

The Liberal Party's Policy and Plans
for Victoria for the 2006 State Election



Metropolitan Planning: A Plan for All



Liberal Plans for the future

The Liberals have announced more than 50 policies that outline a better future for Victoria.

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Metropolitan Planning: A Plan for All

Summary

A Liberal Government will encourage sustainable growth, development and improvement in our urban and built environments.

We are committed to protecting the heritage of our cities and our much appreciated liveability, in particular reviving and enhancing our longstanding reputation as the ‘Garden State’.

To do this, Victoria, and in particular metropolitan Melbourne, needs an effective planning system that fosters confidence, quality, professionalism, timelines, accountability and which operates for all - not just the insiders.

These are our goals for metropolitan planning in Melbourne.

Key features of the policy include:

- A full-time Minister;
- Withdrawal of the flawed strategy ‘Melbourne 2030’;
- Development of a Metropolitan Growth Strategy which has the confidence and support of all;
- Restoration of longstanding designated Growth Areas;
- Local decision making;
- Investment in the protection and upgrading of Green Wedges and Public Open Space;
- A reduced role for the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) and a fair go for councils;
- A more accountable, integrated and consistent system of Heritage protection and
- Help to upgrade strata title properties.

Ministerial Priority in Planning – A Full-time Minister at Last

Since its election, the Bracks Government has had three Planning Ministers.

Each Minister has had other portfolio responsibilities with no immediate relationship to the Planning portfolio. These other interests have ensured that planning has had a much lower priority in the Bracks Government and the Bracks Cabinet than was either appropriate or promised. In fact, the additional portfolios of the three Planning Ministers have included some of the most significant areas of state government responsibility.

As a consequence, planning has been reduced to an issue of low priority and Victorians have endured two terms of ‘part-time’ Ministers for Planning.

MINISTER	YEARS	OTHER PORTFOLIOS
John Thwaites	1999-2002	Health, Deputy Premier
Mary Delahunty	2002-2005	Arts, Women’s Affairs
Rob Hulls	2005 cont	Attorney General, Industrial Relations

Each Minister has failed to win the support of the community. Indeed in 2004, more than 60 resident action groups met on the steps of Parliament and called on the Planning Minister to resign. An unprecedented front page and feature article in the Australian Financial Review openly expressed the business community’s despair at the disengagement of the then Minister.

The Planning portfolio is complex. It requires a Minister to have a detailed working knowledge of the relevant Acts, the various established strategies, the Victorian Planning Provisions, and the huge number of Planning Schemes. It also requires a close understanding of community aspirations and a willingness and availability of the Minister to engage with the enormous number of groups seeking to embrace the system. Planning issues have a daily and significant impact on the lives of all Victorians. The portfolio demands close attention from a Minister.

Under the Bracks Government there has been a significant decline in community confidence in the planning system. And there has been a significant increase in the ‘heat’ in the planning system – from proponents, opponents, councils, consultants, professional planners and the community at large.

A ‘part-time’ Minister is simply an inadequate response and offers insufficient leadership. Victoria needs a full-time Planning Minister.

- The Planning portfolio will be assigned to a full-time Planning Minister.
- Any other responsibilities will be held by the Planning Minister only if they are in allied areas.

Melbourne 2030 – Flawed, Unfunded, Unloved, Increasingly Unworkable – It Has to Go

Melbourne 2030 (M2030) was introduced in October 2002, immediately before the last state election. It was introduced more as a political document than a genuine metropolitan growth strategy. The intent was to win minor party preferences at the election. No serious analysis of the document or its impact was possible before the election. No economic impact statement was prepared.

The Bracks Government claims the strategy was based on widespread community consultation but the release of a draft for public comment, as promised, was abandoned. Instead a Ministerial Direction accompanied its release and it immediately became “law”.

M2030 is based on a range of problematic assumptions which include:

- The relevance of the radial heavy rail transport network;
- A centralised freight and logistics network;
- The provision and patronage of additional public transport;
- The future of private motor vehicle use;
- The capacity of existing Activity Centre infrastructure to absorb additional development;
- The relative sustainability of infill or brownfield over greenfield development;
- The construction cost difference between apartment housing and traditional housing;
- The market for apartment living among particular demographics;
- The availability of additional water storage and other services infrastructure,
- The quality and capacity of newly designated Green Wedge Land, expanded overnight from approx 80,000 hectares to approximately 800,000 hectares;
- The capacity of private landholders to absorb the cost of maintaining land in the public interest and
- And above all the awareness and support of the general public.

