

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into Apartment Design Standards**

Melbourne—Wednesday, 16 February 2022

#### **MEMBERS**

Ms Sarah Connolly—Chair

Mr David Morris—Deputy Chair

Mr Will Fowles

Ms Danielle Green

Mr Paul Hamer

Mr Tim McCurdy

Ms Cindy McLeish

**WITNESSES**

Ms Rachel Dapiran, Executive Director, Infrastructure, Strategy and Planning, and

Ms Goksel Karpat, Urban Design Advisor, Victorian Planning Authority.

**The CHAIR:** I advise that the sessions today are being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. Rebroadcast of the hearing is only permitted in accordance with Legislative Assembly standing order 234. Thank you, Rachel and Goksel, for joining us here today at the public hearing for the Inquiry into Apartment Design Standards.

On behalf of the committee I acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of this land, and we pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future and elders from other communities who may be joining us today. I also extend a warm welcome to any members of the public and media who have rejoined us and are watching us here today.

This is one of several public hearings that the Environment and Planning Committee is conducting to inform itself about the issues relevant to the inquiry. Before I begin I would like to point out that all evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. What this means is that you can speak freely here without fear of legal action in relation to the evidence that you give. However, it is very important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments made outside this hearing, even if you are just simply restating what you said here today before us. You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so to check and to approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report.

Thanks again for joining us. I am Sarah Connolly, the Chair of the Environment and Planning Committee and the Member for Tarneit.

**Mr MORRIS:** I am David Morris, the Member for Mornington and Deputy Chair of the committee.

**Mr HAMER:** Paul Hamer. I am the Member for Box Hill.

**Ms McLEISH:** Cindy McLeish, the Member for Eildon.

**Ms GREEN:** Danielle Green, the Member for Yan Yean and the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Victoria and for sport. Good to see you again, Rachel, after the work you did on the Epping town centre all those years ago.

**The CHAIR:** Rach, I am going to hand over to you.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** Thank you. I am Rachel Dapiran, the Executive Director of Infrastructure, Strategy and Planning at the Victorian Planning Authority.

**Ms KARPAT:** Good morning, everyone. I am Goksel Karpat. I am an Urban Design Advisor at the Victorian Planning Authority. Thank you for the opportunity to present today.

**The CHAIR:** Fantastic. Let us jump into the presentation you have got for us.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** Thank you very much, and thank you for having us. It is fantastic to be here. I am really excited that the committee is looking at this important issue. Obviously, Melbourne is growing, Victoria is growing, and apartments are part of our future and a part of the options. So to have the committee taking the opportunity to have a really good look at these standards—what could be improved, what are the international best practice examples, what are we doing here—is fantastic. I know you all come from different parts of the state, which is great, and different development settings, which is important from our point of view.

**Visual presentation.**

**Ms DAPIRAN:** I have just got a quick presentation. It focuses on three things: one, it just explains a little bit of what the Victorian Planning Authority does and our role just in relation to these standards; secondly, how we use these standards; and thirdly, a little bit of information about some best practice things that perhaps the

committee would like to look at. So, if you are happy, I will just flick through those. Goksel is our absolute expert so she can give some examples and we can obviously talk at the end.

The Victorian Planning Authority: we are a state authority. We report to the Minister for Planning. Our role in life is around delivery, so we are not a regulator. We are not the department. The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, DELWP, who I am sure will come and talk to you soon, run the planning system. They design these standards. We use these standards—we sort of map policy into place, if you like—and we do that in three different settings. We do it in regional areas, we do it in established Melbourne and we do it in the greenfield context, so they are obviously the areas that are changing in those growth corridors people will be aware of—really anywhere growing where we have been asked to go and do a precinct-level plan at, that is what we do. We do the planning, we do the rezoning and we do the infrastructure charging. I just thought it was probably worth talking through that.

We have just recently updated our strategic plan, and we thought of relevance to the committee is that the things we look at are having sustainable and liveable communities, great neighbourhoods, well-connected communities—all really important in relation to these standards. But we also look at density done well, and we did notice that Infrastructure Victoria walked out as we walked in, and I am sure they talked to you about the work that they have done. Again, with Melbourne and Victoria growing and more apartment living, it is obviously really important that we get great communities out of that and that there are places that people actually want to live in and that are well-connected—but it is good density, it is not just density for density's sake, which creates awful environments that people do not want to live in. So, density done well is a really big part of what we do, and I think it is important to your discussions here today.

