



The Carlton Residents Association Inc.

# Newsflash

Winter 2007

## *General Meeting May 2007*

I reported on the diverse activities of CRA since our AGM in February as outlined in this Newsflash, then introduced our guest speaker Lloyd Jones from La Mama.

### *Culture in Carlton*

As invited guest speaker Liz Jones had succumbed to flu we were addressed by her husband, raconteur Lloyd on 'Cultural Life in Carlton'. From the mid-1960's central Carlton was at the heart of Australia's most vibrant and remarkable theatrical precinct. How fortunate we are to still have the La Mama Theatre, founded in 1967, as the on-going legacy of this era. The theatre has for the past 30 years been brilliantly administered and directed by Liz. La Mama has always been exquisitely in tune with the times, and is the most important small theatre in Australia, offering many outstanding actors and writers first opportunities to present their works. Carlton is blessed by La Mama, the enduring and resilient crown in Melbourne's cultural life; we celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Lloyd ranged over several interlocking themes: Carlton's diverse historical social landscape as it developed from squalid slum to vibrant, dynamic cultural centre. This is attributed to waves of immigrants, including large numbers of Jews and Italians. Over the past decade the population has increased by 50% as a result of an influx of tertiary students. These in turn contribute to Carlton's cultural diversity, as do the many refugees from the Horn of Africa living on the Housing Estates, and the urban poor. La Mama is involved with and appeals to all. However developers are eroding the sense of community. Continued inappropriate development is causing considerable social divide, students/the wealthy/the poor forming distinct groups living separate lives. La Mama remains a venue for encouraging inclusive community theatre, and appeals to a wide geographic spread of people. However it is under continual threat. The golden years for funding, 1972-1975 have been in steady decline, as politicians question the place of the arts in the community.

### *The Place of Students in Central Melbourne*

This was the theme of a recent *Melbourne Conversations*, which posed the question "*Cash Cows or Community Members?*" Some interesting Statistics: The City of Melbourne (CoM) has 63,500 residents, of whom 23,777, or 37% are tertiary students. In Carlton this figure is closer to 50%, 95% of whom are international, primarily from South East Asia. Approximately 10,000 are housed in the high density purpose built apartments which have sprung up over the past decade primarily in Swanston St. Overseas students pay outrageous rentals for miniscule apartments they leased before arrival. There is appalling lack of services and shared facilities, and virtually no opportunity to participate in local community life. This has led students to feel they are cash cows, isolated and disenfranchised. It was stated that the State Govt, CoM and tertiary institutions have seriously neglected their responsibility to our international students, and must work to rectify this.

When I commented that the University of Melbourne (M.U.) had itself created one of these student ghettos, 'College Sq. on Swanston' (you will recall the 6 weeks CRA spent at VCAT against the development) I was publicly reprimanded by Prof. Peter McPhee, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic). The preferred term is "purpose built student accommodation".

In 2003 CRA joined with CoM and Heritage Victoria for six intense weeks at VCAT, attempting to save Carlton's heritage and streetscapes. The State Government, M.U. and developer Becton hired exotically priced legal teams to gain approvals to construct the 11 storey monstrosity "College Square on Swanston". Some university staff were strongly opposed and spoke against its construction, in particular Emeritus Prof. George Tibbits, Profs Kim Dovey and Phillip Goude. Vice Chancellor Allan Gilbert won the day, and the building is now occupied by hundreds of students, mostly Asian.

## *A win at VCAT*

We alerted CoM that the illuminated “*College Square on Swanston*” sign bore the Becton name. Its removal was ordered, and appealed at VCAT by the developer. Deputy President Jackie Watts represented CRA and won, despite Becton’s costly legal representation. The sign is now gone.

Another VCAT Hearing is pending to consider a planning appeal for yet more high-density student housing on Swanston St, to overwhelm two small terraces opposite St Mary’s College and the immediate vicinity.

## *Cardigan Streetscape Works*

The CoM will enhance Cardigan St between Grattan and Victoria by enlarging the centre islands and replacing the tired, inappropriate Queensland Box trees with Smooth Barked Apple Myrtle, doubling the number of trees in the process.