The general public has come to see M2030 as a problem not a solution. M2030 has frequently been used to justify projects which bear no resemblance to the expectations of local communities. But the Bracks Government has made no moves to change it.

There has been almost no funding to implement M2030. In each State Budget the strategy has been all but ignored. There has been little funding for:

- Councils to undertake structure planning anywhere other than Transit City locations;
- Demonstration projects in Activity Centres;
- Aggregation of sites;
- Infrastructure audits;
- Services infrastructure upgrades;
- VCAT;

- Investment in upgrading of and protection of Green Wedge Land;
- Acquisition and provision of Public Open Space;
- Accessibility or adaptability programs and
- Public transport expansion including fixed rail extensions.

Local government and local communities continue to be ignored by the decisions of VCAT, which in turn is obliged to implement the M2030 policy regardless of the wishes of the community.

M2030 has achieved little. The promised shift to apartment living has not occurred. Approximately 12,000 hectares of green wedge land has been lost under the Bracks Government, more than five times greater than the loss under the previous government. Land prices have soared. Affordability has dipped. Green Wedge Land has been degraded. Apartments are too expensive to build. Public Open Space has been eroded, our gardens have shrunk. Transparency of decision making has evaporated. Even the Government, which in its own right has ignored the Strategy in several locations, has appeared to walk away from M2030 in all but its rhetoric.

Even the Property Council has conceded that M2030 “*has become a policy ‘marking time’ with few respected sources now supporting its operation*”.

A Liberal Government will withdraw M2030 by:

- Withdrawing the Ministerial Directions which give priority to M2030;
- Withdrawing Clause 12 of the Victorian Planning Provisions;
- Placing a moratorium on M2030 as a reference document pending development of a new Metropolitan Growth Strategy and
- Directing councils and tribunals to place priority on Municipal Strategic Statements and long standing Victorian Planning Provisions.

Metropolitan Strategy Review – A Fresh Start

The Bracks Government promised its planning strategy would be released as a draft which would be publicly reviewed. This was the first broken promise surrounding M2030.

The demonstrable failings of M2030 demand that a review of Melbourne's Metropolitan Growth Strategy take place as soon as possible.

That review must be independent and comprehensive. It must restore public confidence and it must encourage community participation. It must lead to a realistic and viable Metropolitan Growth Strategy which has the broad support of the community and bi-partisan political support.

To avoid further uncertainty and community division, that review will have a clear timetable with a view to a revised strategy being in place before June 2008.

The job now is twofold - to build a viable Metropolitan Strategy and to restore the confidence of the community in accordance with clear objectives and principles.

A new Metropolitan Strategy that wins the confidence of all stakeholders must be based on sound and clear objectives and principles.

The objectives should include:

- Protection of existing neighbourhood amenity;
- Capacity based growth, rather than arbitrary targets;
- Clarity, certainty and speed;
- Housing affordability and diversity;
- Enhancement of Melbourne's role in our 'Garden State' reputation;
- Retention of Melbourne's high living standards;
- Easy access to work and reduced travel times;
- Local community support for local outcomes;
- Public confidence in a metropolitan strategy and
- Sustained economic growth.

The principles should include:

- Respect for property rights;
- Maximum use of existing infrastructure;
- Shared responsibility for new infrastructure;
- Maximum provision of open space;
- Sustainability;
- Retention of green wedges as sustainable breaks between urban developments;
- Adaptability to acknowledge changing markets;

- Direct consultation with land owners;
- Timely planning and provision of health, education, transport and other services and
- Public support for land fulfilling public purposes.
- Protecting adjacent semi rural Shires from adverse impacts

A Liberal Government will establish a revised strategy under which inappropriate high-rise, high-density development will no longer be imposed on our suburbs. We will ensure all parties will have far greater certainty about what is and what is not permitted.

