



**Carlton Residents Association Inc.**

# Newsflash

**Spring 2007**

## **Public Housing Estates in Historical Context**

In the 1950s, following renewed appreciation of the architectural merit of Victorian-era terrace houses, an era of renovation and restoration began in Carlton. Then in the early 1960s, against vigorous protests by residents and traders, the Housing Commission of Victoria (HCV) compulsorily acquired a large area of Carlton (118 ha) and demolished several thousand 19<sup>th</sup> century houses to build the public housing estates, including the unsightly tower blocks that still dominate the skyline. In 1968, with further 'slum clearance' planned (the block bounded by Lee, Lygon, Princes and Drummond Sts.) Carlton residents' groups joined in a storm of protest and direct action to save the Lee St block. Thus began the Carlton Association (forerunner to CRA). Houses were mainly owner-occupied, 2/3rds by families of Jewish and Italian origin. They comprised working and professional people, graduates, students and pensioners. Following receipt of compulsory acquisition notices, owners and occupiers opened their houses to thousands of visitors from across Melbourne, who agreed wholeheartedly that 'these are not slums!' Critical support came from the National Trust, which classified numbers of the houses. In 1969 the Builders Labourers' Federation led by Norm Gallagher imposed a 'black ban' on further demolition of private homes and subsequent redevelopment. (*Carlton: a History 2004*)



Drummond St terrace houses saved from 'slum clearance'

Trevor Huggard (later elected Lord Mayor of Melbourne), played a major role in this opposition. He later noted an interesting statistic: the towers house fewer people than lived in the area before, people who enjoyed the benefits of gardens, privacy and community. (*Among the Terraces, 1987*)

Public Housing Tenants are a disparate, volatile community living in endemic poverty (95% unemployment). The population of 4,500 includes large numbers of mainly single, older men with mental, psychological and physical health problems, often compounded with problems of substance abuse and gambling. African refugees, who make up a third of Estate residents, are subject to extreme racism.

The State Government, having created these ghettos, provided minimal support for their occupants. The City of Melbourne in partnership with the current State Government is now planning to rectify this massive injustice, and provide for much needed services for Public Housing tenants in the 'Infrastructure Plan for Carlton'. It is claimed that the large sum of money required constrains the CoM from expenditure on the rest of Carlton, even though similarly deprived – the 8,000 residents apart from Housing Estate tenants, 10,000 students, 16,000 workers and visitors. Unlike suburbs such as North Melbourne and Fitzroy, we have no public spaces and facilities such as a Town Hall or library, where Carlton's disparate groups can meet and be community.



Kathleen Syme Centre

## Kathleen Syme Centre Saga: a Town Hall for Carlton?

CRA has actively lobbied the City Council and State Government throughout 2007 to acquire the *Kathleen Syme Centre* (former Faraday St Primary School) as a Community Centre for Carlton. The building will be sold in 2008 and could end up in the hands of a developer or the University of Melbourne (the University has an appalling history in its dealings with Carlton's heritage buildings).



The University of Melbourne 'dealing with' Carlton's heritage buildings (Barry Square 1999)

An absolutely unique opportunity now exists for KSC to be retained as a Community Centre - Town Hall for Carlton; an asset we have lacked for 150 years.

We might have hoped our City Council would jump on board this innovative CRA vision and run with it. On the contrary, our lobbying has been undermined and sidelined at every turn by the "So Team" on Council and by Council officers. They sought rental accommodation, specifically the first floor of Lygon Court to be utilised as a Senior Citizens Centre with space for a very restricted Community Centre. CRA and CBA (Carlton Business Assn) argued that the site is far too small and lacks accessibility, street frontage, is not permanent, and is inappropriate. When Council's rental bid for the site was rejected by its owners, Councillors and Council officers attempted to bury the KSC initiative within the highly restrictive parameters of the 'Infrastructure Plan for Carlton', with its specific focus on the Carlton Public Housing Estates. CRA received written directions from Council officers to specify "Carlton's requirements", which must be minimal and confined to "fit within the parameters of the "Infrastructure Plan" above. Direct reference to KSC continues to be studiously avoided by the Council; the term "Community Centre" is rejected in favour of "community facility/hub", which must "facilitate co-location of (Public Housing) services" (Lord Mayor So).

