income, Parks/open space should be provided on a ratio according to the density of development proposed. In addition, existing parks should be retained as sacrosanct and never alienated for sporting facilities, carparking or freeways as has been done in the City of Melbourne with our prime parks – Royal Park, Princes Park, Melbourne Park, Yarra Park and the Carlton Gardens. We made this point in a submission to the Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee on 23 March 2004 on the issue of public open space in the urban environment specifically in the outer suburbs (there was not one recommendation made re provision of open space, it was all about development.)

“Healthy Parks Healthy People”: This motto of Parks Victoria was coined by Dr Mardie Townsend who is Associate Professor of Health Sciences at Deakin University. In a Study *“Healthy Parks, Healthy People (The Health Benefits of Contact with Nature in a Park Context)”* The Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences of Deakin University drew up a summary of the contribution of parks to human health and wellbeing. We support Dr Townsend's contention that people's physical, mental and spiritual health is dependant on contact with nature and access to open space. We believe that residents denied access to open space will suffer health problems especially children. Additionally parks are the lungs of the

city and all residents suffer from loss of green open space which acts as a counter to green house gas emissions. Doctors for the Environment claim that excessive carbon emissions are a health risk for the whole population. Dick Smith in his book “Population Crisis the dangers of unsustainable growth for Australia” points to his healthy childhood as a “freerange kid” compared with many of today’s children brought up in apartments whom he terms “battery kids”

Explosive Population Growth, Unplanned Urban Sprawl and High Rise Intensification in Melbourne Metropolitan Area: It is stating the obvious to say that Melbourne has experienced a population explosion in the last 10 years. Under the Bracks Government the blueprint for Melbourne 2030 was drawn up to accommodate 4 million. Then only eight years later under the Brumby Government this planning blueprint was updated to Melbourne@5 million with local councils given population targets to accommodate under the Brumby Housing Capacity Strategy. Now there is talk of Melbourne@8 million by 2035 although net overseas migration has slowed largely due to numbers of overseas students falling away with introduction of tighter permanent residence procedures. As a result of this population boom and the decline of housing affordability goes the phenomenon of the disappearance of the quarter acre block with the back yard for children to play in, the loss of habitat for wildlife and the proliferation of high rise units. This change of way of life for residents is extremely alarming and has direct negative impacts on people’s health. Compensatory public open space is not provided by developers.

Loss of Parkland in Melbourne inner city and suburbs: With the huge and - in our view – unsustainable population increases there has been a loss of public parks and gardens and a decrease in the amount of public open space per head of population. Parkland was once available for passive recreation. The central city has seen over the past 20 years a tremendous loss of public parkland for sporting stadiums – dedicated largely to spectator sports and hence serving a relatively small proportion of the population. Examples are: Flinders Park for the Rod Laver Arena and Gosch’s Paddock for the Soccer Stadium; Albert Park for the Grand Prix, the South Melbourne Football Ground, the Athletics’ Centre and the MSAC. Royal Park has been decimated by the State Netball and Hockey Centre, the Games Village (now a residential development) and a hotel and commercial centre as part of the PPP deal for construction of the Royal Children’s Hospital. Nowhere in Melbourne have we seen sporting facilities built in brownfield sites as was done in Sydney for the Homebush village for the 2000 Olympic Games.

Additionally the public is often shut out of parks and gardens in central Melbourne which are hired out for events e.g. the World Heritage Carlton Gardens are locked up for months for the Melbourne International Flower and Gardens Show. Similarly throughout the suburbs parkland has been incrementally alienated for sporting facilities serving a small section of the population. In Boroondara the community has fought many bids to take over parkland including those by Old Boys sporting clubs wishing to expand their territory e.g. Hays Paddock with pristine parkland and a wildlife corridor in East Kew used for passive recreation was nearly taken over for football training. The wetlands and creek area next to Boroondara Golf Course was nearly taken over for a private Golf Driving Range by a couple of entrepreneurs out to set up a new business. Our organisation which has over 80 environment groups as members can cite many examples of public open spaces threatened by private/specific purpose uses.

No Open Space/Gardens Provided with Building of New City Apartment Blocks and Outer Suburban Developments: Many Councils accept developers' cash in lieu of providing the required 5% open space on building sites. In fact we have not been able to discover any Council which does not follow this practice. We are also unaware if developers are obliged to provide open space in large outer city developments and if so what is the ratio to residents on the estate.

Evidence of Negative Health Effects on Children of No /Little Access to Open Space

Professor Anita Bundy of the University of Sydney was quoted this week as saying that today only 13% of children play outside. I have heard a speech by her re the effects on children of decreased outdoor play. She is a spokesperson for National Tree Day 2011. In a Medical Journal Health and Place No 17 (2011) a study was written up "Childhood Obesity and proximity to urban parks and recreational resources: A longitudinal cohort study." The objective of the research was to assess how proximity to parks and recreational resources affects development of childhood obesity. It was concluded that children with better access to parks and recreational resources are less likely to experience significant increases in attained BMI (Body Mass Index.)

I would be pleased if the Committee could hear a presentation from me. I would then make a number of recommendations.

Yours faithfully

Julianne Bell
Secretary
Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc.
PO Box 197
Parkville 3052

Mobile: 0408022408