In terms of the various roles, as I said, the apartment design guidelines—the department has put them in place and has updated them. That is what DELWP do. From a VPA point of view, we map those through the controls we put in place at a precinct level in all those particular areas that I have talked about. For us, it is probably the public realm and the space between buildings rather than the internal design of buildings which is where our focus is. And local government do that really important job of assessing development applications that use the guidelines and then curating an area and taking responsibility. Hopefully that makes sense just to sort of step through the various roles. For us, it is at that precinct level—strategic planning, rezoning—but certainly the guidelines are very important for the work that we do to make sure that you have a well-connected, walkable area.

In terms of what we do, I have got a couple of pictures up there if you can see them. They are some of the areas that we work in—obviously greenfield areas but also urban renewal areas. We have got one out in Bentleigh in East Village and one at P&P, which is in Clayton. They are former industrial sites; they are areas where the government has said, 'We think there should be urban renewal and change', so working with the local community and with council, we do a plan about what the various land uses are and should be in those areas. Typically, they are mixed-use communities, so they will have residential, they will have commercial and obviously they will have parks and potentially waterways, depending on the area, and transport connections, and then how do you build that back into the fabric, if you like, of the existing local community. That is where, for us, it is really important that density is done well, that you are looking after your well-designed public realm. Because for us obviously the positioning of the buildings is really important and the relationship to the street and to the neighbourhood buildings—all those things have a big impact on really quality of life for the people who live in those areas, live in those apartments and live in the surrounding areas.

What we do with the apartment design standards is interpret them and put them into what is called built-form controls. Goksel can talk at greater length about what that means, but that involves modelling about floor-to-height ratios and things that go to privacy and solar orientation, a lot of the amenity issues and wind control but also the relationships between buildings and some of the common areas, which I think are part of your terms of reference. We think they are really important. Obviously the 2017 guidelines were about internal design, but the updated ones that were put in place I think last year probably speak more to what we do, which is about the external amenity and, as I said, those connections to green spaces and how you make that community fit together and be a place that people want to live in.

In terms of opportunities—I know you are looking at that for further iterations—obviously the guidelines have just been updated, but certainly you would always be looking at these things to continue the evolution of improvement. Obviously, none of us know what COVID will quite mean, but there will be ventilation and a

whole lot of things you need to think about. There are a whole lot of other things that I think the committee could have a look at. There are acceptable density limits; there are other things you can do to improve that public realm quality—some of the separations, some of the transitions; and other adverse impacts you can have, particularly around the bulk size of buildings. You can make sure that you are encouraging community gathering. Would you look at mandating things around the size of apartments within buildings? Because obviously—and I am sure you have taken evidence on this—there are lots of one- and two-bedroom apartments but getting to three-bedroom apartments opens up the market to families and people who like a little bit more space. Obviously, these things have to all be considered with affordability, but there are other things that obviously future iterations could have a look at—nothing urgent from our point of view. Certainly, more detail around the public interface and how you actually make those separations and transitions real are important things that we think are worth having a further think about as Melbourne and Victoria continue to grow and come out of COVID.

In terms of other standards and things that are around, we have put in our submission a range of different guidelines that are around, probably the best one being the *Growing Up: Planning for Children in New Vertical Communities* that the City of Toronto have done. The way that they have done that is they have looked at three different levels: at the unit level, at the building level and at the neighbourhood level, and we think that is the right way for us who are precinct planners. So look first at the neighbourhood—what the interactions are with green space, look at the building and the space between buildings—and then obviously functional design of an internal unit. That is what they have done. The SA Housing Authority have looked again at context and connections. Parramatta is in Sydney, and that is looking again at how you can modulate height to respect the different environment, so depending on where it is, where you might have it. And the *Active Design Guidelines* from the City of New York are worth looking at. Obviously, New York is a highly dense environment. Obviously they have had to grapple with these issues of how to make a really healthy community that is really well connected.

This is my last slide, so bear with me. This is just a little bit more of a deeper dive into the Toronto guidelines. Those external relations are important. I thought I would talk about the neighbourhood guidelines; remember, I talked about those three levels. They focus on the experience around the building, its siting and access to parks and the civic engagement for social interaction and inclusion, so what you do at that level. Then the second tier is what you do with building guidelines, so how you support what they call the social life of the building—how you make some large units, how you encourage functional and flexible places that people can spend time in and how you promote designs that change over time. And then the third tier in their guidelines is the unit, so those individual functional spaces—things around privacy and sunlight, and also how you allow for flexibility for ageing in place within an apartment setting. So we think they are a really great set of design standards to have a look at.