Our lobbying for the greening of Faraday/Cardigan Streets corner is still awaiting Council staff presenting possibilities back to Council. A major concern by the CoM and Carlton Business Assn is that there be no loss of on-street parking. As this area of Carlton is well served by off-street parking, CRA is lobbying for some much needed green space. The main entrance to Carlton from the tram terminus will then look less like a parking lot.

## *History walks around Carlton*

The CRA is about to undertake a project to publish a book of historical walks around Carlton. This is intended to be a small easy-to-use publication that would enable people to take themselves on self-guided tours of a few hours through some of the more interesting and attractive parts of Carlton, while at the same time giving them a little of the historical and cultural background of our suburb.

The walks would focus on themes, or particular areas, such as: Italian Carlton, Jewish North Carlton, the Melbourne General Cemetery, religious sites in Carlton, the University and its Colleges, the architecture of Parkville, and so on.

The plan is to apply to the Victorian Government for a Local History Grant to fund the publication, and to have CRA members and others write up the walks and background material. Fortunately there are people in the CRA who have led such walks in the past - but more helpers are needed.

If you are interested in becoming involved, or would like more information, please contact Jeff Atkinson on 9381-4505 or email [jeffann@bigpond.net.au](mailto:jeffann@bigpond.net.au) 200 Wilson Street, North Carlton, 3054.

## *Eddington Enquiry*

The Bracks Govt has established an inquiry to assess the needs for additional east-west transport corridors to the north of the city. The roads lobby (RACV, Vic Roads, VACC, trucking industry etc) continue to argue for a tunnel to connect the Eastern and Tullamarine Freeways with a link continuing further west to Deer Park (cost estimate \$10 billion). The *North Central City Corridor Study* (2001-2003), to which CRA made significant contributions, concluded such a link unnecessary. A rail line to Doncaster would more effectively reduce traffic congestion. Recently the CoM’s *Melbourne Transport Strategy* (2005-2006), to which CRA also contributed, again rejected the E-W tunnel concept. It supported the long sought rail link to Doncaster and a N-S extension of the underground City Loop. None of this impressed the State Govt, which is heavily influenced by the roads lobby and the big end of town. Hence the Eddington Inquiry, which we believe is predicated on a roads solution to current traffic congestion. We recently circulated pro-forma letters to the Premier and local Federal Member, Lindsay Tanner, on inquiry issues for your consideration. CRA has made a formal submission, which along with all other submissions, may be viewed on the Dept of Infrastructure website (E-W Needs Assessment) [www.doi.vic.gov.au](http://www.doi.vic.gov.au).

## *Council Elections*

As a member of a representative group from CoRA (Coalition of Residents Assns) CRA lobbied Minister for Local Govt, Richard Wynne, to overhaul the City of Melbourne’s electoral structure, changed to its present undemocratic form during the Kennett era.

Our contentions are:

- Re-establish a Ward structure to allow for greater accessibility and accountability of councillors.
- Review voting provisions e.g. current deeming provisions allow 1 vote for residents and multiple votes for business. Two thirds of CoM voters live outside the city.
- Postal rather than attendance voting is mandated.
- Voting ‘above the line’ makes it near impossible for candidates not part of a mayoral team to be elected.
- Reincorporation of North Carlton, excised from the city during the Kennett era.

We were dismissed by departmental bureaucrats who stated the Govt is “not of a mind to change the voting structure” and praised MCC for being functional. Given that, it was interesting to read in The Melbourne Times (May 16) “Simmering anger that Melbourne’s odd electoral system has cheated its communities is set to flare again . . .”

CoM itself can change postal to attendance voting, which would be convenient next year when all Council voting throughout will be conducted on the same day. Councillor Shanahan proposed this, opposed by Deputy Mayor Singer, supported by the So team. However the Lord Mayor expanded this by proposing a decision be based on a telephone survey of 400 voters as to preferred option. For a City of 63,000 residents plus business, the possibilities of being called upon to vote are negligible.

