



**The Carlton Residents Association Inc.**

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## **11<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting, 19<sup>th</sup> February 2007**

### **President's Report**

CRA has been embattled with planning issues and is under constant challenge on heritage, historic streetscapes and community, from developers with short-term profit motives and from MCC and State Government. The CRA Committee met monthly throughout 2006 and considered the many issues which confront Carlton residents. CRA hosted quarterly General Meetings with guest speakers which were open to the public. These meetings proved popular and instructive. We learned of Melbourne University's plans for future student numbers. The theme "Greening Carlton" was led by three experts who informed how we could create a healthier, safer and more sustainable local community. To facilitate greater dialogue and understanding, a meeting shared with Carlton Traders led to lively discussion and very positive exchange of ideas. At our Christmas Party, recently re-elected Member for Melbourne the Hon. Bronwyn Pike MLA spoke on future plans for Carlton.

Committee members met with MU/CRA liaison person Russell Elliott, Vice-Principal, Property and Campus Services (who replaced Doug Danes). It was agreed that we meet periodically and learn of the university's future extension plans in Carlton, so as to circumvent future controversial developments such as Barry Square and Eastern Precinct.

#### **Centrally located Community/Activities/Visitor Centre and Branch Library for Carlton:**

CRA continues to lobby strongly for this much needed facility in Carlton. We lobbied Lord Mayor John So and Councillors individually, who assured it is high on their list of priorities. On 28<sup>th</sup> October I met Premier Bracks at a pre-election Cultural Precincts visit to Lygon Street. He offered State Government funding, and suggested State Govt join with MCC in a partnership. I immediately wrote to confirm this conversation and forwarded copies to Ministers Thwaites, Pike and to Councillors. We renewed our efforts with Council to locate a suitable site in central Carlton, and learned that our former meeting place, the Kathleen Syme Centre, is to be sold in 2008. This building, Carlton's first school, would be an excellent outcome and rare opportunity for the MCC and the State, namely the retention of a Carlton heritage icon, for a sorely needed whole community facility. A second, significantly less practical option also to become available is the Police Station in Drummond Street. It is small and would require considerable refurbishment.

**Planning & Heritage sub-committee** reviews planning applications for postcode 3053 and typically objects to approx. 15% to 20% of applications, where developers push development envelopes without concern for community, heritage and streetscapes. Examples of significant planning objections include:

**Intersection Café** (cr. Lygon & Elgin Sts). A poster red Coca Cola advertisement was installed without approval on the entire Elgin St face of the café. MCC responded to our objection and enforced the restoration of the previous heritage colour.

**Shakahari Restaurant** in Faraday St. The planning application was for an addition of two stories, four apartments, and waiving of parking requirements. CRA objected on heritage, streetscape, bulk and engineering grounds; MCC rejected the application, an appeal to VCAT was withdrawn - for the present!

**262-276 Drummond Street:** Council, despite 22 objections, overruled the advice of its own expert planners and passed a proposal for partial demolition of the existing 2 storey commercial building, and construction of a 4 storey apartment block of 58 residential (mainly 'studio') apartments. This despite the site being in a Residential 1 Zone, Heritage Overlay 1, and Design and Development Overlay 48 (maximum building height 10.5 metres). CRA's appeal at a VCAT Hearing was a bruising experience.

The developer, Evolve Developments P.L., used high-powered Senior Council and hired heritage and town planning experts to successfully argue its case to overturn the 10.5-metre height limit and heritage regulations, and to waive statutory visitor car-parking requirements. We were denied the right to raise Planning Scheme C60, Clause 21, with its specific statements on Carlton, because Evolve's Senior Counsel referred to Clause 22. His assertion that this more general statement obviated the particular - one of our major points - was upheld.

This was a classic case of City Councillors and VCAT being overawed by a high-profile developer. In supporting inappropriate development without adequate regard to heritage and amenity, further denigration of Drummond Street is legitimised. This alarming approval is another win for the big end of town, and sets an appalling precedent for Drummond St, which other developers will seek to emulate. CRA fears for the future in a planning process so favourable to developers and against the interests of the community.

Following our loss at VCAT, CRA distributed a Media Release to State and local newspapers on Nov 8. We found it incredible that such a newsworthy event was universally ignored.

### **Carlton Public Housing Estate Redevelopment**

Housing Minister Candy Broad announced the Government's intention to demolish about 200 walk-up public housing units in Rathdowne St and Elgin Square, and replace them with smaller modern apartments. CRA maintains that the Government's contribution of \$50m would comfortably fund the redevelopment, which will include 45 units of "affordable" housing on the Queen Elizabeth site on Swanston St, opposite Melbourne University. In a controversial deal, the Bracks Govt. will sell four hectares of invaluable public housing land (estimated value \$20m) to a \$200m private development of 550 units to be sold for private profit. It is important to note that there will be no net increase in public housing.