**We therefore sought your assistance**, to help persuade the State Government and Melbourne City Councillors to act *now* to acquire KSC for Carlton. Your letters/emails/telephone calls with the simple message: “*We want the Kathleen Syme Centre for the Carlton Community*” were heard loud and clear by the Council and Government. **We are deeply grateful for this wholehearted support from CRA members and the general Carlton community.**

Despite your vital input, Lord Mayor John So and his team on Council continue to resist any meaningful commitment to KSC as a Community Centre for Carlton with on-going diversions and delaying tactics. For example:

**Minutes, Melbourne City Council Meeting No. 38 Tuesday 31 July 2007**

**Item 5.5 Carlton Community Centre**

A report was presented which sought action from Council regarding the establishment of a Carlton Community Centre. Cr Wilson moved the following motion:

1. That Council:

1.1. *establish a roundtable involving residents, businesses and the State Government regarding the establishment of a Carlton Community Centre.*

1.2 *make an immediate application to the State Govt for funding for a Carlton Community Centre*

1.3 *to obtain an independent valuation for the acquisition of the KSC.*

An amendment was put by Cr Clarke and Sec. Cr Brindley:

1.4 *(That Council) endorse the Kathleen Syme Centre as the preferred location for a Carlton Community Centre.*

The amendment was put with Councillors Brindley, Clarke, Shanahan and Snedden voting in favour; the Chair, Lord Mayor John So, and his team (Deputy Lord Mayor, Cr Gary Singer and Crs Jetter and Wilson – Cr Ng was absent) voted against the amendment. The Lord Mayor then used his casting vote to sink the amendment.

**Nothing could better exemplify the attitude of the So Team to the Carlton community than the above event at Council.**

CRA subsequently wrote to Lord Mayor So as follows: *We note with dismay that you voted against Cr Clarke’s amendment to endorse the KSC as the preferred location for the Carlton Community Centre, and used your casting vote to defeat the motion. Notes taken at our meeting with you on 21 May record our gratitude at your promise to seek a valuation for this National Trust classified building with serious intent to buy the building for the Carlton community. You will recall Connie Paglianiti (CBA), Jackie Watts (CRA Vice President), Kevin Louie (Mayor’s PA) and I (Greta Bird), attended that meeting.*

It took a further two weeks and concerted pressure from Cr Clarke before Council’s Chief Executive Officer Pitchford finally progressed items 1.2 and 1.3 above. The Roundtable Meeting (item 1.1) was convened on 10 August; I was the sole resident representative invited. However several representatives from CLAN [Carlton Local Agencies Network] were included – continuing the ploy to bury the KSC initiative within the parameters of the “Infrastructure Plan for Carlton”. CLAN representatives have been led to believe a Carlton Community Centre will detract from Infrastructure Plan funding for the Housing Estates. We stress: The Carlton Community Centre does not have the same objectives as the Infrastructure Plan Facilities, nor is it in competition. The proposed Community Centre is for ALL Carlton, including Public Housing tenants, workers, students and visitors. It has been sought for a hundred years, and is needed **in addition** to the present Infrastructure Plan.

Why do Council and staff resist commitment to Carlton? They state priority in Carlton lies with providing services to the poor and needy. As to the needs of the rest of Carlton, the ratepayers? “They are rich and can go elsewhere” stated Michael O’Hanlon, CoM Manager Community Development. CRA contends it is not a case of facilities for either public housing tenants/or residents; both are vital. Public Housing tenants are a State Govt responsibility. Ratepayers of the City should enjoy some priority in the provision of services by the City Council.

**Note:** Under constant haranguing from Crs Clarke and Brindley, a turn around finally

occurred: on August 10 the Lord Mayor finally relented and wrote to the State Government expressing Council *interest* in KSC as a Community Centre for Carlton.

It has taken six months of unrelenting effort by CRA, including all your emails, letters and 'phone calls to move Council to simply express an *interest* in the idea of acquiring KSC. Why is it 'So'? Last year Lord Mayor So proudly opened a purpose built Community Centre/Library in East Melbourne (\$4m). The CoM recently purchased a disused school as a Community Centre for Southbank residents (\$10m).

**Carlton gets only fine words and promises.** (You will recall Cr Wilson's impassioned address at our AGM in February on 'Community'.)

