

THE CARLTON ALLIANCE JULY 24, 2011

WHY RE-UNITE CARLTON?

Background to the 'Case for Carlton'

- **19th Century -**

Carlton was designed as an extension of the City of Melbourne. This is what makes Carlton unique. The eminent Victorian Surveyor General Robert Hoddle designed Carlton as a northern extension of Melbourne's CBD Golden Mile 'grid'. Carlton's residents and ratepayers had easy access to the central city and to planned gracious streetscapes. Public gardens lay within two blocks of every house, and there were many fine public buildings within the CBD and Carlton itself, which was an extension of the City of Melbourne. For more than 150 years Carlton functioned very well as a consequence of this innovative town-planning form. It was always an influential part of the City of Melbourne. North Carlton's streets were named after prominent councilors, many of them Carlton citizens.

- **20th Century -**

When Carlton was part of the City of Melbourne, improvements continued: partial street closures, street tree planting, additional plantations, new public infrastructure such as swimming pools and community centres. The restoration of the long neglected Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens began. In the **1950s**, following renewed appreciation of the architectural merit of Victorian-era terrace houses and an era of renovation and restoration began in Carlton.

However, through the **1960's, 70's and 80's** Carlton, as we know it today, was in serious jeopardy. The then Housing Commission threatened the existence of all that was special about Carlton. Against vigorous protests by residents and traders, the Housing Commission of Victoria (HCV) compulsorily acquired 291 acres of Carlton for 'slum' demolition with the intention of razing several thousand 19th-century houses and erecting public housing estates, including the unsightly tower blocks that still dominate our skyline.

In **1968**, with further 'slum clearances' planned, the Carlton Association and Carlton trader groups joined in a storm of protest and direct action to save adjoining blocks. Crucial support came from the National Trust, which classified numbers of the houses as having heritage value and in 1969 the Builders Labourers' Federation led by Norm Gallagher imposed a 'black ban' on further demolition of private homes and subsequent redevelopment. The demolition of Carlton was halted. Later, co-operative action taken by resident and trader groups prevented the planned multi-lane extension to Eastern Freeway being rammed through Carlton and Fitzroy.

As a direct consequence of the success of such community campaigns, the Carlton community managed to push through other progressive democratic reforms in the governance of the City of Melbourne including, by the 1980s, stronger community representation.

In the mid-1990's the progress halted.

The State election in **1993** coincided with a severe economic recession. The 1980s property bubble burst. Victoria's manufacturing base bore the brunt of certain national economic 'reforms'. The threat to Carlton re-emerged. The newly elected Liberal Coalition led by Premier Jeff Kennett attacked Carlton as part of his Victoria wide municipal 'rationalisation/reformation' program. The City of Melbourne was singled out for special attention and the resident ratepayers of the inner city were blamed for the economic malaise that had fallen on the city. When Labor returned to power after 1999, it saw political advantage in continuing to placate the large business and property interests that had been behind the denial of democracy to the residents of the inner city.

The Kennett 'reforms' were ostensibly economic but carried the added political 'bonus' of effectively silencing the vocal Carlton community. Without consultation and against the wishes of 96 % of North Carlton residents, our municipal boundaries were re-drawn. A community was divided. North Carlton was

excised from Carlton and, of course, from the assets rich Melbourne CBD. This action outraged the North Carlton community. There was an immediate call for a referendum. This was refused. This political action effectively dishonored the original heritage design of Carlton. It also nobbled the powerful and progressive Carlton community and it effectively shifted the electoral balance in the State capital city towards so-called business interests. Local democracy was done away with under the guise of a spurious process of local government reform.

The impact on Carlton of the shift was adverse.

- The Carlton community, both North and South, was numerically halved and politically weakened.
- Bureaucrats, large private developers, and other property interests (the '*Big End of Town*') gained greater power in planning and governance.
- The North Carlton residents and ratepayers were no longer entitled to a say in planning or administration of their city - Melbourne.
- In the absence of a strong community voice, the State government and self-interested business interests have dominated the affairs of Melbourne, despite the huge increase of residents within the municipality.
- The poorly resourced Yarra Council, attempting to service the wider Yarra community, stripped the assets of the North Carlton precinct.

- **21st Century -**

Politicians may have drawn lines on the municipal map in 1993, but the citizens residing in both 'sides' of Carlton have not responded in quite the way successive governments would have anticipated.

We have resisted.

It is remarkable that after 18 years the Carlton community still refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of the political division of Carlton. This is essentially because Carlton is what sociologists term 'a natural area' having a distinct geography, identity, population and interests within a wider area.