Really just in conclusion, I think it is fantastic you are doing this work. There are obviously lots of various issues to think about. From our point of view it is the connection to the public realm and the space between buildings. The context that buildings sit in is probably our focus, but obviously there is lots of work and thinking around what happens within the actual internal layout. So that is probably, by way of introduction, just a few comments. I am happy to leave it at that.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Rachel. That is really interesting, and it is very interesting looking at other jurisdictions—who is doing it really well. We have not really heard who is maybe not doing it as well as they should be, which is also very interesting to explore. Because your submission is drawing the committee's attention to a range of examples in those other jurisdictions, can you point to any examples that have been drawn on and how they were actually applied, if any, here in the Victorian context? So have we applied any of this, or is this just more sort of futuristic, saying, 'This is what we should be or could be looking at' as opposed to 'This is what we have actually implemented here, and we can go further by looking at these jurisdictions'?

**Ms DAPIRAN:** Sure. Probably one example—and I will throw to Goksel, who looks after the Arden precinct, if people are familiar with that, the new Metro station in North Melbourne—is the update of the Victorian standards, the one I talked about, more about the external building. We have actually started to run that through our guidelines. That has been out at public consultation as of late last year. So I might throw to you, Goksel, if you want to talk through how we apply that.

**Ms KARPAT:** Yes. In our projects, there are two key policy guidelines that we consistently refer to. One is the apartment design standards certainly, and also the Urban Design Guidelines for Victoria. They are the two key documents that we consistently use as a base point. So, for example, in our recent projects, we have used modelling assumptions based on the apartment design standards, like room depths or maximum floor plates, sunlight, access to communal spaces, wind controls et cetera. So those definitely have elevated the design quality since their introduction in 2017, and we do see that, and we use them as a useful reference. But as in any strategic study there is always room for improvement, and comparing some of these examples, we ask what is the point of difference of the Victorian guidelines? It could be in some areas they do not have the exact metrics or exact standards as some of those do. But again, it is a consideration of how much you want to prescribe and what the right balance of flexibility and certainty is. So I see that as a point of difference with some of the examples we have seen. But our controls in place are certainly setting a bar and filling the gap in the Victorian planning system.

**The CHAIR:** And just quickly, whether you know or you do not know, in these other examples that you have used here in this presentation and in your submission, are the controls in those cities—well, you have got Parramatta there in the state of New South Wales, but also overseas examples—more prescriptive or less prescriptive? So, for example, we have heard from particular witnesses saying there need to be probably less prescription, less mandates, more sort of a guidance to allow industry to innovate and improve. Is that what has resulted in good design, from your point of view, in those cities in those examples, or have there been more government prescription and controls around it?

**Ms KARPAT:** I would say in terms of guidelines it is not more prescriptive than what we have got, but if you compare them to New South Wales design guidelines, I think they are more prescriptive than Victorian design guidelines. But again, I think it took an extended process for the New South Wales government to get there, so they have done various versions of their design guidelines and they have tested, validated what is working and not working well. So I am feeling that Victorian Design Guidelines for better apartment design standards are following that process of getting to strike the balance between flexibility and certainty.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** That is the big issue for us that we see. Initially industry come in and say if you're too prescriptive, they cannot innovate. And then you actually box yourself in, and that happens in planning a lot. But then equally sometimes there is a place for prescription, and I think they are a mix, those standards. I do not think that you can say they are all more prescriptive than Victoria or less. But there are things about obviously engaging the right people at the time to do the urban design work, and then obviously it is the follow-through as well; you can put guidelines in place, but then councils and others make sure they get adhered to. So it is a tricky one. We find it to be an issue. I am sure you have looked at it in other parts of your work here as well: how much prescription do you need, but make sure you don't kill innovation. But then you do need some certainty and not to be so fluffy that frankly you are not getting the outcomes that you want to see from an amenity or community point of view. So it is a tough one. But unfortunately, I think it is a bit of a mix, isn't it? We would not say they are all necessarily more prescriptive, they are just interesting examples, with some other things that I think you could look at from a Victorian perspective.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, thank you. David.

