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Friday 24 June 2011

File no. SF09/317
Contact: Katherine Kucharski
Phone: 9262 6534

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

Dear Keir,

Parliamentary inquiry into environmental design and public health in Victoria

Whitehorse City Council is pleased to submit this response to the above inquiry. Council understands that there are strong links between the built and natural environments and community health and wellbeing. We support the Victorian Governments efforts to ensure that these links are better recognised in future planning activities – both in terms of land use *and* public health.

Council makes the following comments for consideration:

1. While the contribution that the built/natural environments make to health and wellbeing is recognised in the Environments for Health Municipal Public Health Planning Framework, it is absent from the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. The *Planning and Environment Act* should explicitly identify 'the enhancement, promotion and protection of health and wellbeing' as one of its main objectives.
2. Interconnected with the above, there is an opportunity for better integration of Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans, the Municipal Strategic Statement and Local Planning Policies. These are key strategic documents at the local level and need to be better aligned.
3. Public spaces and place making initiatives are important in the planning and development process and both public *and* private developments need to contribute to the improvement and provision of the public domain.
4. Planning makes a contribution to health in terms of facilitating active living. It also, however, influences the health status of communities through gentrification and potentially, segregation by income. That is, there is a relationship between socio-economic status and health. An area may present as healthier when in fact, it has become less affordable. It is important that diversity and *economic* diversity specifically within communities is seen as a priority and in particular that affordable and social housing is distributed equitably throughout Melbourne and indeed, Victoria. Linked with this, the City of Whitehorse has many older residents that are 'asset rich and income poor'. The ability for these residents to 'age in place' – which has a



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many documented health benefits - is reduced by barriers to movement. Such barriers include housing diversity and the availability of appropriate, accessible dwellings. This must be considered in strategic planning activities.

5. Health impact assessment is a useful tool for understanding the impacts of land use planning decisions. There needs to be a greater scope/ability to utilise this in decision making at the local and the State level, as well as the development of tools to assist in this.
6. Sustainable and in particular, active forms of transport must be given greater priority in planning and transport infrastructure provision.
7. Natural landscapes and biodiversity make a major contribution to public health and Council stresses the importance of open space in relation to this, particularly as density increases into the future. Interconnected with this, trees and their protection is also extremely important in the urban environment.
8. Food security is an issue across Victoria and the provision of food – both in terms of access and production - requires greater consideration in land use planning across Victoria.

If you would like further information about these comments, please contact Katherine Kucharski, Social Policy Officer at katherine.kucharski@whitehorse.vic.gov.au or on 9262 6534.

We look forward with interest to the outcome of this inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Debbie Seddon
Manager Community Development
Human Services