Significantly, the name for the entire area has survived in common understanding. Most residents and traders, whether in North or South Carlton, continue to regard themselves as living or working 'in Carlton'. Residents, ratepayers and traders continue to share what is known in town planning term as a strong '*community of interest*'. We share a common history. We share our natural and built environment - our Victorian architecture, our streetscapes, community amenities, and activities. This particular 'mix' results in an urban culture unique to Carlton. In defiance of these imposed expedient political boundaries, many community organisations continue to span Carlton. For example the Carlton Residents Association (CRA), the Carlton Community History Group (CCHG) and various sporting clubs, have members drawn from the whole of Carlton.

North Carlton, having been compromised disgracefully for nearly 20 years, is now fighting back.

A campaign is now being waged to reunite Carlton, to sustain the unique urban design and resident amenity which was so successfully developed, protected and defended between 1856 and 1993 under the visionary concept of a united Carlton within the City of Melbourne.

There are now compelling reasons to argue the 'Case for the Re-unification of Carlton'.

Carlton's survival is again in jeopardy. Maintaining the status quo in Carlton, both North and South, is not a viable option for our community. We are now vulnerable to further degradation of the physical, social and economic well-being of Carlton, both North and South, and our community. Such threats our community amenity and our environment in Carlton are real and constant vigilance is required

Carlton residents and ratepayers cannot be confident in the face of:

- **The Threats?**

* *Freeway links slicing through Carlton remain on the political agenda.*

Carlton residents and traders must recognize that although Freeway expansion plans may be shelved at present, the Roads lobby is very politically powerful and persistent in Victoria. With the decline in manufacturing, it is infrastructure construction that is seen as major business sector for Victoria, whether the outcomes are needed or not. The E-W Freeway links and Tunnel under Princes St. will degrade Carlton and turn it into a traffic sewer. Tunnels require on-off ramps and exhaust stacks, which will mean further demolitions in Carlton.

* *Greater population density* is firmly on the political agenda, whether the public wants it or not. There is little or no regard for the provision of any supporting community infrastructure. There is enthusiastic bipartisan political support for increasing inner urban population in Melbourne and such poorly managed density has the potential to degrade Carlton - over-built sites, increased traffic, and increased commercial exploitation of the public open space land or gardens in Carlton.

* *Planning and Development* is on the State Government political agenda as 'construction' replaces 'manufacturing' as the major economic driver in Victoria. Councils and citizens alike are being by-passed in the planning approvals processes as permits for commercial, residential and institutional projects are fast-tracked. Appeals to government tribunals like VCAT are ineffective against well-resourced developers.

A divided community in Carlton can have a very limited impact.

- **Effective People Power is the Antidote**

A united community was powerful in defense of Carlton in the past and it will be again.

The combined populations of North and South Carlton will deliver greater numbers of residents and ratepayers to lobby on issues of shared concern and threats, which adversely impact upon all of Carlton. As a united and more numerous voting bloc, the Carlton community can have a greater impact.

In a re-united Carlton - the numbers will add up:

Population of North Carlton & Princes Hill = 8187

Total City of Yarra population = 79,540 (i.e. North Carlton approx 10.3 % of Yarra)

Population of South Carlton = 14,729

Total City of Melbourne = 93,105. (i.e.. South Carlton 16% of Melbourne.)

Projected United Carlton population = 22,916 (i.e., more than 24.6 % of the City of Melbourne)

- **The Case for Re-uniting Carlton is convincing.**

There are 6 aspects of the case to consider:

1. About the Heritage Issues

Carlton community support for heritage is split across two municipalities. This division effectively dissipates our collective effort. To protect the remaining built heritage sites in Carlton, a coherent and consistent plan needs to be in place for all of Carlton.

Carlton Residents understand well the ‘value’ of heritage. Your property values and your sense of history recognize and rely upon retaining ‘heritage’ in North and South Carlton. Heritage support is at record low political ebb in the State of Victoria. Across the political spectrum, politicians readily sacrifice ‘heritage’ to promote ‘growth’ and support big developments. This is most keenly felt in heritage-rich precincts such as Carlton. Unification will strengthen Carlton’s resistance to inappropriate development.

Some examples:

* **United - A win.** Wide-scale demolition was averted the 1960’s and 70’s through community activism by a united Carlton. Residents and traders fought successfully against Housing Commission plans to raze most of North and South Carlton and replace terraces with high-rise public housing. This would never have succeeded with a divided Carlton.

* **Divided - A loss.** South Carlton residents alone have not been as successful in defending Carlton against the ever-expansive Melbourne University acquiring residential properties, letting it degrade before bulldozing them to create bleak institutional spaces such as Barry Square on Gratten St. and College Square on Swanston St. Melbourne University’s expansion into Carlton was halted under a united Carlton and commenced again, when Carlton was divided.

* **Divided - Another loss.** Neither Carlton North nor Carlton South has been able to defend the rights of residents to access an adequate or proper share of public open recreational space. The rights of residents have been ignored. Carlton’s meagre public spaces have eroded in that tracts have been acquired for private or institutional developments at Royal Park, Princes Park, Melbourne General Cemetery and public land administered by the Office of Housing Estates in Carlton.

