

RATING PLANNING POLICIES:

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES IN THE VICTORIAN ELECTION FOR THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY SEAT OF ESSENDON, November 2010

Community Rating undertaken by Save Our Suburbs Inc, Citizens for a Liveable Melbourne with Associate Professor Michael Buxton, RMIT (See attached letter)

ANSWERS SHOULD BE BRIEF, PRECISE AND ACTIONABLE

- 1 What are your priorities for urban planning and development in the face of climate change?

To address climate change, planning and development must be shaped by the priority of sustainable built form, energy use and transport. The Planning and Environment Act should be revised to give greater weight to environmental considerations in planning. Energy ratings should be included in the planning permit stage as well as building stage. Standards for solar access and energy efficiency should be mandatory, not discretionary. Dense housing around existing infrastructure should also include best practice environmentally sustainable design. Sustainable transport options must be available for all new homes – including public transport and cycling and walking.

- 2 How should citizens be involved in the review of planning legislation and with what standing?

To date, the review process has collected numerous submissions from community groups and individuals as well as councils. A draft bill has been presented for comment. Consensus views on many aspects of the review have, to date, been ignored. Submissions should be reviewed to better inform a revised draft of the bill. A new draft should be available for comment and debate at both the local government and state government level. Citizens should be encouraged to make further submissions to panel and consensus views should be sought. The consideration of a new bill should be the subject of comprehensive discussion to capture the changes required to overhaul the planning system and provide certainty in planning rules.

3 What reform to the role and function of VCAT, if any, should be made?

The Greens will revise laws to ensure that local policy is given greater weight at VCAT, rather than being ignored in favour of state policy. We will implement the Victorian Law Reform Commission Civil Justice Review's recommendation to improve expert witness procedures and reduce conflict of interest and bias. We will move to restrict lodgement of amended plans at VCAT. This will improve the quality and compliance of permit applications and streamline the assessment process.

4 How might party/policy commitment to partnership with local government be guaranteed in practice?

Abolition of Development Assessment Committees; adherence to local policy at VCAT including height limits; a process for replacing 'calling in' applications that involves ongoing discussions with local governments over a long time frame to remove any need for call-ins; any decisions affecting local governments to be the subject of ongoing discussion prior to a decision being made; and the development of state policy to be undertaken with due consultation with local governments, councillors and community members.

5 What planning reforms could ensure more certainty and consistency in planning outcomes?

The Greens will replace discretionary ResCode guidelines with clear rules and ensure adherence to local policy at VCAT. These measures will provide greater certainty for all parties and relieve the current VCAT backlog. We will immediately start revising assessment criteria, policy, and processes for greater clarity and better environmental design, liveability, accessibility, and social outcomes

6 Should an elected/indirectly elected statutory authority be responsible for planning the Greater Melbourne Metropolitan area? Why/why not?

The Greens' priority is to restore planning decision making to councils and the community. Consistent with this, we will engage communities, councils, NGOs, civic and business groups in a comprehensive, transparent public consultation process to determine the governance model that best meets community needs. Through this process, we will determine the usefulness and feasibility of establishing a central independent statutory authority, either state-wide or for metropolitan Melbourne. We will put forward a number of options, including the establishment of a federation of councils similar to Metro Vancouver. The final model will reflect feedback obtained through the consultations.

- 7 If elected, what criteria will you adopt for the exercise of ministerial power over planning decisions?

The key criterion would be the protection of local policy and local decision making power. The rolling back of ministerial powers to improve democratic standards would be the subject of consultation and review. Alternative mechanisms for resolving prolonged and complex planning matters would be the subject of consultation. While undertaking a review, any exercise of ministerial power over planning decisions must involve consultation with affected communities and local governments.

- 8 If elected, will you proceed (yes or no) with the proposals outlined in the new planning legislation for:

- Increased ministerial power; NO
- code exempt decisions; Code assessed decisions? NO
- approval of bodies other than councils to initiate and process planning scheme amendments; NO
- removal of a local council's right to abandon a planning scheme amendment? NO