

November 2013

WERA Newsletter

West of Elgar Residents' Association Inc.

Whitehorse Housing Strategy

WERA has made a submission to Council's Phase 2 consultation on the draft Housing Strategy, Neighbourhood Character Study and Neighbourhood Activity Centre Urban Design Guidelines. The submission can be read on our website www.wera.org.au

Concerned that the community was not aware of Council's draft documents WERA arranged a 2000 letter box drop. There have been several hundred written submissions and nearly 300 residents attended a briefing at Box Hill Town Hall on 18 September arranged by the Riversdale Ward councillors. Council has already resolved that residents in any final proposed zone change areas receive direct mail contact during Phase 3 consultation (early 2014).

The Victorian Government introduced its new planning zones on July 1 for Councils to develop their planning zones and submit them to the Minister for Planning for approval. The State Government's three new residential zones are; Residential Growth Zone; General Residential Zone and Neighbourhood Residential Zone.

The Whitehorse draft strategy introduces a "*Natural Change with Access*" precinct that does not correspond with any of the above Residential Zones and was not proposed by the Minister. The application of more intensive development near rail and tram routes also conflicts with the proposed "Heritage Environs" neighbourhood character precinct in Mont Albert and Surrey Hills. It is not surprising, therefore, that many residents in the Elgar and Riversdale Wards believe that the areas in Mont Albert North and Surrey Hills have been incorrectly and excessively targeted for more intensive development.

The Housing Strategy does not explain the translation from the proposed change areas (housing strategy) and character areas (design guidelines) to the new zones in any detail. There is also confusion in the community about the boundaries of the proposed neighbourhood precincts and of the housing precincts. Many residents who have contacted WERA have been unable to determine if their residence is inside or outside the boundary of a draft zone. This occurs where the housing precinct/zone boundary curves part way through roads and streets in contrast to the boundary being along a roadway to an intersection.

For the Phase 3 consultation on the final Zones and Schedules to those zones, WERA has requested that Council provide to residents clear details of:

- i. The link of each housing category precinct with the proposed State Government zones.
- ii. The rationale for the allocation of a particular housing precinct/zone
- iii. The draft schedules for each residential zone with a rationale for these

- iv. Delineates the boundaries of each proposed zone and where a proposed zone boundary crosses part way along a street or road, advises residents on both sides of the road in which zone they reside;
- v. Indicates for each neighbourhood character precinct; which zone applies and which zone schedule and/or neighbourhood character guidelines apply
- vi. How medium density development will in a General Residential Zone protect the key elements of these streetscapes which feature single dwellings in large lots with mature trees
- vii. The differences between the proposed residential zones and schedules and the present Whitehorse Planning Scheme zones and schedules.

WERA has also recommended that the natural change with access proposal should be withdrawn as:

- It has been inconsistently applied across the municipality;
- The Minister has indicated¹ there is no intended statutory or policy basis for it; and
- Other municipalities² have not used it to classify areas for *extended* increased density of development outside of activity centres.

¹ *The Minister approved Glen Eira new planning scheme (Government Gazette No S 298 23 August 2013) new planning scheme does not make a variation to Neighbourhood Residential Zone using walkability to public transport. The General Residential Zone boundary from Tram Routes and selected main roads are significantly less than that which would apply using walkability distances.*

² *The proposed Boroondara planning scheme has not proposed a variation to Neighbourhood Residential Zone using walkability to public transport.*

The new “heritage environ” Neighbourhood Character Statement suggested preferred future character statement states that “*Dwelling design will respond to the characteristics of the older dwellings by ... 1-2 storey scale...*” which is also broadly preferred by the residents of this area. However where this character precinct sits within the proposed neighbourhood with access precinct 3 storey apartment blocks will be permitted.

To protect the Heritage Environ “garden suburban neighbourhood character” requires Neighbourhood Residential Zone protection. WERA considers that following character aspects must be applied:

- Minimum lot size: 500 m² NOT 300 m².
- Site coverage: 50% maximum
- Setbacks: Front 7 metre minimum; Side –2 metre minimum
- Site permeability: 35% minimum
- Building height: 8 m maximum (2-storey) NOT 9.5 m (3-storey)
- Separation between buildings on multi-dwelling sites: 2m minimum
- Canopy trees – minimum 2.