A Liberal Government will bring forward the scheduled review of Melbourne’s Metropolitan Growth Strategy and:

- Ensure that review is public, comprehensive and independent;
- Appoint an independent Board of Review, modelled on existing statutory authorities;
- Establish the Board by legislation, with a two year tenure;
- Provide for Board membership to include an independent chair and bi-partisan membership of at least two Members of Parliament from each major political party;
- Require the Board to report to Parliament and
- Fund the Board to undertake a review of metropolitan growth strategy.

A Liberal Government will directly involve the community in establishing this strategy, including:

- Public release of all submissions previously made on M2030;
- Call for renewed public submissions, all of which will be made publicly available;
- Provide for six months public consultation, including public meetings in all affected municipalities;
- Requiring the review to encourage wider public debate on alternative growth strategies including greater regional development;
- Provide for the review to include: population growth forecasts; an assessment of the performance of M2030 against its own objectives; Activity Centre nomination; the extent and effectiveness of structure planning; the mechanisms for defining boundaries to urban growth and
- Set objectives to the review, including the drafting of, winning back public confidence in, and support for, a state government growth strategy for Melbourne and delivering greater responsibility to local communities.

A Liberal Government will publicly:

- Conduct an audit of the condition and capacity of all existing utilities’ infrastructure to determine the ability of that infrastructure to accommodate additional growth;
- Require a report on the status and future of a Metropolitan Growth Strategy to be presented and made public within the first year of government and
- Release a revised Metropolitan Growth Strategy for public comment before final implementation.

	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Cost (\$)	-	2.0	2.0	2.0	-

The Governance of Planning – Responsible and Accountable Decision Making

The Bracks Government has sought to avoid accountability for planning decisions and to reduce the involvement of local government.

Local government has been sidelined by such moves as:

- The removal of Responsible Authority status for wind energy facilities;
- Unilateral rezonings (for example, new rural zones and green wedge zones);
- Removing the right of local government authorities to prepare Planning Scheme Amendments without prior approval of the Minister;
- Unilateral designation of Activity Centres;
- Ministerial Directions requiring compliance with M2030 as a priority;
- Non-provision of interim controls in the absence of compliance with Regional Housing Strategies and M2030;
- Downgrading of the significance of Municipal Strategic Statements with triennial reviews of Planning Schemes instead;
- Removal of Responsible Authority status for major developments (for example Royal Park, Burnley Gardens, Kew Residential, Tooronga);
- Commonwealth Games arrangements provisions and Commonwealth Games imperatives for call-ins (for example Royal Park, MCG footbridge, Hilton Hotel, Lombards site);
- The establishment of the Dandenong Development Authority;
- Unilateral application and alteration of the Urban Growth Boundary;
- Unilateral siting of toxic waste dumps and
- Use of Priority Development Panels and creation of Priority Development Zones.

And Local government has been deliberately burdened with, but not funded for, requirements to:

- Complete structure planning for all Activity Centres (more than 1000 centres at between \$100,000-\$250,000 per centre);
- Undertake complete Planning Scheme reviews every three years;
- Allow permit application amendments without charging fees;
- Apply new rural zones without funding of land capability studies;
- Undertake unfunded infrastructure reviews and
- Apply native vegetation controls.

In addition, the Bracks Government has sought to avoid political responsibility for decision making, while actually maintaining control, by:

- Establishing and then expanding the role of the Priority Development Panel and misleading the public about its accountability;
- Expanding Parliamentary Ratification procedures to apply to specific planning matters (for example Melbourne Airport, Williamstown Shipyard, Green Wedge Land, Urban Growth Boundary);
- Silencing stakeholder institutions by requiring them to sign confidentiality agreements (for example Implementation Reference Group, Smart Growth Committees) and undertakings to support Government positions and
- Engaging in token consultation (For example, M2030, windfarms).

The Bracks Government has now embraced proposals to further remove planning powers from metropolitan councils. This scheme, advanced by representatives of the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) and the Property Council of Australia would see significant planning powers transferred to a new Metropolitan or Regional Council and the effective removal of third party property rights.

The removal of planning powers from councils constitutes a breach of faith with the Victorian public and is another example of more detours and by-passes in the planning system applied at the whim of the State Government.

A Liberal Government will reinforce the significance of Municipal Strategic Statements (MSS) and emphasise the role of local policy and local decision making.

