

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR APRIL 2008 TO APRIL 2009

The Association has performed well in 2008. New initiatives were taken and we made some important progress in reaching out to the broader community. Although there has been some improvement in our membership numbers, we are still limited by our inability to engage more people in the work of the Association and probably to encourage, in fact, new people who do attend some of our special meetings to make the step to sign on membership and to pay a subscription. I acknowledge and commend those Committee members who took part in our weekly Wednesday morning meetings, keeping the issues before the Association moving, drafting letters, visiting the sites related to planning applications, and doing whatever else needed to be done on behalf of the interests of the Association.

The major reason that I think we made progress in 2008 was that we had many more meetings than we had held in the past that focused on critical issues facing our community. Let me list them.

- Department Of Transport on the Eddington Report at the May 2008 Meeting,
- Conrad Cunningham from the North and West Melbourne Precinct Association at the June Meeting exploring where our views might converge,
- Scott Hilditch from Graffiti Hurts looking at a zero tolerance approach to the management of graffiti, which is so prevalent in our area, at the July meeting,
- Department of Transport, City Of Melbourne and Connex on the new North Melbourne Station development at the August meeting,
- The lead councillor candidates from each of the Lord Mayoral teams for the Council elections at the November Meeting and
- Department of Transport on the Victorian Transport Plan at the March 2009 meeting.

On the positive side, these meetings did encourage more members and other interested community people to attend our meetings, while on the negative, we spent less time engaged in detailed discussions about planning applications and reflecting on the many other areas of interest that we have on developments and issues within our community. On balance, I think that it is more important to encourage the broader participation, rather than the less stimulating in-depth analyses. Follow up of the issues that arise from these meetings does need to be discussed and considered by the broader Association to ensure that our responses reflect the views of the membership in a fair and balanced way.

To balance the above, we have to look at the resources that we have available to organize these activities. Our monthly meetings require time to organize, especially where special speakers have to be contacted and briefed as to what our principal areas of interest are. We have four or five people who are able to meet for half an hour each week to undertake these tasks, as well as to do the regular functioning of treasury and secretarial works. All these people have significant other responsibilities in their lives and certainly cannot devote unlimited time to the Association.

We have rules that limit the time that people can serve on the Committee. We are testing those rules, mainly because we do not have the number of people interested in standing for office or even taking some of the load of Association activity that we need for a fully functioning organization. I think that these rules - mainly that no officebearer should remain in the same position for more than four years - and even that may be too long - are sound. We do not want to wear people out or to create a situation where individuals are pressured into an unhealthy imbalance in their lives and the whole group becomes too dependent on a very small number of individuals.

We have operated this organization in a fairly traditional way. The Carlton Residents Association also found that they were confronted with similar pressures. They have moved to break down the traditional model and encourage a more portfolio approach where individuals take on a responsibility for an area and the group comes together once a month to review what has happened. The leadership of the chairperson is downgraded as is the function of secretary. I suppose a treasurer would still be required to handle the finances.

Issues for 2008-9

Democracy in the City of Melbourne

Last year, we had an election in the city of Melbourne. This followed a year when our involvement in a group known as CoRBA (Coalition of Business and Resident Associations – Melbourne) had tried to reform the electoral processes and structures in the City of Melbourne to very little avail. CoRBA was active during the election and gained some commitment to reform of the Council during the campaign from almost all candidates. Our agenda included:

- The reinstatement of wards, wards bring Councillors closer the voters; we need at least some wards. This is not an unreasonable demand.
- The instigation of a review for the City of Melbourne, the only municipality in the State not required to have a review every two election cycles to address questions of democracy, elections, boundaries and structure; We need regular reviews.
- That attendance voting, rather than postal voting, be required for the election of Council. Postal voting is open to fraud; it encourages the big spending candidates, and it makes it easy for every Tom, Dick and Harry to stand for election, regardless of their commitment to the City of Melbourne. This may have been less of a problem this election than the last, but we still need to be alert to it.
- The removal of the “deeming provisions” where the company franchise does not require an application from the voter. This again gives the vote to people who may have no connection or interest in Melbourne and is again open to ‘loose’ voting.
- The removal of multiple votes for companies. Why should companies get two votes and every one else only one?
- The removal of above-the-line voting that encourages group control of the Council

During the election, several candidates noted how disconnected voters were from the issues of the election, as well as from the operations of the Council. We agree that it is a problem and we think that the system promotes this disconnection. We also encouraged an audit of Council resources by the new Council to try to ascertain the extent of the run down of assets during the last two election cycles, but so far have not had any useful response.