A Community Liaison Committee (CLC) was formed in March 2006 to demonstrate Government commitment to community consultation in redeveloping the public housing estates. This committee proved most disappointing: it devalues community insofar as it is deliberately ineffective. It consists principally of OoH staff who give uninformative reports. There is minimal community representation, input is discouraged and ignored. Issues I raised on behalf of CRA received a hostile response from OoH members. The community would have opportunity for input, we were told, at a Panel Hearing.

CRA actively participated in the Panel Hearing over a two-week period, commencing Nov 27. Treasurer Warren Green made the lead presentation for CRA. Other CRA members including Vice-President Jackie Watts and Ian Bird also contributed, emphasizing different aspects of the major concerns which arose from our public meeting in July.

The Panel was given very constrained Terms of Reference by the Bracks Govt. We were dismayed to learn that most of our concerns were outside these terms. This despite repeated assertions by politicians and Office of Housing staff that the Panel Hearing would provide a forum where objections would be heard. The Govt had previously removed our democratic, third party appeal rights to VCAT!

Government barristers and expert witnesses were retained to support highly questionable OoH redevelopment proposals. We learned the redevelopment is all about urban consolidation under *Melbourne 2030* and only incidentally about the provision of public and affordable housing in Carlton. This revelation came as a shock in view of Government spin that claimed urgently needed public housing was a redevelopment priority. Further spin: "a social mix will break down the stigma of living on a housing estate"; reality: in order to sell the units to the private market, the private housing will be carefully separated from public. On open space, the OoH stressed: "people feel unsafe in the open spaces on the Estate". This insecurity will be alleviated by replacement of open space with pocket-handkerchief sized areas of "quality open space" and with "reinstatement of the former Carlton streetscape". This latter is to consist of reinstated narrow lanes lined with 8-storey housing blocks. The Panel will advise Planning Minister, Hon Justin Madden, in late Feb. We hold little hope for revision of current plans.

An added cynical Government pre-election stunt led to the demolition of walk-up units Cr Princes & Rathdowne Sts two years prior to the site being required for re-development. This has caused intense personal pain and family disruption to displaced tenants, and has created a dust bowl on the site.

**Parks and Recreation - Open Space Strategy:** This is a welcome initiative by MCC to assist the planning of parkland for residents and visitors to enjoy now and into the future. The City of Melbourne has undertaken an analysis of the existing open space for Carlton, based on the size, type, ease of access and future population. At the local public meeting Council staff elaborated their criteria, the ideal being one hectare of open space for every 1,000 people and provision of parkland within 300m of households. Carlton was assessed to have adequate parkland. However this was arrived at only by including Princes Park, which represents two thirds of the identified public open space and is remote for most Carlton residents (further than 300m), being typically 1km from central Carlton and separated by two very busy arterial roads. It therefore cannot reasonably be regarded as accessible parkland for Carlton residents and visitors. The reality is that open space for Carlton residents is only around 0.7 ha per 1000 people. CRA's 'Open Space Strategy, Carlton Area' response can be seen on our website.

Some interesting Carlton statistics (2004):

Resident 11,129 (2021 projection: Resident 17,681) Workers coming to Carlton daily 15,742

**Draft Urban Design Strategy (July 06)** is a Council initiative concerned to protect and enhance the public domain in Carlton, identified as streetscape, heritage, urban amenity and parkland. All are under severe stress due to the impacts of inappropriate development and use of public parkland for private activities. Submissions, including CRA's, are still being reviewed.

**Precinct Planning Workshop:** 'Ratio Consultants' were employed by MCC to compile a vision framework for Lygon St. When challenged on why CRA's contributions had not been incorporated into the report, the Consultants informed that they appreciated our input, however their brief was limited to events and tourism. We were dismayed at the blatant misuse of our time and effort, solicited simply so that it could be claimed we had been consulted.

**Median plantations:** CRA has long proposed median green space in Faraday St from Swanston to Cardigan Sts, and in Cardigan St from Elgin to Faraday Sts. Ample, accessible off-street car parking, high pedestrian traffic, "greening" of median areas as envisaged in the Carlton 2010 Study, and urban design advice justify the consequent removal of car parking from this small area. There is ample parking in the Council owned public car park in Elgin St (near Cardigan). Additionally there is the foreshadowed availability of 628 additional parking spaces from the University of Melbourne's underground car park at 345-375 Cardigan Street. To "green" sections of Cardigan and Faraday Streets would soften the visual impact of the unsightly eleven-storey student accommodation edifice constructed by Becton on the Eastern Precinct Site (College Square on Swanston). Much of the median area is currently unmetred, and is of no economic benefit to the Council. Councillors assure this will happen, but not in the near future.