A Liberal Government will ensure:

- Rejection of the concept of an additional layer of governance in the planning system – ‘no’ to a new Metropolitan Council;
- Support for the existing framework of Statewide Planning Provisions;
- Support for the pre-eminence of local planning schemes and in particular the importance of MSSs;
- Where appropriate, use the process of Parliamentary Ratification only for relevant matters of strategic content;
- Termination of the Priority Development Panel;
- Immediate removal of residual planning powers from the Commonwealth Games Minister;
- Rejection of confidentiality and compliance agreements (other than for matters of commercial sensitivity) for stakeholder advisory appointments;
- Retention of discretionary use provisions but discretion to be exercised by local governments and subject to substantial compliance with MSSs;
- Retention of appropriate avenues for appeal subject to substantial compliance with MSSs;
- Funding of up to 50 per cent of the cost of MSS reviews as required;
- Return of Responsible Authority status to Local Government Authorities (LGAs) in regard to windfarms;

- Removal of mandatory structure planning requirements;
- Repeal and abandonment of the Dandenong Development Authority and return of powers to the Greater Dandenong City Council and
- Return to local government the right to prepare and exhibit Planning Scheme Amendments without prior approval from the Minister.

	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Saving (\$)	-	0.5	1.0	1.0	1.0

Urban Growth Boundary

In establishing its new definition of Green Wedge Land the Bracks Government abandoned long standing growth area plans in the Wyndham, South East and Northern corridors. Those growth area plans had guided future growth for more than 20 years. They had also guided the long-term provision of infrastructure. Having retreated from those long term plans, the Bracks Government has resumed a growth strategy in those very same areas and has, through secretive processes, shifted its once immutable Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) toward the original growth area plans.

In the process, the price of land within the UGB has skyrocketed. And the processes involved in moving the UGB have lent themselves to inappropriate influences.

Given that a change to the UGB has the potential to significantly affect land value, a UGB change is equivalent to a re-zoning. However, it does not require the same open processes as a re-zoning.

Smart Growth Committees considering changes have met in secret and have considered publicly only general propositions for change. There has been no public process or consultation associated with definitive proposals for change. Ratification of ministerial positions has been rammed through the Parliament without adjournments associated with the usual passage of legislation

A Liberal Government will ensure:

- A comprehensive, independent public review of Melbourne's metropolitan growth strategy;
- Reinstatement of long-standing growth area plans and realignment of the UGB;
- Establishment of 30 year growth area plans;
- Resumption of traditional re-zoning processes for changes to the UGB;
- Substitution of disallowance provisions for ratification provisions for UGB changes and
- Removal of confidentiality provisions for any future Smart Growth Committees or their equivalent.

Green Wedges – Green, Public and Permanent

The Bracks Government, in its Melbourne 2030 document, dramatically increased the amount of designated ‘Green Wedge Land’. The green wedges identified first in the 1970s by the Hamer Government occupied approximately 80,000 hectares.

In October 2002, the definition of ‘Green Wedges’ was expanded. ‘Green Wedge Land’ is now all land outside the Urban Growth Boundary and inside the Outer Metropolitan Perimeter. Rather than having notional wedge shapes, Green Wedge Land now occupies a more donut shape around urban Melbourne and comprises some 800,000 hectares (a tenfold increase in defined Green Wedge Land).

However, unlike the Hamer Government, the Bracks Government has not invested in the upgrade, maintenance or long-term purpose of this Green Wedge Land. Most of the land is privately owned. The more restrictive zoning of this land has meant landholders have been left to carry the burden of protecting such land for public purposes without any investment or funding from the Bracks Government.

The quality and capability of Green Wedge Land varies. Some land may remain suitable for farming; some may be best protected by public acquisition for use as parkland while other land may require significant upgrading.

The development of Green Wedge Management Plans has failed to address the concerns of Green Wedge landholders as to the purpose and future use of their land.

To ensure accessible parks for residents of new suburbs, to protect Green Wedges and to equitably deal with private landholders, governments must clearly identify land suitable for future parkland, make public acquisitions for that parkland, use the processes of bodies such as the Trust For Nature to purchase, covenant and re-sell other land and assist other green wedge landholders with upgrading their land.

The Liberal Party believes that planning and providing for Melbourne’s and Victoria’s future park land needs on a long-term basis, is as important as planning and providing for built infrastructure.

