

Activities and Achievements of The Carlton Residents Association

The CRA was founded in 1996, following an earlier decision by the Kennett Liberal-National Party State Government to redraw municipal boundaries. This policy placed largely residential North Carlton within the City of Yarra, leaving South Carlton, a largely business dominated area, within the City of Melbourne. Residents believed this action was taken to break the power of resident activism in Carlton.

Predecessor to CRA, The Carlton Association, formed in 1969, had been very effective in confronting successive State Governments over the demolition of thousands of Victorian Era terrace houses in the name of 'slum clearance', for the construction of highrise public housing estates in Carlton. Other issues included traffic and transport matters eg. the construction of the Eastern Freeway through residential areas of Carlton in the 1970's, and protection of parkland and historic buildings from the predations of development.

CRA inherited all these issues from the disbanded Carlton Association while facing escalating pressures from inappropriate development proposals and traffic. This included the voracious off-campus expansion of Melbourne University into Carlton's heritage residential areas.

Some examples of CRA's activities and achievements since 1996 are outlined below. Our *Newsflash* archive provides further information on these and many other activities.

- **Melbourne University Private:** one of the earliest challenges faced by the newly formed CRA, was the takeover of historic Barry Square on Gratten Street, for a new enterprise, *Melbourne University Private (MUP)*, in 1998. The plan was to demolish around 30 heritage listed terrace houses for construction of 15 storey buildings around the Square, and to convert the Victoria Bowling Club into a multistorey underground carpark. The Planning Minister 'called in' and approved the plan outside regular planning processes. CRA action moderated the more outrageous aspects of the proposal in collaboration with the University. Facades of most terrace houses were retained and building heights scaled down, however the destructive impacts of this development remains a blight on Barry Square. MUP failed as a commercial enterprise.
- **World Heritage listing of the Royal Exhibition Building & Carlton Gardens:** CRA was an active supporter and participant in this historic proposal which was successful in 2004. We continue to support preservation, restoration and management of the area through *The Carlton Gardens Group*. Inappropriate commercial use of the Gardens, which results in destructive impacts, is a constant challenge, together with highrise housing development within nearby environs.
- **Carlton: A History:** CRA auspiced and organised the publication of a critically acclaimed book, *Carlton: A History*. This mammoth task, completed in 2004, stands as a magnificent legacy to founding and long-time CRA President, Dr Sue Chambers, and her editorial committee.

- **Public Housing Estates Redevelopment:** In the traditions of the Carlton Association, CRA actively monitors developments within the Public Housing Estates, including a major redevelopment proposal announced in 2005. CRA led successful public activism in opposition to reopening Drummond Street through the Lygon Street Estate. Loss of open space and parkland from the sell-off of public land to a private housing development on the Estate remains a problem. We participated in a Panel Hearing which exposed many negative aspects of redevelopment proposals which the Government partially responded to. CRA continues to participate in the Community Liaison Committee which monitors design and development of the Estates. The provision of community resources and support for the diverse needs of public housing tenants regularly engages CRA attention.
- **Planning Issues:** monitoring planning applications for Carlton is one of CRA's major ongoing activities. Pressure for intense development within our heritage zones is a constant challenge, along with protection of Design and Development Overlays (DDO 47 & 48) and the Municipal Strategic Plan (C60). Developments range from minor residential building proposals to major building infrastructure under *Melbourne@5million* planning provisions, which may involve VCAT appeals. Examples of the latter include *College Square on Swanston*, a highrise student housing development, initiated by Melbourne University in 2002. A site specific planning overlay was provided by the Bracks Labor State Government to bypass regular planning processes. CRA was heavily involved in a 6 week long appeal at VCAT which resulted in a less intense development with the highest 11 storey component on Swanston Street, tapering to 3 storeys on Cardigan Street. Most terrace houses around the site were saved from demolition and have since been restored. A further example began in 2005, with a proposal to convert a 2 storey commercial building in Drummond Street to a 4 storey apartment complex, within a 2 storey heritage streetscape. Again CRA took the lead in a VCAT case with the aim of protecting Carlton's intact Victorian Era streetscapes from inappropriate development. While some moderation of the design was achieved, the high profile developer was successful in manipulating established planning provisions to achieve commercial goals.
- **Carlton Parkland:** Quality of life and open space issues are important in Carlton. CRA continues to lobby for improved green-space through street tree planting, median greening, and preservation of historic garden squares. We successfully campaigned against the removal of all 200 street trees from the Lygon Street Precinct, and have moderated on-going proposals for developments on parkland. Despite this work, much of Argyle Square has been paved to create *Piazza Italia* and associated facilities; Lincoln Square houses the Bali Memorial with large areas of hard surface; much of Barry Square has been paved for an underground carpark. CRA assisted in the successful campaign to relocate *The Big Day Out* away from Princes Park. We support *Protectors of Public Land*, a State-wide activist group concerned to preserve parkland and public open space.
- **Transport, Traffic and Parking:** CRA has actively participated in many State Government and City Council reviews and studies of transport, traffic and car parking eg. Eddington Inquiry, Melbourne Transport Strategy, Carlton Parking & Access. We emphasise the importance of public transport, cycling and walking, and the need to constrain ever escalating levels of private

commuter motoring through Carlton. Road safety, urban air pollution, greenhouse implications and peak oil impacts are of major concern. At the local level, we successfully lobbied for a 40kph speed zone through the Lygon Street Precinct and for improved bike parking and path facilities.

- **Community Activism:** CRA collaborates with like minded residents and community groups within the City of Melbourne and beyond. We are members of *The Coalition of Residents and Business Associations*, which takes on 'big picture' issues within our city, such as Council undemocratic election processes and commercial use of public parkland for private profit. CRA is also active in the State-wide group, *Planning Backlash*, which is concerned about population policy and the unsustainable growth of Melbourne, including intense development pressures arising from Government policy *Melbourne@5million*. We have participated in meetings with the Planning Minister and many public rallies on planning issues.
- **Community Resources:** Unlike many comparable inner urban areas, Carlton has no library or community space for events, meetings, community resources etc. The Council has acknowledged this long standing community need, however the State Government remains uncooperative. CRA has identified the *Kathlene Syme Centre*, a component of the now vacated Royal Women's Hospital site, as an ideal building for a Community Centre to service the entire Carlton community. However, Melbourne University also has an interest in the building and has incorporated it into its 2008 Master Plan. We are continuing to strongly lobby State Government authorities to release KSC for community use.