

**BLACKBURN & DISTRICT  
TREE PRESERVATION SOCIETY INC.  
P.O. Box 5, Nunawading, 3131**



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Ms. Vanessa McLean  
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Dear Ms. McLean

**Tree Society Submission on the Draft Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre Built Form Guidelines and Amendment C175 to the Whitehorse Planning Scheme**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the draft Guidelines and Amendment C175.

The Blackburn and District Tree Preservation Society Inc. (the 'tree society') is a not-for-profit environmental organization with over 80 members managed by an honorary committee of five.

The tree society concerns itself with issues involving the natural landscape primarily within the City of Whitehorse including planning (specifically in relation to the natural environment and landscape character), the built landscape, streetscape character, the management of parks and open spaces, the links/biolinks between parks and the creation and management of an ecologically sustainable urban environment.

The tree society committee understands the requirement to develop the Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre (MAC) in a coordinated fashion via these guidelines and Amendment C175 such that Box Hill continues to be a focus of substantial development and investment in the City of Whitehorse for the next decade.

However the tree society considers that the creation and implementation of these documents may be too little too late in attempting to balance the profit-driven, expansionist goals of developers with the need to create a sustainable, healthy, high quality local environment complete with the requisite infrastructure to meet the needs of a functional, people-friendly high density municipal activity centre into the future.

In fact the tree society questions the veracity of the statements in the *Amendment C175 Explanatory Report*, page 4, namely that:

*‘... The amendment supports and implements the State Planning Policy Framework by responding to the objectives of Clause 15 by aiming to create an urban environment that is safe, functional and provides a good quality environment with a sense of place and cultural identity ...’*

And:

*‘... Additionally the objective of Clause 15.01-2 is to achieve architectural and urban design outcomes that contribute positively to local urban character and enhance the public realm while minimizing detrimental impact on neighbouring properties. This Clause includes urban design principles about the public realm, safety, landmarks, views and vistas, pedestrian spaces, heritage and light and shade which are addressed through the amendment by the implementation of the Box Hill Built Form Guidelines ...’*

The society also questions whether the objectives of planning in Victoria will indeed be met with specific reference to section 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and emphasized (in the *Amendment C175 Explanatory Report*, page 3), as being relevant to this amendment particularly to:

- Provide for the fair, orderly, economic and sustainable use and development of land; and to
- Secure a pleasant, efficient and safe working, living and recreational environment for all Victorians and visitors to Victoria;

There are a number of issues that the committee has identified that require comment and consideration by council when assessing the merits of the draft Box Hill built form guidelines and Amendment C175.

## **Strategic Issues & Comments**

### **1. Quality, Functional Open Space**

The tree society is of the firm view that the amount and quality of open space currently available for active and passive recreational activities will fall well short of that required with the large increase in residential population, increased workforce and dramatic expansion of the hotel accommodation within the fully-developed Box Hill MAC. Box Hill already has the highest population density within Whitehorse.

The formal, municipal Box Hill Gardens is a 6.5 hectare centrally located, popular and well-utilized park. It will be the major open space for the high-rise dwellers, particularly those residing or working north of Whitehorse Road.

However the recreational opportunities provided by this park will be sorely tested with the anticipated population increase (in both numbers and density). Unless provision is made for more small (e.g. landscaped plazas), medium (e.g. local parks) and large (e.g. neighbourhood parks) open spaces within the Box Hill MAC, the consequence will be very limited, poor-quality recreational opportunities for locals and visitors alike.

Kingsley Gardens is a neighbourhood park of 2.4 hectares. It is located at the far-western section of the MAC and serves as the passive recreational space for the local community to the north and west into Mont Albert as well as the hundreds of TAFE students studying at the adjoining Elgar campus of Box Hill Institute.

The median strip section of Whitehorse Road (at 0.75 hectares) is a worthy attempt at claiming open space. But because a large proportion of the median is currently used as a car park and is bordered by the very busy Whitehorse Road, the land is hardly an area conducive to a quality passive recreational experience.

Residents and workers in the high-rise buildings sited between Whitehorse Road and the railway line have little or no access to useful open spaces unless they overcome the major obstacles of Elgar and Whitehorse Roads and the railway line to get to Kingsley Gardens, Box Hill Gardens or the parks south of the railway line.

To the south, the much large Surrey Park, near the corner of Elgar and Canterbury Roads, is too far away and the closer privately owned Brickworks site remains undeveloped due to contamination issues (including methane gas production underground).

**Whitehorse council must broker a deal whereby the major developers within the Box Hill MAC provide funding, via council's open space contributions scheme, to purchase and ameliorate the Brickworks site, and other strategic, smaller properties within the Box Hill MAC, for public parkland to help ease the parkland congestion that is otherwise inevitable.**

Currently the safe, stress-free connectivity from Box Hill Central to these open spaces for pedestrians, cyclists and disabled people is at best problematic due to major road and railway line barriers.

## **2. Crucial Landscape, Infrastructure and Connectivity Issues within the Box Hill Municipal Activity Centre**

### **2.1 Landscape Issues**

It is the tree society's view that an important urban landscape objective for the Box Hill MAC must be to guarantee that there will be a net gain in tree and shrub canopy over a 1-, 5- and 10-year period within the precinct as measurable by the i-Tree Canopy Tool.