To successfully implement such a policy requires long-term planning and commitment, not just occasional and ad hoc budget initiatives or private benefaction.

A Liberal Government will:

- Enhance and protect Melbourne’s green wedges;
- Revive Victoria’s Garden State reputation;
- Identify all Green Wedge Land deemed to have high conservation or public interest value;
- Identify the full extent of land suitable for future public land acquisition.;
- Develop a network of public land and high conservation green belts in Green Wedge Land for public use and protection;

- Ensure that acquisitions of land for such parks and other public ownership over at least the next 15 years are planned and budgeted for under the Victorian Infrastructure Strategy Plan which a Liberal Government will establish;
- Fund the acquisition of such land out of the Victorian Infrastructure Fund which will be established by a Liberal Government;
- Publicly release all submissions previously made on the UGB and Smart Growth Committees;
- Undertake a comprehensive land capability study for all Green Wedge Land to establish the agricultural potential of that land;
- Ensure Melbourne's future park and other public land needs within Green Wedge areas are thoroughly assessed;
- Continue to support and fund the work of the Trust for Nature and
- Encourage the Trust for Nature to develop a specific strategy for its work within the green wedge.

VCAT and Failure to Determine Provisions – A Fair Go for Councils and the Community

In the 1990s, faced with the need to kick-start the flagging Victorian economy, the Kennett Government focussed un-ashamedly on the building and construction industry. One of the key problems facing the industry was seemingly endless delays with approvals at local government level.

In response, the Government introduced the 60 day rule. Where Councils failed to determine a planning approval application within a 60 day time frame, a proponent assumed an automatic right to apply to VCAT for a decision.

The rule has helped to speed up processes and encourage councils to better manage their planning departments.

However, other problems have arisen in turn. Provisions which stop and start the 60 day clock have become open to abuse. Councils shy of potential political fallout from contentious projects have intentionally delayed decisions so that the non-elected VCAT will have to carry the decision making responsibility. From time to time, the 60 day period has simply proved insufficient for the reasonable assessment of complex projects, projects of high community interest or applications which coincide with limitations of resources such as peak loads, absence of planners or holidays.

It is possible to provide for some flexibility in the application of the rule without losing the imperative of timely decision making and to discourage councils from abdicating their responsibilities to determine matters within their jurisdiction.

A Liberal Government will:

- Legislate to provide councils the opportunity to seek a one-off 30 day extension on the 60 day rule;
- Require a request by a Responsible Authority for an extension to be made within 30 days of the receipt of the application, to the Secretary of the Department and
- Publish guidelines for the consideration of such requests.

VCAT Access

Victoria has for many years provided for the review of Responsible Authority determinations of planning approval applications.

VCAT assumed the reviewing role in the 1990's from the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

However, VCAT is increasingly regarded as a de facto one-stop planning authority in its own right, even though that was never intended. Local councils, seeking to avoid the politics of contentious projects, often allow VCAT to make the determinations. Proponents often prefer the perceived political neutrality of VCAT and seek early access accordingly. Local interest groups express their frustration at seeing decisions removed from local responsibility. Local communities often feel effectively ambushed – without any measure of accountability. The State Government, while obliging VCAT to apply State Government policy, stands aside from the political consequences and encourages criticism instead to be directed at VCAT. The performance of the Bracks Government in the Mitcham High Rise Towers' case is a classic example.

The opportunity now exists to reinforce local policy and to lessen the load on VCAT. At the same time, decisions about projects which go beyond the current realm of local policy can remain entirely in local or politically accountable hands.

A Liberal Government will put an end to the ambush role of VCAT in development approvals. We will:

- Legislate to limit access to VCAT for the review of determinations for projects which are deemed in advance to substantially comply with the relevant Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS);
- Require councils to advise a council view on the degree of MSS compliance, with their determinations;
- Provide for VCAT to determine whether an application for review qualifies on the grounds of substantial compliance;
- Publish guidelines for the determination of substantial compliance and
- Ensure decisions on applications which are outside existing local strategies stay with councils.

Ministerial Intervention – a Transparent and Accountable Minister

The *Planning and Environment Act* provides for considerable capacity for the Planning Minister to intervene in a Planning Scheme Amendment or in a Planning Permit Application. Sections 185 and 185 A of the Act give the Minister enormous power. That power is primarily intended to provide a means to facilitate projects of state significance or to overcome unintended consequences. It is not a power that should be abused.

