

FRIENDS OF THE MARIBYRNONG VALLEY INC.

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2004

ACCOMMODATION

There are changes afoot at headquarters. The other occupants at the Community Meeting Rooms have expanded their activities and need more space. To help accommodate them, we have been offered a larger room and will be moving the contents of our office and store into it – vacating two smaller rooms. To help with storage the library is also finding some more shelving for us. In addition, the walls at the centre will be fitted with Velcro/pin boards so that displays can be put up or changed at short notice. We will need a Working Bee to move to the new accommodation very soon. To be discussed at the May Meeting on 5th at 7.30, at the Highpoint Library as usual.

OPEN DAY AT THE DEFENCE SITE

On Saturday 21 February, Foresite held an Open Day so that the community could view the site and make its own opinions on what might be best for its future. Four shuttle buses ran at hourly intervals and over 500 people did the 30 minute circuit and saw the static display. The tour could not show the whole 130+ hectares but the immensity of the site became reality. The whole area compares with Royal Park or the Botanic Gardens. Possibly the most daunting aspect is that even if only a half is preserved for open space, the amount of work to convert it into a park is awesome. The cost and logistics of the removal of many buildings of low significance, the restructuring of land profile and the containment of contaminated soil will impact on the economic viability of the site. (Parks Victoria is watching developments but is not yet active in proceedings).

The tour guides were careful not to be drawn on matters of contamination or any of the heritage issues.

FMV had an enterprising day, handing out 500 brochures outlining why it is so important to create a park at the site. There was much interest and we gained a few new members from the exercise. We obtained some valuable exposure on the Channel 7 news that night. FMV acknowledges the efforts of Don, Maelor, Fred and Christine who donned yellow lifejackets to lower the risk of dodging the traffic at the entrance, to talk to people in cars. Thanks also to Paul and Meagan Upsher who put together the Leaflet at short notice.

MARIBYRNONG DEFENCE SITE UPDATE

Department of Defence is negotiating with VicUrban, the State's arm for land dealing/developing, with a mandate for a 'priority sale'. In anticipation that this deal is ultimately reached, then our target for pressure becomes the State Government. To put FMV more in the picture, two VicUrban Officers, Kerry O'Neill and George Tieman attended the April meeting and gave an update. Their intention is to arrive at an offer that takes into account all relevant factors and convince Defence that it is the highest price that is commercially viable, when it is in fact the lowest that can be justified. Whilst admitting that factors such as the various heritage issues, land contamination and community/infrastructure needs were being brought into the equation, they could not be drawn on either the greatest amount of open space that could be considered or conversely the least amount that would have to be sacrificed to residential/commercial development in order to conclude the deal with Defence. Anyone wishing to personally find out more about the Defence Land sale can contact Kerry O'Neill at VicUrban on 96284499.

The site managers, Foresite, are presenting two information nights at Maribyrnong Municipal Offices on Thursdays 22 and 29 April. Perhaps we will learn more of what the consultants' surveys have revealed. But don't be too optimistic. At the first meeting on 22nd, Professor Richard Mackay presented an overview of his team's three year project. His assessment of the industrial/social/aboriginal heritage issues were thorough and revealed a number of features that were rated HIGH including some of the buildings and remaining floors and footings, and rail lines. His assessment of the natural heritage was more cursory and there had been no account taken of landscape values or of the site as a part of the river corridor. Of greatest concern is the fact that when (if) the land is transferred to State control, these heritage reports and recommendations will have no standing. It is even more disappointing then that the Commonwealth, having this information, refuses to apply development caveats in the conditions of sale package. Meanwhile we are collecting signatures for the petition that is to be presented to ministers Delahunty and/or Thwaites on behalf of the State

Government in May. **Volunteers collecting signatures can have an extra week to get more. Please return all petition sheets to the Committee or to me or PO Box 266, Ascot Vale 3032 by 3rd JUNE.**

NEWS FROM UPSTREAM

Yes, what happens upstream affects those downstream. PROJECT STREAMSIDE looks as if it is gaining momentum. I could be linking up with SCARPS. That would result in a focused upgrade of the river and its surroundings roughly from Darraweit and Konagaderra as far downstream as Keilor.

In looking at how the Catchment Committee should focus its attention for the coming year, the underlying issue of landholder awareness and education came to the fore. The “carrot” the committee is looking at will be to direct all levels of government to look at incentives like rebates, grants or subsidies for such things as fencing, revegetation and education in landcare. There could also be development of an Environmental Management Scheme framework for landholders in the area to help them develop sustainable land management priorities.

PLANTINGS

The dry weather continues and it is not kind to plantings. In addition, local firebugs have incinerated some of our charges. In view of the conditions, there will not be any early plantings this autumn: we will be in care and maintenance mode. Bronwyn tells me that she and Lorraine are growing a whole lot of saltbush and other groundcovers. Seems very sensible. Weather permitting, we are only involved in three plantings this year – two with Brimbank. Saturday July 10 with Rotary at Duke Street Reserve and Sunday 8 August at McNabbs Weir, Keilor. We are also planting with Maribyrnong CC on Saturday 31 July 1-3pm at the Braybrook escarpment. Put them in your diary now!

CLEANUP DAY

Again a dedicated few made a huge impact on the litter around the river. The difference we made was so great that the areas that could not be serviced stood out like the proverbial sore thumb. Special credit to Fred and Christine who, from their canoe, gathered nine big bags of garbage from the wet of the riverbanks. Corinne and I retrieved a supermarket trolley with a good crop of barnacles and mussels. We wondered about putting it back as it was clearly an

environmental asset! Thanks to Maelor for coordinating our effort and everyone who participated.

Next year we must do a better job of publicizing the event so that we can get more schools and community groups involved. (It’s not our job but it must be done).

NEWSFLASH

The Maribyrnong Catchment Committee is recommending that the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority Board become involved in the land use planning for the Defence Site. This could be briefing the Ministers for Environment and Planning to ‘retain the maximum amount of Defence land for open space, cultural heritage and biodiversity values for Melbourne, to achieve the aims of Melbourne 2030, Parks Victoria’s Linking Parks and Spaces, and the Regional Catchment Strategy’.

ED’S NOTE

Friends of the Maribyrnong Valley seems to be busier now than at any time since its inception in 1986. Also the issues are momentous in terms of the future of the river and its surroundings. We are only here for a few years but what we leave behind stays for future generations in centuries to come. **Whatever we do now must be to improve the River Maribyrnong. Anything we lose now is lost forever.** It’s much the same with getting older. If you are not at least holding your ground, then you are going backwards.

Keep it up. John