### *Planning Backlash*

This is an umbrella group of over 100 residents groups from throughout Vic. concerned at inappropriate development under guise of *Melbourne 2030*. We joined with a representative group that met with Planning Minister Justin Madden, seeking representation on a panel to review *Melb.2030*. Continual pressure being applied by Coordinator Mary Drost looked promising. The Minister agreed to four meetings to listen to the concerns of groups across the State, at which we planned to seek panel representation. Minister Madden suddenly decided not to support the review of *Melb.2030* promised in 2002. Instead he will appoint a Panel of three, chaired by a health expert (the relevance escapes us) to “audit” the flawed planning provision. Residents may present submissions to this Panel in August. Planning Backlash members are deeply dismayed at this new tack by the Govt to avoid scrutiny.

### *Community/Activities Centre /Library for Carlton - Update*

We continue to lobby CoM and State Govt to provide this long sought and much needed centre for Carlton’s residents, business, the 16,000 workers and visitors, and 12,000 students who live in nearby housing apartments and feel disenfranchised.

After four months of seeking an appointment with Minister Batchelor, the CRA was granted a joint meeting with Department of Victorian Communities (DVC) and CoM personnel. Brilliantly supported by Mark Rubbo (Readings Books), Liz Jones (La Mama) and Connie Paglianiti (Carlton Business Assn), we elaborated our vision for Carlton and were told that this needs to fit within the parameters of “*Carlton Community Infrastructure Plan*”. This is part of a 10 Year CoM Community Infrastructure Plan 2007-2017, which outlines the priority community infrastructure needs in the municipality.

Carlton’s so-called “Community Hub” will be based on three sites on the Lygon/Rathdowne St Estate, with a fourth site to be found in Central Carlton. The report for Carlton reasonably addresses the specific and dire needs of public housing tenants, but offers little to the rest of the community and is based on highly erroneous data. For example, population data excludes the approx 12,000 students who live here and the 16,000 workers and visitors who commute to Carlton daily, the needs of La Mama, and Business Assn requirements. Under Recreation: “overall the provision of public open space in Carlton is quite high . . . Princes Park provides a large scale active and passive open space for Carlton”. This ignores the fact the park is typically 1 km from central Carlton and the Housing Estates, and separated by two major arterial roads. Under ‘Library Services’ the report states “Overall Carlton is well serviced by public libraries” and cites four: the North Carlton Library - yet the Infrastructure Plan acknowledges that this library is heavily oversubscribed and necessitates a long walk and crossing Princes St., a very busy arterial road. The highly restricted CAE library in the city is also cited, as are the State and Baillieu, which are “open for study space . . . however not to borrow”!

We were asked to provide an indicative floor plan detailing Carlton's requirements which must fit "within the parameters of the Community Infrastructure Plan for Carlton". A meeting space could hold up to 80-100 people, which must be divisible for multi purpose use, such as an "innovative library". This could consist of:

- 2-6 PCs with internet access, Microsoft applications and access to library catalogue,
- small paperback and magazine collection
- 2-3 stationary toys that can amuse children if parents are using the other facilities.
- a list of suggested programs we could run.

This by no means meets our vision for Carlton. So our focus remains as before: to acquire Carlton's historic first primary school, the Kathleen Syme Building, when it is vacated by the Royal Women's Hospital next year.



This building is a Carlton icon, ideal in location and size to house diverse activities, and has a significant street presence. It would provide a focus for Carlton's disparate groups. We continue to seek to activate the Premier's promise for a State/Council Partnership, and met with Minister Bronwyn Pike to discuss the State Government's commitment. She has promised to undertake varying actions, including a valuation of the KSB and arranging meetings with relevant government bodies.

In the meantime, we strongly oppose attempts by Council staff to steer us toward a lease of the first floor of Lygon Court, which has proved impossible to lease commercially and could be subject to a deal with CoM. This option is totally unsuitable for the purposes of CRA and others.

### *Parkland Neglect*

Nothing could further demonstrate the seriously skewed financial priorities of CoM than its controversial decision to disband the dedicated Parks and Recreation Group and sack its highly respected Group Manager Ian Harris and Manager Trevor Griffin. All this while giving financial emphasis to "Events" funding, such as the Grand Prix. The neglect of World Heritage listed Carlton Gardens in the interests of commercial imperatives, will likely be the future of all our parks and gardens.

*Greta Bird*

President

*Newsflashes are on CRA's website, which members are encouraged to check for details of CRA activities.*  
<http://www.carltonresidents.org.au>



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