

West of Elgar Residents' Association Inc.

W E R A A.N.:A0031410U

President's report

May 2013

The past 12 months have been the busiest of my 6 years as president. The committee has extensively considered and prepared submissions on the following:

- State Government Metropolitan Planning Strategy to 2050.
- State Government planning zone reforms (still on-going pending recommendations to be prepared this year by Council for submission to the Minister for Planning).
- Whitehorse Council review of Neighbourhood Character and draft Neighbourhood Activity Centre Urban Design Guidelines with the submissions now being considered before the release of a final drafts in mid-year.
- State Government proposed increase in VCAT fees.
- Florence Road, Surrey Hills 45 unit apartment proposal where VCAT heard objections relating to the proposal being contrary to neighbourhood character and supported both objector and Council view in refusing a permit.
- Everton Grove, Surrey Hills proposed 6 town house and 20 apartment development which has been refused a planning permit by the planning office under delegation.
- Renown Street; Burwood 5 double storey townhouse development approved by the planning officer but planning permit refused by Council.
- Participated on the consultative committee set-up by Deakin University to consider options for connections between the campuses along Gardiners Creek. Community representatives on the committee jointly put forward a proposal that the University has not commented upon.

WERA also organized a Council pre-election "meet the candidates" meeting.

There will be no respite during the remainder of 2013 with finalization of Council recommendations to government on planning zones; review of the Whitehorse Housing Strategy and the possibility of developer appeals to VCAT.

The residents of Florence Rd; Everton Road and Renown Street (and neighbouring streets in each of these localities) who have objected to planning applications; attended council mediation forums and in the case of Florence Road appeared before VCAT have when confronted with extreme proposals shown a strong resolve for the *neighbourhood character*. In the present era defending moderation in change to housing density and the scale of built form requires a persistence that some objectors find overwhelming in the time and effort required to comprehend the provisions of the planning scheme relevant to the application and then preparing for public submission at forums and hearings. A new neighbourhood "*connect*" grows for those who persist.

WERA acknowledges the considerable effort required by the Whitehorse planning department and councillors to absorb and comment upon the significant State Government planning proposals of the past 12 months. Council submissions (along with other eastern region Councils) have sought more detailed explanation from the government on the interpretation of several aspects of the metropolitan strategy especially as to financing the implementation of final proposals.

WERA will support schedules for the new planning zones proposed by Council to the government if change to the ResCode standards relating to a maximum building site coverage of 50% and a minimum permeability level of 30% are included for the Neighbourhood Zone in the recommendations ultimately forwarded to the Minister for Planning.

The draft urban design guidelines for neighbourhood activity centres in Whitehorse are indicative that providing for housing growth requires changes to the density of housing and that it is preferable this occurs in defined zones rather than creeping throughout established residential streets. We each have to decide if this type of change combined with probable future growth in apartment developments around Box Hill Central Activity Area is the appropriate scenario for absorbing population growth?

My thanks to members who provide comment and expressions of appreciation for the committee's efforts. We need your feedback as guidance and the encouragement to continue. You can contact WERA by emailing info@wera.org.au.



Geoff White