In addition, the Minister retains the power to set policy or issue directions which may interfere with the genuine interests of local communities. That power should not be used without giving those communities a right to be heard.

The Bracks Government has expanded the nature of interventions. Melbourne 2030 and the accompanying Ministerial Directions have seen M2030 take precedence over local planning policy, which is what happened in the Mitcham Towers' case.

Substantial site specific amendments at odds with the Government's own strategic policy have been approved at Royal Park, Burnley Gardens, Kew Residential Services and elsewhere. The hypocrisy of these interventions has not been lost on the community.

Changes to the *Planning and Environment Act* now require prior approval from the Minister for all Planning Scheme Amendments. This has disenfranchised local councils and runs the risk of inappropriate and/or corrupt influences.

The dimension and gravity of these interventions is disguised by the Government's simplistic Annual Interventions Report which seeks only to count some of the interventions and avoids detailed scrutiny.

A Liberal Government will:

- Legislate to restore the capacity for Responsible Authorities to prepare Planning Scheme Amendments without first requiring ministerial approval;
- Require that the published reasons for a ministerial intervention demonstrate a genuine and explicit case of state significance;
- Publish guidelines for the establishment of state significance;
- Require that ministerial interventions support State Planning Policy;
- Require that the annual statement to Parliament of ministerial interventions also record ministerial rejection of Planning Scheme Amendments;
- Require that the annual statement to Parliament of ministerial interventions also record approvals facilitated by the Minister's Department and
- Require that the annual statement to Parliament of ministerial interventions also record any transfer of Responsible Authority status.

Residential Development – Simpler and More Transparent for All

People in the community participating in the planning process should be clear on what is required and how it is best done. The system currently operates for the benefit of insiders – those with a regular involvement in the system. The general public, who only have occasional engagement with the planning system, remain confused by the complexity.

Those working within the system should be motivated, customer focussed and appropriately rewarded.

A Liberal Government will:

- Bring greater certainty and clarity to residential planning for the benefit of residents and home buyers alike;
- Conduct an industry review of ResCode to assess the impact on design quality of all ResCode provisions such as bedroom windows, ceiling heights, garaging;
- Develop and implement a planning training package run by all councils for their constituents. These forums will simply and effectively outline ResCode, the documentation required, costs to be incurred, neighbourhood character requirements and dispute resolution;
- Ensure that advertising of planning proposals and amendments is sufficient to ensure residents and ratepayers have sufficient knowledge of the proposed plans;
- Require all councils to provide a pre-application certification service to facilitate the non-adversarial processes for stakeholders;
- Require that notice of building approval applications also be given to adjacent landholders and that drawings be available for public inspection and
- Limit the need for planning approvals for single storey residential extensions that are contained within existing building envelopes.

Heritage

The Liberal Party remains committed to a heritage system that preserves the best of our past, shows the history of our built environment and preserves it for future generations.

Heritage Victoria has the responsibility of identifying and assisting the conservation of Victoria's heritage.

However, there remain areas of some contention, including Heritage Council representation and the capacity for interested parties to review listings or appeal decisions taken by the Director or the Heritage Council.

The Public Heritage program commenced by the previous Liberal Government continues and remains appreciated.

A Liberal Government will:

- Reject the Productivity Commission's proposals to cease registration of private property unless by agreement;
- Require that all Heritage registrations are based on processes that are open, transparent and fair to all parties;
- Extend the program for a further three years at least;
- Audit the future maintenance and improvement requirements of all government owned properties including those subject to leases or trust arrangements;
- Work with all relevant agencies and tenants to establish a long term tenancy strategy for all publicly owned Heritage properties that will maximise the viability of those properties and remove the crippling burden of maintenance from non-profit tenant organisations.;
- Ensure Heritage properties which enjoy icon status on Melbourne's and Victorian Regional Cities' Heritage trail receive maximum support to ensure their continuing good condition. These buildings (such as Como House, Ripponlea, the Immigration Museum, Heidi Gallery and the Bendigo Town Hall) continue to contribute to Victoria's tourism attractions and are principal State assets;
- Restore a better balance of rural and regional representation of the council and committees of Heritage Victoria;
- Work with the Heritage Conservation Group and the property and design industries to develop an appropriate appeals mechanism for Heritage issues, which is at arms length from the Heritage Council and its Director, including considering directing all appeals to VCAT and
- Require that the Director may not permit the demolition of properties, about which they have made a decision until such time as any reference to the full council is determined.

