



Newsflash

Summer 2007

We hope the Christmas break has you refreshed and invigorated, and that a very happy and healthy 2007 awaits you. CRA is faced with several continuing challenges:

Panel Hearing Public Housing Redevelopment

CRA actively participated in the above Panel Hearing over a two-week period, commencing Nov 27. Treasurer, Warren Green, made the lead presentation for CRA, other CRA members including Vice- President Jackie Watts and Ian Bird also contributed, emphasizing different aspects of major concerns which arose at our public meeting last July: the reopening of Drummond St., over-development of the three sites for 550 private housing units while reducing public housing, loss of open space and parkland, lack of transparency, etc. The Panel was given very constrained Terms of Reference by the Bracks Govt. You can imagine our dismay on learning that most of our concerns were outside these terms. This despite repeated assertions by politicians and Office of Housing staff that the Panel Hearing would provide a forum where objections would be heard.

Government barristers and expert witnesses were retained to support highly questionable OoH redevelopment proposals. We learned the redevelopment is all about urban consolidation under *Melbourne 2030* and only incidentally about the provision of public and affordable housing in Carlton. This revelation came as a shock in view of Government spin that claimed urgently needed public housing was a redevelopment priority. Further spin, "a social mix will break down the stigma of living on a housing estate": reality: we learned that private housing will be carefully separated from public. Also, "people feel unsafe in the open spaces on the Estate". This insecurity will be alleviated with "reinstatement of the former Carlton streetscape", consisting of narrow lanes lined with 8-storey housing blocks. The Panel will advise Planning Minister, Hon Justin Madden, in late Feb. We hold little hope for revision of current plans.

A Government pre-election stunt led to the demolition of walk-up units two years before the site is needed for re-development. This has caused unnecessary, intense personal pain and family disruption to displaced tenants.

CRA Loss at VCAT

Following our loss at VCAT over Evolve Development's high profile 4-storey apartment project on Drummond St., CRA distributed a Media Release to State and local newspapers on Nov 8. We find it incredible that such a newsworthy event was universally ignored. Here it is for your interest!

VCAT approves controversial Carlton apartment project

The conversion of a 2-storey office building on the corner of Drummond and University Streets, Carlton, to a 4-storey complex of 58 studio apartments with partial waiving of car parking has been approved by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT)

Melbourne City Councillors previously approved this controversial proposal against strong advice of Council planners and objections from the Carlton Residents Association (CRA) and 22 others. A stalemate was reached during mediation and the matter was referred to VCAT.

During the VCAT Hearing, the developer, Evolve Developments Pty Ltd, used high-powered Senior Council and hired heritage and town planning experts to successfully argue its case to overturn the 10.5-metre height limit, heritage regulations and to waive statutory visitor car-parking requirements. Drummond Street streetscape was claimed by the developer's experts to be "mixed and patchy" and the existing 2-storey building was in need of increased "verticality". It was further argued that a 4-storey building in the 2-storey streetscape would "enhance the amenity and urban character of the area"; visitors could park elsewhere.

CRA President, Greta Bird, said: "This is a classic case of City Councillors and VCAT being overawed by a high-profile developer. In supporting inappropriate development without adequate regard to heritage and amenity, further denigration of Drummond Street is legitimized. We call on our Councillors and VCAT to support planning regulations which have been designed to protect Carlton's renowned Victorian Streetscapes and our urban amenity. This alarming approval is another win for the big end of town, and sets an appalling precedent for Drummond St, which other developers will seek to emulate. CRA fears for the future in a planning process so favourable to developers and against the interests of the community."

Challenges for VCAT

A very lucrative industry has developed around planning barristers and expert witnesses who provide paid services to developers at VCAT and Planning Panels. The more controversial and objectionable the project, the more costly are the barristers and witnesses who must be employed to argue for it. There now seems nothing that cannot gain planning approval, given sufficient financial resources. Residents groups across Melbourne, such as CRA, are constantly confronted by wealthy developers and their 'hired guns'. The situation has reached scandalous proportions. Concerted political pressure for planning reform, particularly at VCAT, appears the only course now open to Residents Groups. We cannot financially match developers at their game. VCAT has become a 'developers paradise'; even its Presiding Judge is a developer (*The Age*, Oct 28, 2006). CRA will liaise with other Residents Groups in 2007 to consider the political options. The time, effort and failure rates at VCAT have become intolerable.

CRA Fighting Fund Raffle

Following our loss at VCAT over the Drummond St development, the Committee looked at options to raise money to better fund planning battles. A raffle was decided upon and was launched on State Election Day, Nov. 25. Tickets were sold at the Carlton Polling Booth, Lygon Court and elsewhere. Richard DiNatale, Greens candidate at the State election, drew the winners at the CRA Christmas party.

1st Prize: Apollo Mountain Bike, valued at \$399, donated by Philip Watts. 'Gay', Ticket No. 1039.

2nd Prize: Wine Voucher, valued at \$75, donated by *King & Godfree*. 'Craig,' Ticket No. 1673.

3rd prize: Aromatherapy kit, valued at \$50, donated by *Cards on Lygon*. 'Kate', Ticket No. 1707.

We gratefully acknowledge the generosity of the prize donors. CRA gained \$900 from the raffle.

Special thanks to those CRA members who helped sell tickets.

Xmas Party at La Mama

This popular annual get-together was held on Monday Dec 11 with around 80 people attending. We are grateful to Liz Jones of La Mama for a unique venue, and to Brunettis for assistance with nibbles. Our recently re-elected Local Member, Hon. Bronwyn Pike, MLA, addressed the assembled revelers. Several City Councillors dropped in during the evening. It was a good night as always, made possible through the excellent work of a dedicated band of CRA members.

Annual General Meeting

Monday 19 Feb, 7.30pm; venue to be confirmed. (The Kathleen Syme Centre is no longer available to CRA). Committee positions of President, Vice-President, Secretary, Minutes Secretary, Treasurer, and two ordinary members must be elected. Please consider nominating for any position; a nomination form is attached. We need fresh ideas and renewed vigor for the challenges ahead. Nominations should be with our Returning Officer (Ian Bird, 9 Lt Elgin St., Carlton, phone 9347 1411) by 16 Feb. Alternatively, please advise if you would like to be co-opted to join various subcommittees, such as Planning, PCCC, Parkland, Traffic, Newsletter (in particular we are seeking an editor, or perhaps an editorial team) etc. This allows for a broad range of inputs to CRA from members. Further details of the AGM will be circulated to members nearer the date.

Membership renewal

A warm welcome to new members, and thank you those who have renewed membership for '07. For those who have not, please don't forget your membership renewals are now due (form attached). Please encourage your friends and neighbors to join CRA, so that we may add to our strength and influence.

Greta Bird

President