WERA has also submitted:

- i. That the landscape views, both towards and from within, Wattle Park be recognised as significant landscape under the provisions of the Whitehorse Planning Scheme clause 42.03 Significant Landscape Overlay.
- ii. The proposed strip Substantial Change precinct along the north side of Riversdale Road should be replaced with a Natural Change classification.
- iii. The adjoining natural change with access precinct should be replaced with limited change precinct (Neighbourhood Residential Zone.)
- iv. To protect the “garden suburban neighbourhood character” of the adjoining Surrey Hills residential area requires Neighbourhood Residential Zone protection. The same character aspects required for the Heritage Environ must apply in the schedules for this zone.

WERA also objected to extension of the Principal Activity Centre boundary (Garden Suburban Precinct 8) around Kingsley Gardens. The Box Hill Activity Centre boundary (within which the TAFE is located) has been previously defined. WERA sees no rationale for its extension into what is still largely residential detached housing. These residents are already experiencing significant negative impacts from traffic and parking arising from the Box Hill TAFE. The TAFE provides limited on-site parking and has no capacity for onsite recreation. The adjoining Kingsley Gardens has been “appropriated” by TAFE students for this purpose. We strongly object to the extension of substantial change in this area. This zone extension overlaps both historically significant housing in Victoria Crescent and a strongly established Garden Suburban character in all of the streets.

The draft Housing Strategy does not provide any summary of the zone area percentages and change from the present to proposed zones. WERA has estimated and obtained some data for the new zone areas as shown in the table below:

Zone	Percentage of area	
	West of Elgar Road	Whitehorse Overall
Neighbour Residential (limited and natural change for heritage overlay) 2-storey maximum building height 8 m	54	68
Neighbourhood with Access (natural change) 3-storey & apartments maximum building height 9.5 m	38	13
Residential Growth Zone (substantial change) 3 & 4-storey & apartments maximum building height 13.5 m	4	8

The West of Elgar area Natural Change (Neighbourhood Residential) percentage of 54% is considerably lower than Whitehorse overall at 68% and is a stark contrast to both Boroondara and Glen Eira that have zoned nearly 80% of their municipalities as Neighbourhood Residential.

West of Elgar area Neighbourhood with Access (albeit likely to be a General Residential Zone) percentage of 38% is markedly different compared to Whitehorse overall at 13%. It is WERA's view that this is the outcome of the inequitable application of walkability distances across the whole of Whitehorse; a discrimination that is not explained in the draft strategy.

The Residential Growth (substantial change) zone of 4% relates to areas designated along Whitehorse; Riversdale and Burwood Roads and also the area west of Box Hill TAFE. The overall impact in West of Elgar for housing growth opportunities in the Neighbourhood Activity Centres (shopping precincts and streets) is not taken into account in the table because the data only relates to Residential Zones.

Although the Phase 2 consultation period has closed reviewing the three documents; viz draft Whitehorse Housing Strategy 2013; updated draft Neighbourhood Character Study 2013 and updated Neighbourhood Activity Centre Urban Design Guidelines 2013 can still be found through the project website www.ourhousingfuture.com.au and on Council's website www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au/hanc.review.html. Copies of the three draft documents can also be viewed at all Council libraries, service centres and key Council facilities.

8 – 14 Everton Grove Surrey Hills

VCAT held a Practice Hearing on Friday 25 Oct to decide whether Gardencity Australia Pty Ltd could present its revised plans for 8, 10, 12 and 14 Everton Grove to the VCAT hearing scheduled for November 13, 14 and 15, 2013.

Residents and WERA signed a letter asking VCAT to reject extensively amended plans. The VCAT decision directed that the developer may only proceed at the hearing on the original plans that Whitehorse Council had refused to grant a planning permit. Further, if the developer wished to proceed on the revised plans, they must submit them to Council and go through the planning permit application process again.

The developer has since advised all parties that they will not proceed with the scheduled hearing on the original plans. That Council (planning officers) when they received the community letter decided to support our application at the Practice Day hearing with legal representation (a first ever for Whitehorse we understand) is encouraging.