Vegetation in urban landscapes provides many benefits as stated in the Introduction to the publication, *Final Report: Benchmarking Australia's Urban Tree Canopy: An i-Tree Assessment*, UTS: Institute For Sustainable Futures, May 2014:

***'... Vegetation in urban landscapes (or Urban Green Space) is known to provide multiple benefits that encompass biophysical, economic and social attributes. These benefits include:***

- Maintenance of habitat for native fauna, which can include vulnerable or threatened species in fragmented urban landscapes.***
- Reduction of the urban heat island effect, which is also an important climate change adaptation strategy.***
- Improvements in air quality.***
- Improvements in storm water management through reductions in the extent of hard impervious surfaces.***
- Provision of spaces for interaction, amenity and recreation, which improve community health and social well-being.***
- Provision of beneficial visual stimulus for urban residents ...'***

#### **Other landscape initiatives would include:**

- Provision for people-friendly reasonably-sized open spaces and plazas within the high-rise precinct with pedestrian and cyclist connectivity to the active transport hubs within Box Hill
- Mandating suitable front setbacks for all new buildings, no matter their scale, and providing suitable soft landscaping and infrastructure to all roads and streets within the precinct to create a people-friendly urban environment attractive to local residents, workers and visitors
- Mandating building and landscaping initiatives and practices to mitigate wind tunnel effects and over-shadowing, particularly in public places
- Providing suitable environmental conditions to optimise the growth, health and longevity of trees and shrubs in these landscapes
- The interfaces with residential areas abutting the city precinct and public open spaces within and adjoining the Box Hill MAC require special consideration and management. This would include lower building heights and less site coverage (for more tree and shrub plantings) to facilitate a smooth transition from the higher density development areas through to the existing residential areas that still retain their eastern middle-suburban character.

## 2.2 Infrastructure Issues

Currently there are seven high-rise buildings in the Box Hill MAC that have received planning approval by council (or other authority e.g. VCAT). These buildings are at various stages of development from not yet started to completion and occupation (e.g. The ATO Building).

The important characteristics of the seven buildings are summarized as follows:

- The seven buildings will consist of 9 towers with an average height of 98 metres or 28 storeys.
- One building, the ATO Building, has a primary commercial function and contains 1,250 staff
- The remaining six buildings will collectively contain 1,946 dwellings and house an estimated 4,400 residents and
- 250 hotel rooms containing 200+ guests at any one time
- The total number of off-street car parking spaces equals 3,078
- The number of off-street bicycle-parking spaces equals 845 (NB – the number of spaces were published for only four of the seven high-rise buildings)

The influx of an additional 4,400 residents housed in these seven buildings alone amounts to the population of a medium-sized country town being added to further compromise the already over-stretched infrastructure within the Box Hill MAC e.g. Lakes Entrance in eastern Victoria has a population of 4,569.

And this figure of 4,400 doesn't account for the workers, shoppers, visitors and hotel guests who will further increase the number of people within this small area.

Yet the draft built form guidelines and Amendment C175 pay scant attention to catering for this number of new residents, workers and hotel guests whether it be services like active transport infrastructure, sewerage, storm water run-off, flood mitigation, schools, kindergartens, medical, dental and other professional services, active sporting facilities and a range of passive open space areas and experiences for residents.

In addition the existing public transport services and local and major roads are inadequate to cope with this increase in population.

With the anticipated further high density development of the Box Hill MAC via the draft built form guidelines and Amendment C175, the population increase will further stretch the local infrastructure and the fear is that a modern-day slum will be the inevitable result.

## 2.3 Connectivity Issues

- Major barriers to pedestrian and cyclist traffic must be designed out of the urban landscape in the Box Hill MAC. An example would be the installation of generously proportioned pedestrian underpasses/overpasses for major roads and the railway line.
- A network of wide shared use paths needs to be installed with safe, simple connectivity to the significant open spaces surrounding the MAC including Box Hill Gardens, Surrey Park and Kingsley Gardens. This pathway network will be planted out with a diversity of trees, shrubs and groundcovers that will allow these linear links to double as effective biolinks between the parks, plazas and smaller open spaces within and beyond the Box Hill MAC.
- Provide safe, low-stress pedestrian, cyclist and disabled connectivity with public transport hubs, local schools and tertiary institutes, residential, retail and commercial

precincts, Box Hill hospital, the library and most importantly with existing infrastructure e.g. the Box Hill to Ringwood Rail Trail (which was not mentioned at all within the guidelines or Amendment C175 documents!)

- Installation of safe bicycle storage facilities at all active transport destinations within the Box Hill MAC including transport hubs; the retail, office, residential and educational precincts; Box Hill hospital and the library
- Minimize the conflict interfaces between motor vehicle and pedestrian, cyclists and other users of active transport modes within the MAC. Examples would include minimizing motor vehicle crossovers on shared use paths, mandating rear parking access for residential buildings and provision of suitable setbacks for vehicle crossovers to maximize sight distances for pedestrians and cyclists

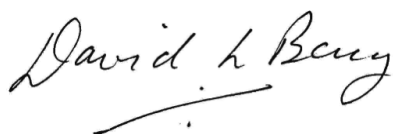
### **3. References to Existing Council Policies and Strategies**

The draft guidelines and Amendment C175 make no mention of a number of City of Whitehorse policies and strategies that are directly relevant to the objectives underpinning the draft guidelines and subsequent Whitehorse Planning Scheme amendment.

The list includes (in alphabetical order):

- Box Hill Gardens Master Plan
- Heritage Kerbs Channels and Laneways Policy
- Integrated Transport Strategy 2011
- Municipal Early Years Plan 2014-2018
- Municipal Youth Plan 2014-2018
- Road Safety Strategy 2013
- Streetscape Policy and Strategy
- Whitehorse City Council Climate Change Adaptation Plan
- Whitehorse Cycling Strategy 2016
- Whitehorse Disability Policy and Action Plan 2012-2016
- Whitehorse Open Space Strategy
- Whitehorse Positive Ageing Strategy 2012-2017
- Whitehorse Sustainability Strategy 2016-2022
- Whitehorse Urban Biodiversity Strategy

Yours sincerely



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