***Our vision is for a Centre which will facilitate integrated activities – developing / building / sustaining community / creating well-being – space where Carlton can be community.***

CRA cannot, and should not, be definitive about the eventual use of the Centre by our community. Our plans for community development are long-term. We have discussed requirements for a Community Centre with various stakeholders over many years and in significant detail, and have identified the following needs:

- library
- toy library
- visitor centre
- Carlton history display
- large spaces for cultural, social and commercial events/exhibitions/performances
- spaces for a variety of meetings
- business incubator
- permanent spaces for Arts, Literature, Fine Arts displays (Readings, La Mama, Museum)
- spaces for music, variety of performances, rehearsals, workshops
- range of activities to foster international student relationships with the Carlton community
- space for 200 plus for private & commercial events (we receive weekly inquiries)
- theatre/coffee shop

**We await the outcome of on-going negotiations with the Council and**

**Government with much anticipation and will keep you informed.**

## Melbourne 2030 Audit

The State Government introduced *Melbourne 2030 (M2030)* in 2002 as a Strategic Plan to stem urban sprawl and to protect the Green Wedges by channelling housing development into 120 Activity Centres. On the face of it this seemed a reasonable plan, particularly as upon *M2030* introduction the Government stated “There is a commitment to undertake a review every five years involving local government, the development industry, key stakeholders and the community in the process”. However, the promised broad review of *M2030* has now been downgraded to an audit of its implementation, chaired by a health services expert! This decision is controversial and very disappointing to the general community, including to CRA.

*M2030* has become a shambles of conflicting policies and lamentable implementation. It has done little to constrain urban sprawl because the State Government continually responds to developer and Federal Government demands for increased land releases in urban fringe areas in an attempt to stem rising house prices. Planning in Victoria is developer driven; facilities and services have not kept pace with population growth. Heritage and liveability are being undermined in the interests of development. In Europe these important aspects are protected and honoured, whereas in Melbourne they are degraded and compromised.



Terrace houses (Faraday St. with Eastern Precinct backdrop) saved by CRA through VCAT action against Melbourne University demolition plans



*Melbourne 2030* strategies have led to a siege situation in Carlton from voracious developers, the State Government and the University of Melbourne, using *M2030* to push development overlays in the interests of short-term profit. Issues associated with *M2030* in Carlton may be summarized as: protection of established heritage, streetscapes and height overlays, impacts of ever escalating through traffic (from the Eastern Freeway) and VCAT failings to protect the community interest. At a recent forum initiated by the umbrella group *Planning Backlash*, CRA had an invaluable opportunity, along with other residents groups, to voice our concerns directly to Planning Minister, Hon Justin Madden.

Important public transport emphasis within *M2030* has been sidelined amid an on-going emphasis on roads constructed under Private Public Partnerships (PPP). The overwhelming political influence of the roads lobby and merchant banks has ensured that roads projects attract 90% of transport funding while public transport initiatives are neglected. Considerations of global warming, peak oil, traffic congestion, urban air pollution etc are ignored amid road construction priorities.

## Precinct Development Fund

The ‘Cultural Precinct Enhancement Fund’ was a pre-election announcement by (then) Premier Bracks of \$8m to be shared between the Chinese, Greek, and Italian ‘precincts’. (It was at this meeting that Premier made his enthusiastic and now famous promise to support a Community Centre for Carlton). CRA submitted four imaginative proposals which invest in the development of our precinct to enhance its cultural, commercial and human imperatives. These proposals are also mindful of policy developed by the CoM’s Melbourne Transport Strategy, which encourages increased walking and cycling; they comply with the funding guidelines.

## CRA Proposals

### Project 1: Borsari Memorial Bicycle Path

This project involves the installation of bike paths on both sides of Lygon St: Elgin St to Victoria St, to be known as the *Borsari Memorial Bicycle Path*. Such a bike path should be constructed in the “Copenhagen” style for maximum rider safety. Associated would be the installation of bicycle racks at strategic locations. The proposed bike path would draw cyclists to the precinct (Canning and Swanston St, bicycle lanes channel cyclists away). A vital subsidiary benefit to our community would be traffic calming of Lygon St by reducing it to one 40kph traffic lane in each direction. This would drastically reduce noise and air pollution, and ensure Lygon St was pedestrian friendly and a destination point for visitors, rather than a primary arterial road.

The memorial bike path would celebrate Italy’s great international cycling tradition and the historical association of the Lygon Street precinct with the famous Italian Olympic cyclist, Nino Borsari, who was detained in Australia at the outbreak of World War 2. He established a bike shop on the corner of Lygon and Grattan Streets in 1941 through the generosity of Sidney Myer (*Carlton: A History*; the shop was decorated for the visit of President Saragat of Italy in 1967). A restaurant bearing Borsari’s name now operates at that site. The neon sign above the restaurant depicting a sprinting Borsari, was installed in 1948; it is one of the oldest neon signs in Australia and remains a Lygon Street landmark.