One benefit of the new Council is that it is not controlled by one group as the So Team did in the last Council.

We still feel that the current electoral arrangements have been politically managed to remove grass roots resident and business groups from achieving any real influence on the Council. The State Government and the Minister of Local Government have resisted our approaches for the above changes to be investigated and reviewed. A real difficulty is how we get voters to be more appreciative of the significance of the reforms we are promoting. We encourage you to take up these issues with your local Member of Parliament at any opportunity that you might have to express an opinion.

We acknowledge the work done by Kevin Chamberlin in representing the Association on the Transition Committee for the reintegration of Kensington and parts of North Melbourne back into the City of Melbourne. It was a process not without its challenges.

Heritage

We can only reiterate the opinion expressed in last year’s report that we have serious concern about the priority of heritage that is reflected in Council decisions. After the loss of the Grandstand at Arden Street in early 2007 and the abolition of the Council’s Heritage Advisory Committee in 2006, we can see no improvement in the Council’s understanding of heritage, its policy-making processes or its ability to manage these issues. There is still no work being done to update outstanding tasks that

were before the Heritage Advisory Committee when it was abolished. It is now years since the initiation of a major heritage review of the urban precincts within the Melbourne municipality was commenced – no major work has been done on it for over two years and the heritage of our local areas continues to be compromised by its incompleteness and the overall lack of commitment by the Council and its officers.

We are also concerned that the Council is taking a very negative view on participatory structures of community consultation with the abolition of the Heritage Advisory Committee and now the Royal Park Master Plan Implementation Advisory Committee. It not only downgrades these issues but it also reflects poorly on the role that community can play in supporting Council in ensuring that good policy is developed and implemented. I have also just learnt of the abolition of the Carlton Gardens Community Reference Group. When does the continuation of this trend reach a point where any credible process of community consultation is damaged beyond repair?

The Queensberry Street School

This is our good news story for the year. Our Local Member, who also happens to be Minister of Education, has announced that this site is no longer to be selective High School for the Western suburbs, but is to become the home of the Victorian Institute for Educational Leadership – an organization to promote the development of Principals in Victorian Government schools. It means that the rear concrete structure is to be demolished – it is almost gone - and the heritage school building with some new development to the rear, will be refurbished. It is very good news for the locals and even better since it has just been announced that the rear section of the site that was to have been sold off – for what we are not sure - is now to be retained. Congratulations to Bronwyn Pike for this excellent outcome.

Planning

As reported in last year's report, the development of three new residential zones that focus on their potential for development; little change; incremental change and major change. The zones are still in contention but some of these proposals have been abandoned, including, I understand, the abolition of the right of appeal. The bigger problem at the moment seems to be the propensity of the Minister of Planning, with the Premier's support, to call in, particularly large applications, to endorse them without due process for the purpose of promoting employment in the recession.

I would also like to acknowledge some work by Doone Clifton in looking at all the public and private expenditure on current and planned building development in North and West Melbourne, and on the immediate boundaries, that will impact on the concentration of activity and the resulting quality of life in our area. She notes that there is little oversight

“of all of the planned private and public developments, leading to chaotic and unsatisfactory outcomes. It is time for a complete audit of the facilities and services currently in the area. From there an assessment of the current and future needs and a plan to ensure that these needs are met.”

I suggest her observations are consistent with our comments in relation to Arden Lodge in the Social Issues section, where we call for the Council to have more power over social planning of the location and distribution of facilities in the community.

Errol Street

Errol Street emerged as an issue in two aspects during the year. First, it emerged as a planning question in our discussion with the Precinct Association where a suggestion was made to explore the possibility of removing cars and parking from Errol Street between Victoria and Queensberry Streets. It was suggested that the tram stops on Victoria and Queensberry could be reworked into Errol Street and obviously alternative parking would have to be organized for the traders. It is still only an idea and so needs to be developed further.