Contemporary Heritage

Our Victorian and Edwardian Heritage Buildings are a feature of Melbourne's Heritage and character.

More contemporary properties such as those from the post-war period are now being seen for their heritage significance. They tend to occupy sites of lesser prominence and have fewer patrons or guardians.

They do, nevertheless, attract passionate supporters and occupy an important place in our built environment.

Many such buildings are only now being considered for Heritage listing.

These buildings are in private ownership and their listing is often resisted as a threat to value.

The structures of these buildings may not be as durable as their stone or brick predecessors, and therefore their survival requires more regular structural and maintenance attention.

A Liberal Government will:

- Work with Heritage Victoria, local government and other public and private agencies to identify contemporary properties that may warrant heritage recognition and/or listing in the future;
- Develop advisory systems to support owners seeking to maintain the special character of these buildings and
- Establish a 'Top One Hundred Homes' strategy to identify the most important contemporary homes in Melbourne and regional Victoria and to develop strategies for the continuing survival of these buildings.

Government Architect – Speaking Up for All of Us

The State Government finally appointed a Government Architect in late 2005 – a Liberal Party policy in the 2002 election.

Sadly this position has been denied independence, authority, tenure or resources. The shortcomings of the Government's job description have already been demonstrated when the Government Architect was unable to speak without clearance

Our cities and towns have unique characteristics much valued by all Victorians.

The character of these cities has been determined over time by decisions of strategic significance and the evolution of design.

Victorians have an interest in the well being of the urban character around them. But the reality is that there is no public guardian or adviser of that character beyond the government or council of the day.

The development of that character is impacted by developers and the occasional edict of government or agencies dedicated to particular projects (for example Docklands, Federation Square, Major Projects, URLC). Most of those decisions take place in isolation.

Heritage Victoria has an important role to play, but its focus is on particular places, particular buildings and of course preservation issues.

There is, however, a need to ensure government receives timely, independent, forward-looking and relevant advice on opportunities for improvement in urban character and the potential impact of any proposals being considered.

A Liberal Government will:

- Re-define and renegotiate the Office of Government Architect as an independent full-time statutory officer reporting to Parliament;
- The Government Architect will provide advice on urban design matters and be responsible for articulating and maintaining the urban design vision for key Victorian cities. The Government Architect will be given independence, authority, resources and tenure;
- The Government Architect may provide recommendations on urban design matters to all relevant Ministers and departments and also to local governments particularly in regional cities and towns and
- The Office will conduct research, identify opportunities for improvement, promote good urban design, provide advice when requested and make submissions as appropriate.

Strata Title Improvement Strategy

Strata title apartments, offices and other facilities have provided affordability and accessibility to residential and other accommodation for many Victorians.

The maintenance and continuing improvement of these properties is dependent on active, well managed and resourced bodies corporate, reflecting reasonable co-operation among joint owners.

Some properties have not had the benefit of an effective body corporate.

Those properties have continued to decline in maintenance, presentation and value. Title-holders aspiring to improve such properties face an uphill battle to win support from indifferent owners or managers.

Serious issues such as structural concrete failure, roofing or drainage damage, services replacement or upgrades can cripple body corporates.

Neighbourhood character is often adversely affected by these properties. Opportunities to upgrade properties and neighbourhoods are often overlooked.

Ultimate responsibility for these upgrades must remain with the property owners but governments, both state and local, can take a leadership role in identifying opportunities and supporting and advising bodies corporate.

A Liberal Government will:

- Establish a Strata Title Improvement Unit in the Department of Infrastructure;
- The unit will work with relevant industry groups to develop strategies to assist bodies corporate to maximise the potential of their properties and to deal with significant maintenance issues;
- The unit will also encourage local governments, Real Estate Agents, Property Managers and Bodies Corporate to develop improvement plans and
- The unit will also promote examples of successful improvements, develop best practice material for, and provide advice to bodies corporate.

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