**Mr MORRIS:** Thanks, Sarah. Certainly the New South Wales guidelines—we heard a strong message from the industry yesterday to not go there. Stay away from them.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** Okay.

**Mr MORRIS:** I have two questions. On the second page of your submission—and this is probably picking up from Sarah's point—you talk about where controls might go in the future, and there is some commentary there about acceptable height, acceptable density and that sort of thing. Are those issues that were not considered in the update of the guidelines, of the BADS? In other words, were they considered and rejected, or did the process not get there, from your perspective?

**Ms DAPIRAN:** The simple answer is I am not sure because whilst we provided input to them, obviously DELWP, who you will talk to today, can probably give you a far better answer on whether they considered them or not. I suspect they probably did, but that is speculative from me. But I think these things are natural

evolutions. As I said, the first one was just ‘Let’s get the internal design right and then let’s look at the external’, and then I think those bigger questions, Deputy Chair, you have mentioned around—

**Mr MORRIS:** The reason I ask you that is it is a matter of whether it is appropriate to be putting those sorts of issues into guidelines or whether it is more appropriate to put them directly into the schemes themselves.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Ms KARPAT:** Yes. There is not a fixed relationship between height, scale, density and the public realm. They are certainly interrelated—they impact each other and influence each other—but basically the right public realm improvement or enhancement needs to be done through strategic planning in our work or what local councils do. But there may be some parameters in built form controls that are more universal, that are more applicable state-wide, and they are based on human needs like access to sunlight and ventilation et cetera. This requires a bit of consideration around what standards can be strengthened and can be applied state-wide. Built form is always a contested area, as you all know. Heights and scales and densities are of concern from the community’s or council’s point of view and getting the public realm quality right is our main area of focus. Therefore, we think there may be areas for future consideration to strengthen those areas, but, as you said, it is very subjective, it is not a linear proposition. It does not have—

**Mr MORRIS:** Yes, I am just thinking there might be an argument to say they should go into PSPs or whatever, but I guess then you run into the many areas of the state that do not have PSPs. If it is a greenfield site, I guess that is one thing—or what were the Clayton and Bentleigh East sites. I guess you can do that sort of work.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** You are right: we do do that work, and we would say that is the benefit we bring. We do more refined guidelines and often have them for the bulk of the development that happens across the state, but it is a consideration. It is something I think the inquiry can definitely look at.

**Ms KARPAT:** Even clarity in definitions would be really beneficial to consider, because those labels like ‘low’, ‘medium’ and ‘high density’, for example, may be misleading and mean different things to different communities.

**Mr MORRIS:** Medium density means something very different in my part of the world on the Mornington Peninsula to medium density in the City of Yarra, for example.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** It is like ‘appropriate’ and ‘inappropriate’ development. I mean, it is in the eye of the beholder.

**Ms KARPAT:** I think clarifying those definitions would be useful.

**Mr MORRIS:** The other issue that I just want to get to quickly is that there was a strong message, again from some representatives of the industry, saying these controls are building controls: they should be in the code, they should not be in the planning scheme. I am just interested in your reaction to that.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** Yes. That is again one of those other things which is quite contested. I can understand the industry saying that, but there are planning controls that could help mediate some of those things. I think it is important to give shape through the planning system so you actually can consider. It can just be a bit of a blunt tool, I think—that would be my view—just using the building system. I think—

**Mr MORRIS:** The argument was very much couched in terms of ‘Because it’s in the planning system, it gives councils the opportunity to buy in to issues that should be technical’. That was the—

**Ms DAPIRAN:** Right. My view is that those are issues of community and how people interact, so I think they are beyond just the technical. We have this ongoing debate, and there are some things which probably should just be, you know, technical engineering questions that are grey, but there are things that are of emphasis that I think are really important in terms of actually getting the communal spaces and their connections to the public realm, which I think the planning system can add value to. And I think, to be honest, councils are the ones that live on with those communities and have to make sure they become great places. It is not unreasonable that they would have a say through the planning system, in my opinion.

**Mr MORRIS:** Once the builders are gone? Exactly.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** Yes.

**Mr MORRIS:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, David. Paul.

**Mr HAMER:** Thanks, Sarah. I was just interested in the two examples you put up, the East Village and the Clayton site. Now, I assume that they were single sites with a single owner, which perhaps made it somewhat easier to work with the owner and the council to develop that solution and, just looking at some of those images, perhaps adopt some of the public realm elements that have been included in the latest iteration but at an earlier stage so you could sort of push the envelope more. Can you maybe just confirm that? But then I was wondering how that could then be applied in an environment where most apartments are probably going to be built on single sites—much smaller sites, so you might not have the opportunity for the public realm within that particular site. How do you bring that all together when you have got multiple owners within a particular precinct? Obviously the VPA is not engaged in all of them, but there are some large sites where you are. Do councils have the tools to be doing that?

