

Melbourne@5million

The State Government is planning to house an extra million people in Melbourne within the next 20 years. A new planning document ***Melbourne@5million*** has now replaced the earlier ***Melbourne 2030*** plans. Controversial new planning policy documents have engaged the CRA in recent weeks as we formally respond to the State Government and the City of Melbourne (CoM) about the *New Residential Zones* proposals and a review of the *Planning and Environment Act*. (More information is available from the Department of Planning and Community Development: www.dpcd.vic.gov.au)

These new planning documents are about enforcing high density living in Melbourne as a response to Government economic policies which requires ever escalating population growth (currently 1500 people per week). Premier Brumby contends more consumers are needed for economic growth; Planning Minister Madden states the Government aims to “strengthen certainty and timelines in the planning process” and to “streamline the growth area planning process”. The State economy is now apparently predicated on this Melbourne-centric growth, regardless of its implications on liveability, sustainability and the environment. Issues of land supply, water, transport infrastructure, health and education services, air quality etc are largely ignored by the Government in its drive for rapid population growth.

Decentralisation of population to regional cities and country Victoria is no longer on the policy agenda. Melbourne-centric development is very attractive to ‘the big end of town’ for short-term profit at minimal financial risk; developments beyond the city fringe hold little attraction. There has been no meaningful public debate on population growth. Is this the Melbourne we want?

The general community and local councils have largely rejected Government high density residential policies, however senior CoM bureaucrats are enthusiastic about it. High-rise living has not been widely embraced in Melbourne, especially in the suburbs. Much more prescriptive policies are now in the pipeline to force high density living on a sceptical community. Plans for such development along suburban tram, bus and rail routes are now being ‘fast-tracked’ to accelerate housing construction and for job creation eg. as now exists along Swanston Street, Carlton. The powers of the Planning Minister to over-rule councils and to ‘call-in’ controversial projects have been significantly enhanced, as recent media reports confirm.

In Carlton, the Lygon St. Precinct has been declared a “Major Activity Centre” which will exacerbate already intense development pressures. Likewise, our Victorian Era heritage housing and streetscapes, currently protected by height and heritage overlays, will come under increasing scrutiny for higher density development. The environs of the World Heritage Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens are of particular concern.

The Government must be called to account over its Melbourne-centric population growth policies; issues of liveability and sustainability must be urgently addressed. Our silence will be viewed as acquiescence.