* **Divided - Jury is out.** The World Heritage listed Royal Exhibition Buildings precinct is without a Council in control, since the municipalities of Yarra and Melbourne as well as the Museum Board share the administration of the precinct. When the lines of responsibility are not clear, then degradation and mismanagement are more likely to occur. The Royal Exhibition Building, despite its prestigious World Heritage listing, is still being run as commercial exhibition space with events that trespass on the amenity and heritage of the Carlton Gardens.

2. About Planning Processes

All residents and ratepayers have a right to participate in planning processes for residential and commercial developments which impact on their lives and finances. Such planning processes should be transparent, timely and accessible across Carlton. Currently, North Carlton residents do not have this. This right must be upheld so as to ensure that Carlton is not degraded site by site by inconsistent, ad-hoc developments. The City of Melbourne assists its residents in monitoring all planning applications by providing such data on-line. Should residents in the City of Melbourne wish to consult with planners on proposed developments, or to lodge objections, their access to Melbourne Town Hall is direct, via public transport.

Currently, North Carlton residents have a more difficult task when faced with new developments in their area. In North Carlton residents learn of new planning applications by noting a sign has appeared on their street. They must then trek to the City of Yarra Town Hall several kilometers away in Richmond in order to see the plans.

3. About Boundary Anomalies

North Carlton residents and ratepayers with properties adjacent to, or opposite areas of parkland, which is not controlled either by Melbourne or Yarra councils, are effectively without power when issues arise..

For example, the arbitrary municipal boundaries along Bowen Crescent and the middle of Park Street leave residents in limbo. They have no right to be advised about events or developments, which occur on parkland or in premises in parks on the other side of their street. Since they are without access to relevant councils, they have no recourse when difficulties arise. For example, they are provided with little or no

information about events such as the Big Day Out, Football or other events, parking in Princes Park, fun runs, inappropriate constructions, traffic, cleaning, vandalism restitution etc.

North Carlton has little in common with the planning layout and design of Fairfield or Alphington, which feature suburban 'blocks', settled under different periods in Melbourne development. Such precincts as these must obviously to be managed differently than a precinct featuring the urban density found in Carlton.

Since Yarra and Melbourne adopt a different 'regime' in relation to urban design, landscaping, road maintenance, investment in parks, street trees, street cleaning and traffic calming measures, there is no consistency for residents as would occur under one municipal control. A regime, which is appropriate in large parts of Yarra, may not be appropriate in North Carlton. If the regime is not appropriate, there will be an adverse impact on lifestyle as well as property values.

4. About Municipal Administration

City of Yarra municipal offices are several kilometers away to the South-West of North Carlton. These are very difficult to access via public transport, since North Carlton is served by the radial North/South public transport, which gives ready access to the city of Melbourne.

5. About Access to Services and Resident Services

There are two aspects consider in the provision of municipal services.

(a) Actual Services delivered

Such services may be understood as 'social' support for you and your family. They may also be understood as services related to 'property' or related to the general up-keep of your precinct. Your rates underpin the provision of all municipal services, which should be distributed equitably throughout the municipality - even if you are geographically apart from the 'main' area e.g. in North Carlton or Princes Hill. Although Yarra and Melbourne municipal services (child-care, health, aged care libraries, cultural events) are generally funded at the same level by the State government, the service provision differs in each municipality. Each Council makes policy decisions as to how services are provided and where they are distributed throughout the precincts of the municipality. Councils forge the direction and emphasis of such expenditure on community services. However, the 'mix' of business and resident rate revenue will inevitably impact in the funds available for Council to fund services.

(b) 'Communities of Interest'

It must be recognized that essentially Carlton and North Carlton share a 'community of interest'. This must be present before any case for re-unification may be argued. A simple test of the existence or strength of such 'community of interest' is to pose such questions as: Do North Carlton residents relate to Richmond Town Hall or Melbourne Town Hall? Which public swimming pools do they use? Where do they play sport, walk the dog etc. What public transport do they access? Where do they travel primarily on public transport - across to Richmond or into Melbourne? Where do their children go to school? Where do they engage in cultural life - movies, music, theatre, arts etc?

6. About the Rates

Rates are obviously an important '*big-ticket*' budget item for all residents and ratepayers.

Rates represent an economic transaction within the municipality. In essence, to evaluate the transaction it is a matter of considering the '*Return on Investment*' provided by the municipality. i.e. your '*Investment*' determined by your rates charges, compared to your 'Returns', delivered in the form of 'services' or amenities delivered by the municipality.

The key question to be considered in relation to rates charges is straightforward. Is the quality of municipal services and community amenity commensurate with the rates you pay to maintain, sustain or improve your lifestyle and your precinct?

Despite the complexity of such evaluations, comparisons may be drawn and the Carlton Alliance group, as the reunification campaign progresses will present these for your consideration.