The second issue is about re-establishing a toilet block for Errol Street. It was learnt that last year Council was adopting a toilet plan for the municipality for the next five years and despite several

approaches having been made to Councillors, Errol Street was not on the list. This was remedied, and we were approached early in 2009 to see whether we would like an Exceloo – a modern space age unisex toilet with all the latest in technology - to be located in Queensberry Street, close to Leveson Street. After much discussion, we agreed that we were not keen on the Exceloo – we preferred a more traditional heritage variety, and felt that more work really needed to be put into determining the ideal location. Our position may mean that we will be placed further down the priority list.

Education Centres and Student Accommodation

We have been concerned about the proliferation of applications for Education facilities in the area. There seems to be little in the way of quality controls on these facilities or on the parameters such as times in which they operate.

Similarly, we are concerned at the dysfunctions of student accommodation being located in close proximity to residential areas in a residential zone. A further real issue is the parking waivers that are allowed for student accommodation. Both these matters require further follow up.

Planning applications

We have objected to a number of applications during the year and provided advice to a number of residents about applications that posed negative amenity issues for them. We supported the Council on a small number of applications at VCAT such as on 33-35 Arden Street where we were successful in establishing a lack of consideration for the heritage of surrounding buildings for an office block that was proposed.

We are still concerned that we do not have the resources to provide the level of support for affected residents in their process of objection and appeal that we have been able to perform in the past. Even the regular routine of checking the lists is not as systematic that we would like – despite the excellent work done by Ray Cowling in preparing the lists for us.

Social issues

We continue to work with the North and West Melbourne Homeless Action Group to adopt a Community Charter and Protocol as well as an Education program. The group networks between a number of agencies, Council and Government departments, including the Police, aiming to achieve creative and equitable responses to issues that arise. Our concern has been to find better ways of working with the homeless and their carers, including the protection of their rights, to promote the safety of our community, to inform ourselves of the nature of the issues and we try to ensure to the extent that we can, that there is no intensification of the number of homeless people or facilities in our area.

Two planning applications raised questions about increased intensification of accommodation for the homeless and socially disadvantaged about which we have been concerned.

The first was a project on the Carlton side of Elizabeth Street (660 Elizabeth Street, between Queensberry and Pelham) being promoted by a group called Home Ground for a project of mixed housing, including accommodation for the homeless, ten stories high. The project is supported by the State Government, the Council and Grollo. We did not object, as the odds seemed to be stacked against us. It is outside our area but is still very close in terms of the amenity demands that will be made on our community

In the second case, we did object to the planning application for the renewal and expansion of **Arden Lodge** in Arden Street and were given moral support by the Homeless Action Group based on issues of service quality and management and limited provision of basic services. The question that emerged from these discussions was the limited scope that the planning scheme gives to Councils to plan the way that these services develop and to ensure that the services do achieve certain standards of service

provision and ensure the satisfactory qualification of the operators. A more comprehensive social planning process would not only address these issues, but also enable Council to address questions of appropriate location and distribution of such facilities.

The Social issues Group has met several times over the year and raised a number of issues. Please see the Social Report for more details

PCCC

Our relationship with the police has continued to be inactive. As a result of our persistent efforts to get the Police to address the PCCC boundary issue down Victoria Street dividing North Melbourne into the Carlton PCCC and West Melbourne into the Melbourne West PCCC which also includes Docklands and Kensington, (the MCC part) as well, frustration has set in. We have long argued that this division does not enable us to address the issues affecting us holistically. In a sense, in some limited areas, the Homeless Action Group substitutes for the PCCC. Unfortunately, the Police representation does not cover both areas as coherently or consistently as we would like, and there are other issues, apart from the homeless, which need to be addressed with the Police across North and West Melbourne, such as the issue of graffiti, and other social dysfunctions that result from socially-supported housing in the area.

We have again begun some preliminary feelers out to the police to explore options to address these issues, and have recently had some constructive discussions which, while they may not directly solve the boundary issue, may provide some alternative ways of addressing our critical issues.

North Melbourne Recreation Reserve

After the decision of the City of Melbourne to demolish the Arden Street Grandstand in early 2007, we have continued to participate in the meetings of the Landscape Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC). Meetings in 2008 have not been as regular or systematic as we would like and have not even addressed matters in its charter such as the landscaping of the Reserve, let alone the major questions of the interface of these new facilities and the community. We certainly share concerns about adequate community access and seek an independent process for determining management of at least the community parts of the facility. Ongoing follow-up is required.

