



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
Select Committee on Public Land Development

Submission No: 31

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The Chairman

Select Committee for Public Land Development

Parliament of Victoria

Dear Sir,

The availability and maintenance of public land is an issue I feel strongly about, and I thank you for this opportunity to write to you.

I will refer to my local area of over 27 years. During this period we have all learnt to herd closer together, dutifully reducing urban sprawl, but have witnessed our public land being sold off at a rapid rate. It seems cruelly ironic that as we collectively reduce our private space, the government takes away our public space, just when you would think we have greater need of it.

We have seen local schools sold off - schools which were de facto parks after school hours, while the expansion of the Tullamarine Freeway consumed miles of walking paths and trees. To the north, the much-used parklands at Edgars Creek is in danger of being sold off to private developers - it all makes one feel quite helpless about our democracy, to see our common-wealth taken away.

In particular, though, I want to mention Royal Park. The Psychiatric Hospital and the lovely TAFE Horticultural Centre were razed for foreign-owned commercial development; open playing fields were closed down, replaced by a giant private netball/hockey stadium; the Children's Hospital is intent on expanding; and finally, the expansion of yet more car parks and a freeway threatens to be the final nail in Royal Park's coffin. Bit by bit, this park is being removed from us, and handed over to private profiteers and the car with its noise and fumes.

This rambling park is our local lung. We are not a bayside or bushland, or even a leafy suburb. We are houses, and increasingly flats and units, with few parks, and certainly nowhere else to go for a really decent walk. I for one am not fobbed off by 'linear' parks, such as under the tollway. Nobody would dream of wrecking the Treasury or Botanic Gardens in the way that Royal Park has been vandalized. I plead with this committee to place a moratorium on all future development of Royal Park, and in particular car parks and freeways. The Zoo is well served by tram and train, and could surely be asked to do a special 'public transport/entrance fee' deal with patrons.

I walk through Royal Park every morning on the way to work, and have made some interesting observations about these huge free car parks around the zoo. On the eastern side, commuters use them, having only five minutes walk to Royal Parade for a tram. On the northern side, you can see the car spaces filling up long before the Zoo opens, and commuters emerging who have found a handy free car space right next to the Royal Park station. Our park is now just a free commuter car park. I should also point out that some glades of particularly beautiful trees and shrubs were bulldozed to make way for the last of these hideous car parks. All around the zoo are these ugly

rows of bitumen and concrete for cars. And having – in quite a clever tactical move – left the last space as a dustbowl, the Zoo keepers will find little opposition when they concrete this too. I refer to the northern entrance which should be treed, and made into a picnic area, with ‘buses only’ space.

As for the Children’s Hospital – a very emotive issue to those of us whose children and grandchildren have been cared for there. Of course we are grateful to it, and glad it’s there, but if there is not enough room for the new hospital on its present site, well the government needs to buy some commercial space, and not emotionally blackmail us into shrugging off yet more public land. It now threatens to dominate the southern side of the park, and present a psychological as well as a physical barrier.

I am sure there are many other places in Melbourne where the local need for space has been over-ridden by greedy developers, and the opportunity lost for ordinary people to wander among trees. That it happens makes one wonder just what level of collusion exists between developers and the various levels of government. There seems to be the attitude of "it’s just a little bit of land", but as the former mayor of Melbourne, Trevor Huggins, has pointed out, that’s how you lose it all.

I very much hope that this committee will consider the city-dwellers’ need for space to wander, space to get lost in, space to just *be*, when it looks at public land policy. It is not exaggerating to claim that public space is there for our mental health. There are also, of course, the moral and ethical aspects of selling to private (often foreign) developers what is really owned by the public.

Finally, I wish to comment on the prospect of an even more intrusive road through the park, linking east to west. It is commonsense that if you build a bigger road, then more people will use it. I would like to see all roads through Royal Park revert to parkland – to make cars go round Flemington Road would be a huge incentive to getting these people out of their cars altogether! Building a freeway through a park is something future generations will look back in horror, just as we cringe at the cement over the Moonee Creek. I am sure you are all familiar with the research on east-west traffic, so I won’t repeat that, but just tell you of my engineer (and car-loving) son’s reactions to the car-dominated cities such as Los Angeles and Hueston where he works, and how they changed his mind about transport planning. Do we want those excesses here? Do we want the world to mock us as we all scorn Los Angeles? I get a real kick when I hear Melbourne described as a ‘liveable’ city, and I think that’s what Governor La Trobe had in mind when he set aside Royal Park as a place of recreation for the people.

I wish you well in your work as a committee, and thank you again for this opportunity to express my opinions.

Yours sincerely,

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