Borsari Corner (Grattan & Lygon Sts - present bicycle shop on far left)

### **Project 2: Historical plaques on significant sites**

This project involves the installation of plaques on buildings, landmarks and private houses which recount their extraordinary and fascinating history. (A number of informative sources recounting this local history are readily available, e.g. the CRA produced book *Carlton: a History* and at Co-As-It). Such plaques are installed on historic buildings throughout Europe, to great effect, and would complement the historical walks guide being developed by CRA. Lygon St retains only a token number of Italian traders, but the street remains a symbolic focus for the Italian community, which plaques would emphasize and celebrate.

Examples of historic sites in Carlton include: Jimmy Watson's, La Mama, Lygon Crt (former Pram Factory Arts complex), Watt's Shoe Store, Grinder's, King & Godfrey, The Carlton Movie House, the adjoining 'Genevieve' (first coffee shop), Threshermans, Brunetti, University Café, Borsari Restaurant and Bike shop, La Notte, Caffe Notturmo, L'Alba, Toto's, Trades Hall, to name a few, and many private houses in adjacent streets.

Highlighting historic buildings and landmarks throughout the precinct and recounting their history would confirm the precinct as *destination* for visitors and significantly *enhance* interest in the precinct's fascinating history.

### **Project 3: Install distinctive street signage**

Install distinctive street signage at the northern (Elgin St) and southern (Victoria St) boundaries to define the precinct, e.g. 'Rathdowne Village' signage in North Carlton.

### **Project 4: Sculpture/Structure/Poles on Roundabout (to be constructed) Intersection Elgin and Lygon Streets**

The intersection is currently a vast expanse of tarmac at a 5 ways road junction, dissected by trams and buses. This Entry/Exit point to Lygon St is shabby, ugly, confusing and dangerous. The tarmac expanse seriously detracts from the pleasant streetscape of Lygon St., which has been the site of significant investment over several years in beautification by the City of

Melbourne. This investment is an obvious acknowledgement that streetscapes induce people to gather and linger. Provision would be made for trams to continue through the intersection. CRA has approached Vic Roads who have agreed to consider its feasibility, and to seek examples of comparable or suitable designs. There are many precedents for this style of intersection treatment. Similar treatment could be considered for other intersections within the precinct, e.g. Faraday/Lygon, Grattan/Lygon etc.

Currently there is no visual focal point to 'punctuate' or visually 'enclose' the important higher northern end of the Lygon St. Cultural Precinct. The street simply bleeds out from a pleasant tree-lined vista into a snarl of competing traffic. The Precinct, like many such precincts in Italy, is a place where people congregate; streetscape design obviously must be conducive to such activity. The artistic design of the sculpture or monument could be decided through open competition which would lead to a design brief to specify appropriate and agreed cultural elements. A visually attractive and culturally significant monument at this intersection would define and accentuate Lygon St as a key Cultural Precinct within the City of Melbourne.

**The above four projects would significantly revitalise Lygon Street** which features wonderfully diverse culture with its combination of Victorian and contemporary architecture, wide streets and low building heights. It is a magnificent tree lined boulevard to which current public infrastructure does injustice – tired footpaths, ugly dilapidated public furniture etc. As a major arterial road (north/south arterial link), it is congested in peak periods and a Mecca for hoons in off-peak periods. With an uncontrolled traffic speed limit of 50 kph, Lygon St is not conducive to an environment of relaxation, cultural celebration and destination for strolling pedestrians. Heavy through-traffic generates high levels of noise and air pollution which detracts from the ambience of al fresco dining and street life. This major arterial road is very dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists (in February a pedestrian was killed crossing Lygon St, near

Elgin St. In recent times 3 motor cyclists were killed on the strip). The appalling situation is that Vic Roads ignores pleas to reduce speed limit to 40kph.