North Melbourne Sustainability Street

We reported last year that we had been approached to enter into a collaborative arrangement with NMSS, using our incorporated status to enable them to receive Council funding to run a series of seminars on sustainability for three target groups: renters / landlords, flats and apartments, and heritage homes. The first of the seminars has now been held and we are still seeking legal advice on a Memorandum of Understanding setting out the terms of our agreement to work together.

Traffic and Transport

In the last year, we have held two major forums on transport across the broader metropolitan area, emphasizing the impact that is likely to occur on our local area. The first focused on the Eddington report, whose major proposal was to construct a road tunnel from the end of the Eastern Freeway to the Tullamarine Freeway and beyond into the western suburbs. Other matters that arose included:

- the need to invest in reducing vehicle emissions as well as other transport options
- whether the public transport options can be made so effective as to negate the requirements for additional road infrastructure, particularly with rising petrol prices
- concerns about the noise, vibration and destruction of wetlands and parkland required to support the proposed excavation sites for periods up to five years

- concern that the road component will dominate what is currently proposed as an integrated solution, at the expense of public transport and cyclists,
- whether there might be potential to improve services by increasing the number of trains carried on the current network, or whether its design precludes any major improvement this way
- likely location of vent stacks
- possible rail connections between North Melbourne and suburbs like Fitzroy
- the commitment to having no run-offs between Hoddle Street and Flemington, and
- the potential impact of climate change imperatives.

The Association made a submission to the Eddington inquiry, emphasising our concern at the disruption to Royal Park and to Holland Park in Kensington as well as the lack of priority for public transport.

The second meeting was held in March 2009 for the purpose of briefing the Association by the Department of Transport on the Victorian Transport Plan, which was developed as response to the review of the Eddington Report.

The Association was represented at a number of high level transport forums as part of the consultation process.

Other traffic and access issues that emerged during the year included the following:

- **401 Bus** – A development from the Department of Transport to run frequent express busses between the North Melbourne Station and the Royal Melbourne and Women’s Hospitals and Melbourne University to avoid the need for public transport users to go into the City and then out again to reach their destinations. Our involvement was to write to the Minister to request that the service create a stop at Errol Street to facilitate local movements in both directions.
- Two meetings were held with **Yarra Trams** during the year to liaise with the community on the installation of DDA compliant platform tram stops, firstly, three stops in Peel Street and, secondly, regarding proposed stops on the 57 line in Abbotsford Street.
- Another issue regarding access, was the imposition of **loading zones** by the City of Melbourne, in what were short term parking zones in Queensberry Street outside the North Melbourne Town Hall. The behaviour of the Engineering Department in their total lack of consultation on these sorts of decisions demonstrates a high degree of inflexibility and lack of transparency. The imposition of fines on unsuspecting parkers in the first few days of the new signs did not improve community attitudes toward the Council.

Excellence Award

The Association had pleasure in presenting our Excellence Award for 2008 to Alan Martin, a volunteer at the Ozanam Day centre in Arden Street. This was done at our Christmas celebration at the Railway Hotel in West Melbourne, in December. Alan was acknowledged for his work at the Centre, his contribution to the Homeless Action Group and for his research and investigation into conditions into some of the rooming houses for the homeless in the local area, as well as the public exposure that this has given to the issue.

Thanks to Alba for organizing this event so efficiently.

Melbourne News

We have been having problems ensuring the delivery of the City of Melbourne News to all residents in the North and West Melbourne area for a number of years. Over the last year the Association has made a concerted effort to try to identify the reasons for the lack of deliveries and to remove the obstacles to its circulation. We are trusting that the outcome has been positive and wish to thank all those members who provided feedback on whether they had received copies or not, in assisting us to reach this point.

Organisational Issues

A number of the Committee have continued with small regular breakfast meetings to look after the management side of the organization and to deal with other urgent issues as they arise.

We are continuing to develop our website as a base to expand our contact and communication with the membership and the community. We acknowledge that our shortage of volunteers has reduced our capacity to undertake many activities and we are trying to devolve responsibility for undertaking planning appeals and the preparation of submissions to individuals or groups who are likely to be most affected by the issue.

