

Statutory Planning Systems Reform
Department of Planning and Community Development
GPO Box 2392
Melbourne Vic 3001

Email: PEActreview@dpcd.vic.gov.au

5 May 2009

Dear Sir/Madam

Modernising Victoria's Planning Act

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the discussion paper *Modernising Victoria's Planning Act*.

VCOSS is the peak organisation of the social and community services sector in Victoria. VCOSS raises awareness of the existence, causes and effects of poverty and inequality and advocates for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society.

VCOSS believes that no one should be disadvantaged by their surroundings and that this principle should underpin the Government's approach to the *Planning and Environment Act* (the Act). VCOSS would also like to endorse the views expressed by the Heart Foundation in its submission to this review.

The discussion paper poses the question whether planning is an appropriate vehicle for behaviour change. VCOSS would suggest that the built form, and as such planning, has a significant impact on shaping behaviour. In areas without access to public transport, participation in community and social activities is limited by people's ability to access them; people's ability to exercise or use active transport is constrained by the design of their community; and children are less likely to walk to school in areas without safe walking routes.

While planning cannot substitute for social policy, the built environment impacts significantly on health, wellbeing, equity, community connectedness and both climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. Planning decisions have long term impacts on the shape and use of our urban areas. Once planning decisions are made and works undertaken, the results are enduring. Increased urbanisation, population growth, climate change and

climate change adaptation measures all drive the need to view the approach to land use planning differently.

Given the enduring role that planning plays in shaping our environment and our responses to that environment, VCOSS believes that the overarching purpose of the Act should be to 'plan for liveable and sustainable communities'.

This means communities that:

- have access to employment and recreational opportunities within their local area,
- provide a variety of transport options for local, regional and metropolitan travel,
- have an urban form which encourages physical activity,
- facilitate the provision of affordable housing and provide a variety of housing options,
- provide adequate and accessible community services,
- take into account both climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, and
- ensure that all community members can participate in decisions about the shape of their environment.

While a number of these goals are outlined in various government policy documents, it is important to articulate these goals within the Act to ensure that the framework itself serves this purpose.

Having identified the need to reframe the purpose of the Act, the objectives will necessarily need to be aligned with this goal. VCOSS suggests the following objectives be included in the act:

1. To create urban form which can adapt to a changing climate and encourage behaviours which reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
2. To promote community health and wellbeing.
3. To provide equity of access to community services, across all age groups and abilities; and
4. To provide an adequate supply of affordable and accessible housing through public and private rental accommodation and home ownership.

To meet these objectives it is crucial that the *Planning and Environment Act* enables the participation of *all* community members in planning decisions. This may include community consultations with senior Victorians, discussions with people with a disability, or other consultative and participatory mechanisms. Planning mechanisms need to ensure that the needs of all

community members are met and all community members have a role to play in planning decisions. The following principles¹ provide a guide to what steps should be taken to ensure effective community participation:

1. The process of public involvement should be agreed between the agency and participants.
2. Public involvement should start early in the decision making process.
3. The objectives of the public involvement process need to be clearly stated.
4. People need to be aware of the level of influence being offered.
5. Efforts should be made by the agency to identify all interested parties.
6. Information should be freely available to all participants.
7. Participants should know how their submissions or inputs will be processed.

In keeping with the need to consider a wider range of perspectives in planning VCOSS supports the discussion paper's suggestion that the term 'objection' be changed to 'submission', to allow an array of views and suggestions to be incorporated in the decision making process.

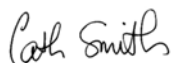
Further to ensure the participation of a wide range of community members VCOSS would recommend that the reform process examine the UNICEF *Child Friendly Cities* to see how they can be incorporated in the modernised Act to ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard in relation to developing the communities and the facilities within which they live.

The *Child Friendly Cities* principles and philosophy present an example of planning that recognises more than simply the built environment.

VCOSS believes that the inclusion of the above principles and objectives will assist in guiding the planning system to provide for the needs of all community members, and go some way to ensuring that no one is disadvantaged by their surroundings.

If you would like to discuss VCOSS' submission further please contact Policy Officer Sarah Toohey on 9654 5050 or at sarah.toohey@vcoss.org.au

Yours sincerely



Cath Smith
Chief Executive Officer

ⁱ G. J. Syme, 'Planning, Social Justice Research, and Socially Acceptable

Decision making' *Stakeholder Involvement in Options Assessment: Promoting Dialogue in Meeting Water and Energy Needs: A Sourcebook*, United Nations Development Program/World Bank Energy Sector Management Assistance Programme and Bank Netherlands Water Partnership Program, July 2003, accessed at http://www.adb.org/Water/Topics/Dams/pdf/esm2640paper_sourcebook.pdf