### Council Proposals

CoM staff tabled a restricted range of Council proposals, which merely extend existing Council plans for Carlton, to be funded or supplemented from the Cultural Precincts Fund, e.g. street lighting. Council staff are also very keen to “do something” about Argyle Square. Having invested \$4m on Piazza Italia, the Council now proposes to commit Cultural Precincts funds to add further infrastructure to the Piazza, which is claimed to now require ‘activation’. Funds already spent to develop the Piazza (over the existing green space of Argyle Square) were largely from the 5% developers’ open space contribution to Carlton, i.e. the compulsory provision of open space ‘levy’ on developers. To CRA dismay, we learned that Council now proposes to construct a generator shed on the site, and is considering other ‘buildings’ also. Positively, there is a plan to remove median parking and develop Pelham St as a defined link from the Melbourne Museum to Argyle Square and thence to Lincoln Square. (Stated to be under-utilised; no wonder! Along its entire Swanston Street side, Lincoln Square is now a stretch of grey concrete, utilised as a skateboard park.)

### Application of the Residential 3 Zone (Mandatory Heights) to Residential Areas

Three years ago the State Government offered Councils an opportunity to introduce a new mandatory height protection into the Melbourne Planning Scheme. Residential 3 Zone (R3Z) was designed to protect neighbourhood character from the development excesses of *Melbourne 2030*. The zoning would set **mandatory** building height limits of 9m, and 10m on slopes. The proposal was vigorously opposed by developers, architects and planners who regularly challenge and exploit the failings of Residential Code 1 (R1Z) for inappropriate developments. Following much lobbying by

residents groups across the city (a CoRA issue), Cr Brindley moved and Council’s Planning Committee voted to pursue the introduction of R3Z protection to R1Z areas not already subject to height controls via Ministerial Amendment. Had R3Z been in place last year, our battle at VCAT against the conversion of the former University Press building on Drummond St., to a 4 storey complex of 58 studio apartments, may have been successful. It is planning travesties like this that R3Z will directly confront with mandatory height controls.

Most development issues in Carlton arise from developers pushing the protective overlays, particularly height, because it is not mandatory. There is always a word, an interpretation, a precedent in R1Z open to exploitation at VCAT by skilled planning barristers and their expert witnesses. A lucrative industry has developed around this business. CRA’s long experience at VCAT is that well resourced developers can manipulate the well meaning intentions of R1Z to achieve virtually any desired outcome.

### General Meeting August 2007

Following a very successful pre-meeting Dinner at Dimatina’s, guest speaker, Dr Martin Mulligan (RMIT), addressed our General Meeting about his involvement in a 3 year research project on the complex relationships between cultural activities and community well-being. He elaborated on the many benefits of participation in community life. Pertinent to Carlton (as part of CoM) are neighbourhood needs and aspirations which are subjugated to corporatisation and promotion of CBD commercial and events interests. Dr Mulligan’s research findings emphasise that cities have no commitment to community. Further, that corporate thinking imposes its own priorities which erode community and destroys neighbourhood. CoM funding emphasis on “events” (to attract tourists) is damaging to community development. The Council claims it lacks financial resources to fund a Community Centre in Carlton where our diverse population can meet and **be** community.

A further example cited by Dr Mulligan was the University of Melbourne, which pursues its corporate goals without consideration of

community impacts eg. the severe architectural compromise of University Square for the failed Melbourne University Private and 'purpose-built student housing' on the Eastern Precinct.

People hunger for community; a place to acknowledge, share and celebrate their wealth of diverse stories. Carlton is richly blessed with its historical and social landscape which arose from squalid slums then developed through waves of immigrants, including large numbers of Jews, Italians, Africans, and over the past decade the influx of tertiary students, mainly from Asia. Carlton is now a disparate community of residents, public housing tenants, students, workers and visitors, isolated from each other with no common meeting place.

### Regular CRA Dinners

The dinner which preceded our recent General Meeting was well attended and resulted in enthusiasm for further wining and dining opportunities together. It was agreed we should arrange more leisurely regular dinner get-togethers between our quarterly General

Meetings (perhaps with an after dinner speaker). Early October will be the date for our next dinner; we will confirm details with plenty of notice. Please aim to attend and get to know other CRA members; we are an interesting and diverse group.

### Vale Peter Allen

With great sadness we record Peter's untimely death. A much loved and valued CRA member, Peter represented the Association on the Police Community Consultative Committee. As CEO of the AFL Coaches Assn and former CEO of the AFL Players Assn. Peter made outstanding contributions to football and also tennis and is lauded for his vision, passion and commitment. Deepest condolences to Peter's wife Lyn Behenna and their family. Peter is sincerely missed by all.

*Greta Bird*  
President

*Past 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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