

Friends of the Maribyrnong Valley Inc.

CHRISTMAS NEWSLETTER 2004

EDITORIAL: Melbourne 2030 and the North Maribyrnong Defence Site

Guest speaker at the AGM of Royal Park Protection Group was Dr Bob Birrell, Demographic Sociologist from Monash University where he is Director of the Centre for Population and Urban Research. His review of *Melbourne 2030* provided mixed messages for the Defence Site. He is adamant that it can not work; can not fulfill its objectives. The reasons are firmly based on both demographic principles and on the effects of human nature.

M2030 set out to provide the blueprint for Melbourne to accommodate another million people. However the principles on which it was founded are based on misconceptions. Consider that the majority of the residential increase will be by urban infill creating around 200000 new residential units around the so called "activity centres". If this is largely by opportunistic development, then it will be resisted because it will destroy the character of the areas that now makes the areas desirable. There will be a reduction in trees, open space, and the biological space, all of which are so necessary for healthy contented communities.

If we look at the new housing blocks that have sprung up at Dockland and Southbank and the high-rise blocks that developers want to put everywhere in the middle suburbs from Moonee Ponds to Montmorency, they tend to be small and expensive. Who is going to live in them if these are the housing units of M2030. In future, most domestic groups will be singles and couples. Many will be aged 55+. These people are not willingly going to give up the freedoms and pleasures they have enjoyed in the family home for decades. If they were to consider the option, they might be faced with selling the family home for \$400K and then having to buy a small unit for \$500K. Yes? Given the low birthrate of Victorians now, the population increase will be by migration, which the State Government is flat out trying to boost. Should we be participating in an exercise that will diminish out quality of life and standard of living in order to satisfy Bracks' people's dreams? Also, are the migrants going to want or to afford small expensive units?

M2030 also features the pipedream of converting Melbourne to a 'Public Transport' community. But present day Melbourne is not designed as this and its people are not committed to that style. By increasing the population of inner and middle Melbourne by up to 30% will bring traffic impossibilities. Imagine it.

What then are the alternatives?

Firstly M2030 must be dismantled in the form of 'review' so that the emphasis is placed on planned communities in the outer areas that will provide both housing and employment. Perhaps the concept of "Activity Centres" will work in the 'brownfields' situation, where there is planned redevelopment of outer suburbs which at present have little or no social or cultural merit.

It is a concern that although we are suffering the birth-pangs of the M2030 gestation now, the government has set aside NO funds to carry it through, though there are 25 years to go.

How does this impact on the Defence Site? Well the situation now is that M2030 is ambivalent. On one hand it identifies both the need for open space and parkland in the already deprived inner west and especially in the area of the river. It spells out the opportunity to create parkland around the axis of the river corridor. On the other hand this land is 1km away from the Activity Centre at Highpoint which means that State Government and Council are united in wanting to put 2000 or more new homes in the area. Cabinet Ministers recently bluntly expressed their priority of putting housing before parkland. On the basis of what we have seen of recent developments in the area, high density, low cost (affordable) housing that our governments wish to force on the community will be the slums of the future. At present it is hard to see that governments will want to do what is really needed here.

In its present form M2030 will be used against the best interests of the western suburbs despite spelling out much better outcomes. If Melbourne 2030 is to work it must be modified so that it enhances and protects our most livable city, and not destroy it.

- John Upsher

VRC WALL

Members of the Footscray Rowing Club have initiated a Maribyrnong River Floodplain Committee to fight the proposal by the Victorian Racing Club to build a 1.6 k long, 2.7m high, flood protection wall around Flemington racecourse. The Committee has 2 independent peer reviews of the study done for Melbourne Water and the VRC upon which the Government has based its decision. They conclude that some initial data supplied to the VRC consultants was inaccurate and the methodology used in their modeling was outdated. They have been very active in getting reports into the media and in lobbying politicians. At the time of writing the committee is still attempting to get the government to recognise that the Melbourne Water report is flawed.

Almost coincidental with this is Melbourne Water review *Port Phillip and Westernport Regional River Health Strategy* - now at a consultation and review state. This report is less lofty in its statements but more refined in its content, giving the best available data for criteria of water and streamside condition. It also presents well founded assessments and projections, some modest, some far-reaching. Another good read.

For anyone interested, copies are available from Ian, Maelor or John.

CATCHMENT COMMITTEES AND MELBOURNE WATER COME TOGETHER

After eight years of considering the Maribyrnong catchment, its problems, its potential and its past and its future, Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority is releasing its omnibus document *Port Phillip and Westernport Regional Catchment Strategy 2004-2009*. PPWPCMA is now mulling over the next stage - the complex business of implementing the plans that were seen to most suit the needs of each of the catchments and the programs that are common to several or all. The document is an excellent review of the condition of the catchments and will become a reference item.

CHRISTMAS BREAKUP

This year we are couldn't be closer to the Maribyrnong for our End-of-year celebration at the Essendon Canoe Club. Courtesy of Fred and the Club, we have accepted their kind invitation. Be There! Saturday 18 December, 6.30 pm. Bring all the food and drink you need for a barbeque and a fine sociable get-together. All welcome.

FMV wishes other 'Friends of' and Land Care groups and everyone else in the business of improving and enhancing our world, a successful 2005, but keep the pressure on the politicians and bureaucrats to always take the best option for the quality of our future. Options that their children would be proud of. J.