

The Secretary
The Select Committee on Public Land Development
Legislative Council
Parliament of Victoria
Spring Street
Melbourne 3000

11 Darebin Rd
Thornbury 3071
26/9/2007

Dear Sir

SALE AND DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC LANDS

Much of the City of Darebin, Particularly Northcote/ Thornbury is located in the inner and near city where public land including green open space is often limited. This is mostly located (apart from parks and sporting fields), along creek banks including the Merri and Darebin on the east and west fringes but an important component of treed and green public open space, is located along railway reserves.

In recent times, this important component of inner suburban green corridors or wedges, has come under pressure from developers, Local and State Government, the latter as the owners and caretakers of this land should be doing all they can to protect this valuable asset, rather than handing over slices of it for what is inappropriate and ill considered private development. Examples in this Municipality include, the land referred to in the Northcote Activity Centre Draft Structure Plan. This was recently out for public comment and sates in part as an objective (p92 RS - 03); “ *to better utilise areas of vacant railway land for housing...* ” and (p92 RS - P1); “ *redevelopment of poorly utilised railway reserve land is supported, particularly on the east side of the railway land for housing and support services for the activity centre* ”. Development has in fact, already occurred on the western side of the railway line immediately adjacent to the tracks just to the north of Separation St, in Herbert St. A huge fence (locally dubbed the “Berlin Wall”) has been constructed as a noise attenuation measure hard up against the rear of the units which are three storeys or approximately ten or so metres in height, within a few metres of the railway tracks. This is appallingly bad planning to locate housing development so close to (virtually right on the edge of) the railway tracks. In terms of safety, health and public amenity, it is bad planning; the wall has in fact dramatically increased noise levels for residents to the west of the line and poses potential future safety risks if a crash were to occur. In terms of restricting potential future development of railway land for public purposes, it is particularly short sighted, given increased patronage by the public over recent times and the clear and obvious need for expanded future public transport needs given projected population increase in Melbourne (see recent *Age* report of up to 5 million in coming decades) and the impact of climate change.

Other examples of inappropriate development on or adjacent to public land include the projected development of two (or more recently one large joined) ten storey office/apartment tower right next to and in fact intruding into, All Nations Park. This proposal was initially rejected by Council as being above their five storey height limit (which they would themselves be breaking if recommendations for up to eight storey

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development alongside the railway land in the abovementioned report proceeded). The matter went to a panel and was called in by the Planning Minister. More recently the above amended version is back before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). This was done without consultation with residents. There should be no such multi storey development adjacent or intruding into public parks and reserves. This and other developments which are taking place or proposed in the municipality are all going forward under the umbrella of *Melbourne 2030*. This has become so entrenched in local planning schemes and state government policy to have become an all encompassing banner under which to pursue a pro development approach that effectively amounts to bureaucratic bulldozing, providing little or no input by residents and ignoring heritage, neighbourhood character or public use concerns.

Public land should be for public use not private profit; it should not be alienated or impinged upon for purposes other than the wider public good. With pressures of significant population increases as well as environmental considerations and climate change and with the growing of trees as both a carbon sink and necessary relief from increased urbanisation, we should be looking at the growing importance of public lands and green open space, not its diminution.

Yours sincerely

Dennis O'Connell

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dennis O'Connell', written in a cursive style.