



## Submission regarding Fishermans Bend Plan

### “The Essential Building Blocks of Community Capacity”

#### **Port Melbourne Neighbourhood Centre**

For the past 27 years Port Melbourne Neighbourhood Centre (PMNC) has provided a broad range of affordable and accessible social, educational and community development programs to a diverse community. PMNC provides lifelong learning and recreation programs including English, literacy, information technology, parenting, work and life skills. These programs help participants manage daily life, deal with disability, and overcome disadvantage and social isolation while transitioning into work, study or other activities. Participation in PMNC community events, arts and social groups also generates community benefits related to broader connections developed. Networks are created between participants, workers and other institutions help people feel part of a community and become more tolerant of difference. The positive experiences for many at PMNC lead them to want to give back to the community and some become involved in volunteering, committees, or decision-making activities in the broader neighbourhood. All these Port Melbourne Neighbourhood Centre initiatives and programs facilitate an active citizenship and a stronger, resilient and more inclusive community.

#### **Social infrastructure planning is required to build strong connected communities**

Port Melbourne, Beacon Cove, Fishermans Bend and Southbank continues a dramatic transformation from 20<sup>th</sup> century working class industrial area to a 21<sup>st</sup> century city embracing the future . However, to ensure Fishermans Bend’s success as a distinct, vibrant and liveable community requires careful social infrastructure planning that moves beyond the built environment.

“Building of themselves do not and cannot create a community. It is people building relationships between each other that define a community”<sup>i</sup>.

Social infrastructure planning involves processes, programs, events, services, networks and activities that support individuals and families to meet their social and personal needs in a particular place through personal growth, social interaction, social services support and community development.

Many residents choose locations to live because of the promise of community<sup>ii</sup> . Community connection and inclusion results in positive health, mental health, economic and social outcomes with neighbourhoods and suburbs. However, this requires effective social infrastructure planning as a well-designed physical infrastructure. Maintaining a healthy community requires improved investment in community development enabling local communities to build skills, positive community interactions and community capacity.

Social capital refers to the ability of members to form social relationships and networks between neighbours, shared interest groups and the wider community. High levels of social capital links to positive

community outcomes including better educational achievement, improved health and lower levels of criminal activity. These outcomes are linked to residents experiencing connection to others rather than a place.

Specifically for new communities in growth areas, lessons learned from the UK show ‘a strong link between mental ill-health and lack of social ties in a new environment’, with recommendations that ‘decision-makers and developers must ensure that resources are made available to promote social cohesion at the same time as building the physical environment.<sup>iii</sup> There is now a solid body of research that reinforces the poor economic, social and environmental outcomes that result from creating dormitory suburbs.

## **Social infrastructure planning must start early in the planning process**

It is important that state and local governments do not confuse the built environment and infrastructure as ends in themselves when planning communities. Research indicates that two areas of urban planning have often been inadequate in many newer suburbs<sup>iv</sup>:

- Larger scale public infrastructure such as public transport
- Social Infrastructure – community-making work that helps build community through the formative period and the timely availability of community support services to vulnerable sections of the community during the early period of development.

Local councils have a core role in ensuring planning achieves community strengthening goals. The Local Government Charter aims to provide services and community facilities to meet the needs of local communities – and fostering community cohesion and active participation in civic life.

Places Victoria and more progressive councils and developers are beginning to recognise that hard infrastructure itself will not create sustainable communities of the future. Evaluation by local governments has led to an understanding of what leads to successes and failures in new residential estates. Early and sustained engagement with residents, services, and brokerage of service delivery partnerships are now seen to be crucial strategies in achieving planning goals in new suburbs. Redlands Council on the Brisbane fringes developed an innovative social infrastructure strategy based on a rich understanding of residents’ needs, strength and aspirations. The plan goes beyond bricks and mortar recognising the importance of services, activities, groups and networks<sup>v</sup>.