**Lygon Street Plane Trees:** You will remember demands made in Spring 2005 by The Carlton Business Assn that the 180 plane trees in Lygon Street be removed because of hair and leaf drop. Alternative solutions are being sought by a committee chaired by Cr Fraser Brindley and including botanist Ian Shears.

Botanical Research revealed the hair and leaf drop contain irritants, but not allergens. A range of actions are being trialled. These include increased frequency of footpath cleaning in peak periods of hair and leaf drop. In the long term, reduction of flowering by chemical application via trunk injection will be investigated. Longer term planting of Plane trees with low leaf hair and non-flowering species is planned. Monitoring of the trees throughout 2006/7 with traps placed in canopies is being implemented.

**Community Forum:** Carlton and Parkville residents were invited to participate in a community forum chaired by Deputy Mayor Cr Gary Singer, advertised as presenting an opportunity to talk to MCC Councillors and staff about issues of concern in Carlton. It was most disappointing to find the several submissions made in writing prior to the event were glibly dismissed. CRA has again submitted a list of issues for a second Forum, to be held in Parkville on Feb.20 and chaired by Cr David Wilson.

**C60 Planning Amendment** for the revised Municipal Strategic Statement received Ministerial approval, but without the disability access for which we campaigned in conjunction with Coalition of Residents Assns.

**Res3 Zone** is a ministerial amendment designed to protect Streetscapes and urban amenity. The aim of the new zone is to protect Melbourne's historic neighbourhood character in sensitive residential areas. Councils could define limited areas within established suburbs for rezoning to a 9-meter maximum height limit. CRA joined the North & West Melbourne and the Parkville Assns in meetings with MCC Planners, and wrote submissions to include areas of Carlton in this amendment.

After a lengthy process involving 36 submissions and reports to Council's Planning Committee, Council Management and their planning experts recommended that the Planning Committee request the Minister for Planning to amend the Melbourne Planning Scheme and introduce R3Z to areas shown in its report.

Council decided to ignore its own expert advice and to yet further delay consideration of protection for our remnant Victorian heritage streetscapes by requesting the Minister for Planning to appoint an independent panel to consider the Residential Zone 3 yet again. Once again, Council leaves itself open to the charge of being more concerned to support the interests of developers than the important task of preserving and enhancing streetscapes, heritage and amenity in Carlton.

Melbourne City Council's lack of commitment to protect the City's Heritage is further evidenced by its decision to disband the Heritage Advisory Committee

**Melbourne 2030** continues to cause widespread alarm throughout Victoria. A large number of Residents Associations have joined to campaign to have this policy reviewed. Its principle, to limit urban sprawl, is excellent, but planning is deeply flawed, allowing massive destruction of heritage and community amenity.

**World Heritage listed Carlton Gardens :** The organizers of the **Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show** (MIFGS) were granted a two-year extension, and are seeking to make the Gardens their permanent home. Alternative venues, which would not be damaged by the heavy construction, such as the purpose built Showgrounds or Birrarung Marr, were rejected by MIFGS: the first because it lacks the desired tree canopy, the second, which has beautiful trees plus the Yarra, lacks the Exhibition Building backdrop!

It is stressed that CRA's objection is not to the Flower and Garden Show per se, but to the highly damaging hardware, building and farm equipment which have become part of the display. Proposals that these constructions be made on the concrete section of the gardens have been rejected. MCC approved this event, despite being presented with photographic evidence of massive damage. Further, Council staff successfully lobbied Planning Minister Hulls to amend the Melbourne Planning Scheme for commercial events on public parkland to be approved without planning permission. This removes our democratic, third party appeal rights to VCAT!

CRA, Residents 3000, East Enders, and others, support the active Carlton Gardens Group in its attempts to remove at least the hardware section of the commercial garden show from future events.

**"Piazza Italia" at Argyle Square:** Argyle Square is the last of Carlton's four historic garden squares to have been substantially paved during the past decade. Here is another example of a lengthy struggle by CRA, resulting in only partial success. Our efforts achieved some modification of the original environmentally destructive proposals. CRA objected vigorously to the loss of green space, and the design was modified to exclude concrete steps along the Lygon St end, and to include grass and a surround of shade trees. The piazza now blends better into Argyle Square.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincere thanks to the Committee, Sub-Committees and other active members for their highly valued contributions, dedication and innovative ideas to CRA.

Grateful thanks also to Brunettis, who provide delicious suppers for our general meetings and Xmas party, to La Mama Theatre for our Christmas party venue, and to Dimattinas Restaurant, for allowing us use of their spendid 1<sup>st</sup> floor facility to meet for our AGM.

*Greta Bird*

President