**Ms DAPIRAN:** That is an interesting question. I might throw to you in a second, Goksel. But you are right: in both those cases there might not be one landowner, because often those sites get sold and then they are picked up. But they are easy to deal with at scale—at 15, 16, 20 hectares, whatever—you are right. Then you can have your sort of integrated land uses and then connect back to the fabric of the surrounding community. It is obviously harder at that smaller scale. What would be your thoughts on that, Goksel?

**Ms KARPAT:** Yes, it is definitely a key constraint in our precinct planning—fragmented land ownership, smaller lots and narrow sites. That makes it hard for our plans and for the future land use and built form controls to be realised. But through built form controls, you can also encourage lot consolidation. It makes it much easier, for example, for a couple of lots to consolidate to reach the optimal capacity of a site to develop into the future. So you can basically have it as a principle to encourage consolidation, but you also need to consider, if consolidation does not happen, whether or not the site still has the capacity to develop with the floor area ratio or built form controls. So again, it is a constraint certainly, but through built form controls it can be shaped and encouraged in a certain way.

**Mr HAMER:** But is that something that is achievable through the planning system? When you talk about trying to encourage a consolidation of lots, I mean, how could that be achieved practically? I am just thinking of an example in, say, Box Hill, where obviously there is a large area that has been identified as a potential development site but with multiple, multiple owners. How do you incorporate some of those elements of public realm within that site? Because that is obviously going to impact upon some landowners differently to other landowners in terms of what they might be able to develop.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** We do have sites that have multiple landowners, and if we are the planning authority, then we have the ability to put those controls in place and those landowners have to respond to the controls that are put in place. It is probably more an issue when, as you say, in smaller sites where it is just like one apartment building. There is only so much council can do. They obviously will connect it to transport and to places, but you do not have the room to get that sort of great precinct approach. That is, to be honest, where most development happens, on a single site or whatever it might be. Obviously it is easier for us if there are just a few landowners to deal with, but we have other sites where those people are all subject to the *Planning and Environment Act*, so they cannot develop their land until there is a sign-off done through a strategic planning and a rezoning. In that sense, the planning system enables that to happen, because if that area is being designated for growth, then those landowners will need to be aware of, you know, 'This is the plan'. Not to get too complicated, but you have a plan and someone's area over here might be designated for a park and then there is a process to buy that park off them. That is why there are winners and losers in these things and why it is difficult planning. You have got two growth area MPs who would be well aware of it. Obviously, there are speculators and things like that, but if you are within a precinct, on one of these precincts, and we have done all the planning and we have decided that area needs to be transitioned through to a park or something like that and that is your land, then we will look at ways around that. But sometimes landowners then get recredited some of

their money, and there is a whole system in place to make sure you are enabling a whole precinct level to happen. Landowners fall within that because their lands are subject to planning controls.

**Mr HAMER:** Do you think that the councils have the tools to do that work at the moment?

**Ms DAPIRAN:** Strategic planning is obviously an expense within council. But if you look at a site like the former paper mill site at Alphington, that was done by the City of Yarra; that was not something, say, like a state authority like ours completed. I think the hard part is actually dealing with all the government departments. That is hard for council because government can be a bit big to navigate. But in terms of the controls, I think they are probably there. The hard part is: how do you get great outcomes for buildings that are just one site amongst a sea of residential? Then that is a bit harder. But I see what you are saying. These things are never simple, and it is harder for council because they do not quite have the tools that we do. But I think the controls, built form controls, still would enable them. And there are some quite big sites in Melbourne that are being run by—I mean, the majority of planning is run by local government day to day.