Social infrastructure planning strategies such as Redlands build stronger communities by including:

- Urban design and people orientated streetscapes, walkable distribution of community service hubs, facilities and public spaces that promote interaction.
- Community makers – presence of people who can connect others, provision of programs to provide connections.
- Funding for relationship-making activities (local festivals, etc)
- Support for life cycle events, new residents, new mothers, teenagers, retirees.

Community ownership and management of assets is also a useful strategy in planning engaged communities. Transferring assets such as community centres and parks to local community-based organisations can give communities a greater opportunity to shape the way these assets are run and provide maximum benefit. Community ownership is a means of empowering the community.

## **Neighbourhood Houses deliver social infrastructure and community-making in new suburbs**

Neighbourhood Houses are good examples of inclusive, secular ‘community-making organisations’ and are already working in many growing areas to help generate a sense of community and belonging<sup>vi</sup>.

Victoria’s 400 Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres aim to enhance the social and economic development of communities, operating from the principles of community development, inclusion, life-long learning and active citizenship. Research shows participation in Neighbourhood Houses benefits both individuals and communities: networks generated among participants, staff, volunteers and other organisations ‘help people feel part of a community and become more tolerant of difference<sup>vii</sup>’.

The importance of local opportunities for education and skills building is crucial to strong connected communities. Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres play a key role in the delivery of accessible, affordable and inclusive opportunities for adult education and skills development in local communities. Neighbourhood Houses have the advantage of developing local links and networks to more fully understand local community needs and so provide more responsive and effective services.

### **Further Port Melbourne Neighbourhood Centre recommendations**

Significant social infrastructure planning and resources should be prioritised in the development of Fisherman’s Bend. The planned \$15,000 per site levy should be used to resource social infrastructure planning involving processes, programs, events, services, networks and activities that support communities to meet their social and personal needs in a particular place through personal growth, social interaction, social services support and community development. A carefully researched, planned and resourced social infrastructure process, should involve extensive community engagement and participation from community-making organisations such as neighbourhood houses.

In addition, space and funding should be allocated for the construction and establishment of:

- 1 Neighbourhood House And Learning Centre
- One Community Health Centre
- 1 Primary School (and one secondary or TAFE branch which would bring in employment and economic activity around student populations)
- 2 Childcare Centres
- Parks and outdoor community activity spaces
- A mix of private, student and community housing stock
- Indigenous history space and a history of Fisherman’s Bend interactive walk.
- Public transport infrastructure and bike paths (this should include at least one light rail and an extension of existing bus services)
- 3-6 neighbourhood hubs with a mix of commercial and community/civic space and some outdoor recreation space at each hub. Some outreach branches and community activity facilities in each hub.

Port Melbourne Neighbourhood Centre (PMNC) believes that major capital infrastructure such as public transport is crucial. However, this should be funded from state government revenue rather than the planning levy.

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- <sup>i</sup> K Breen (2001). *Planning For Health and Well-Functioning Community On The Urban Fringes Of Our Cities*. North East Neighbourhood House Network
- <sup>ii</sup> Williams. P. (2009). *Linked Up Lives: Putting Together Work, Home and Community in Ten Australian Suburbs*. University of South Australia.
- <sup>iii</sup> C Goh & P Bailey (2007), *The Effect of the Social Environment on Mental Health*, Cambridgeshire PCT.
- <sup>iv</sup> K Breen (2001). *Planning For Health and Well-Functioning Community On The Urban Fringes Of Our Cities*.
- <sup>v</sup> Redland City Council. (n.d.). Retrieved 2011 from Redland City Council: [www.redland.qld.gov.au](http://www.redland.qld.gov.au)
- <sup>vi</sup> Savage, A & ANHLC (2013), *Melbourne 2050: Planning for connected communities*: <http://vcoss.org.au/blog/melbourne-2050-planning-for-connected-communities-angela-savage-anhlcvic/>
- <sup>vii</sup> J Pope (2005), *Strengthening local communities*, Department of Victorian Communities: [http://docsfiles.com/pdf\\_strengthening\\_local\\_communities.html](http://docsfiles.com/pdf_strengthening_local_communities.html).