We still do not have enough people on the ground to do the regular routine work that needs to be done to keep our responses organized and timely and our intelligence current and well-based. This year is the first in a considerable time that we have had vacant Committee positions – Vice – Chairperson and Assistant Secretary. Again, this year we are losing and have lost, experienced people from the Association. We need not only to replace them; we need to add to them.. We have too few people willing to work on our working groups and make them effective autonomous units, and those who are working are experiencing overload. It is obvious from the issues referred to throughout this report that there is much work to be done. The need for vigilance has never been greater. Unless we get more support from individuals, our effectiveness must decline. The future of the Association rests in your hands.

We acknowledge the contribution by the City of Melbourne to our income and thank them for their contribution. We also acknowledge that it is paid for us to develop our communications capacity such as the website development and not to engage in political campaigns that question Council decisions or structure. We note that the Council is making the requirements for their funding more onerous and we are taking appropriate action to satisfy these demands.

To conclude, I would like to acknowledge the work done by **the Committee** this year especially those who have attended the weekly meetings and non-Committee members who have supported the Association.

Alba Gatto, (Secretary without an assistant) Thank you Alba for taking on this challenging role and all your goodwill and persistence in following up member inquiries, council and police contacts, dedication to administration matters, and being so generally supportive of the needs of the group. Attending and hosting the weekly meetings and planning other issues and events.

Michael Horscroft, (Treasurer), thank you for keeping all the payments up to date, recording the subscription receipts and membership lists, preparing the financial statements and completing the acquittals of Council grant monies, as well as attending Council training sessions, Board Training and our weekly meetings.

Denys Harroway, (Ordinary Member) Thank you Denys for your ongoing support over the year and for your initiative in taking up a number of issues and running with them. Attending weekly meetings

Kevin Chamberlin, (Ordinary Member) Thank you for your commitment to the very important issues of democracy and Council structure and representing the Association at a number of groups. Your proactive interest, political nous and networking skills are much appreciated.

Madeleine Scully, (Ordinary Member) thanks for your ability to write excellent minutes, and especially on news gathering and organizing material for *The North & West Melbourne News*

Nancy Nankervis, (Convenor, Social Issues Group) for taking on the responsibility for the running of the Group

Margaret Fried, (Planning) thanks for your work on planning, submissions, Latrobe Close and local applications

George Tyler (Convenor Business) Thanks for your ongoing support and provision of facilities at the Miami for special occasions.

Gabrielle Stannus Thanks for your consistent support in promoting the relationship with Sustainability Street

To other non-Committee Members

Lorraine Siska Thanks for continuing to support our processes and helping to induct new people into their roles, Membership of the Homeless Action Group and many other interests.

Geoff Leach Thanks for continuing to show interest in both the local planning applications and the macro planning developments. Your input is still much appreciated.

Alan Ashley Thank you for taking on some of the more technical work in relation to our publishing marketing and website work, as well as attending many of our meetings

Mary Kehoe, not a member of the Committee this year but thank you for your tireless efforts on 603 Queensberry St and deeply felt concern about heritage issues

Ray Cowling Thanks Ray for all your work in preparing the planning lists for our perusal and for being such a prompt responder whenever we ask for advice.

Kevin Wong Hoy Thanks for your interests in matters affecting the Association, planning applications, PCCC and social issues.

Beth Bennett, again not a Committee member but active on the new North Melbourne Station Development and representing the Association on the Judy Lazarus Centre.

Rob Oke for auditing our accounts and participating in the negotiations with Sustainability Street.

Thanks to all those who organized the Excellence Award presentation to Alan Martin in December 2008. Our congratulations again to Alan.

To the membership, thank you for your support of the Association, for your participation, attendance at meetings and your financial backing. Thanks to those who have assisted in specific tasks such as managing the door at special meetings and working on the Association stall at the Spring Fling. Thanks to members who responded to our requests for feedback on matters such as receipt of the Melbourne News and the Errol Street toilets. Please continue to promote us to others in the local community.

There is still much that needs to be done around this community. We can do it.

If you have an interest in any of the areas we have reported on, please put your name forward or come and talk to a Committee member.

Bill Cook
Chairperson
26 March 2009