**Mr HAMER:** Thanks.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks. Cindy.

**Ms McLEISH:** Thank you. If I can just start with a very short, sharp, one-word response—

**Ms GREEN:** Do not forget I want to get a question in too, Cindy.

**Ms McLEISH:** This is quick. How high is too high in middle suburbs?

**Ms DAPIRAN:** It is very subjective, isn't it? Middle suburbs—so are we talking established Melbourne or regional areas or—

**Ms McLEISH:** City. It is Melbourne, not the CBD.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** This is a terrible planner's answer, but it depends, I have to say. It depends on the context. If it is a site that is next to, you know, a freeway where there are no overshadowing issues and sunlight issues, you can probably go quite high, but if it is a site that—

**Ms McLEISH:** So are you happy with that?

**Ms DAPIRAN:** Yes. It is all about the context, but if it is just an island and it is just a sea of one-storey houses and someone says, 'Twenty storeys', then I think that is problematic because that does not fit with the context. It will overshadow and have an impact on amenity. So in my view it just depends on what is around, and obviously that is why you want the strategic planning done. Most councils just have an area that is designated for growth—if you look at Stonnington or somewhere like that, they just have it around Glen Huntly Road—and that is where they put their growth. Obviously there are lots of low-rise areas in Box Hill; they concentrate growth into one area. I think just having, standing out of nowhere, a big tower in the middle of a sea of low rise is problematic for everybody. But it depends. I know it is not a very simple answer, but yes.

**Ms McLEISH:** One of the things that you put on the screen first was about the involvement in spatial allocation of land uses. Can you tell me what has been the biggest failure in this area in the last five years or so? Like not the 70s, but something quite contemporary.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** Getting the balance right is always really hard. Making sure that there is enough room for employment—I would not say 'failure', but I just think you have just got to make sure you have got room for jobs as well, because it is one thing to have communities, but it is very important to obviously have land set aside for jobs. That does not mean people will invest there, but you have got to have land set aside for it.

**Ms McLEISH:** So that has not been happening?

**Ms DAPIRAN:** Well, I think it has, but you can always put a sharper focus on that.

**Ms GREEN:** Rachel, where you worked in the City of Whittlesea, that one new job per each new housing—I have always put them up as the great example, because they had that at the front. Most growth municipalities

understand that, but it seems to me that it is the others, like Nillumbik, where I live—more people leave that municipality to go to work than anywhere else, and part of it is their resistance to development in their town centres. If they were to be more proactive around that, about the housing and the jobs, it would be different.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** It is an understanding of the need for viable densities if you are going to have jobs, if you are going to have transport, if you going to have services—so yes, I think making sure that jobs are part of the picture. I do not see it as a failure; I think it is just something that we have got to get better at it.

**Ms McLEISH:** So there have been no failures?

**Ms DAPIRAN:** Obviously I would not say that.

**Ms McLEISH:** I asked about failures, and you have said this. Then you finished up by saying it is not a failure.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** It depends if you mean individual sites or you mean system wide. Individual sites—yes, obviously there are sites you look at and think that was not the right balance of land uses that might have been, but across the—

**Ms McLEISH:** Yes, it is where the learnings are.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** Yes. I think, yes, getting employment landed in the right places is really important, and getting that transition, making sure that things are done in the right context. Of course there are mistakes all the time, but system wide I think *Plan Melbourne* and all the systems that sit underneath it has the strategy right, and these guidelines anticipate them, but obviously it is in all the application, isn't it?

**Ms GREEN:** Chair, I am looking at the time. I have got a question.

**The CHAIR:** Great.

**Ms GREEN:** Thank you. I was really rapt that in your submission you referred to the Infrastructure Victoria work, their research. They specifically talk about what they did and how industry should talk to people who currently do not live in apartment dwellings but would like to or get them onboard. And when we heard from local government, they were sort of talking about the deep stresses on planners and how they cannot keep up with their workload and they keep leaving. It seemed to me that the solution that is proposed by Infrastructure Victoria, those design panels and getting that early on—and that was something that I suggested to industry yesterday—like, you would be aware, in the City of Whittlesea in their greenfield sites when they sit down and do development conferences, although they do not include community. Then we heard from local government as well that with the Preston example, for example, the community just seems convinced; they have had 10 000 people sign a petition that the Preston Market site is going to look like Docklands, and nothing will convince them any other way. What do you think what Infrastructure Victoria is saying about development panels? How do we get people in the car in that way?

**Ms DAPIRAN:** That is a good question. Preston, I should declare, is one of our projects. It is very contested. Obviously people love their market, and we think our plan will incorporate the market but enable for growth, but—you understand—people get very passionate about it, so that is a difficult one. But I think, yes, design panels are good where people can see good design, because, let us face it, we all see bad design—it is not like it does not exist—and that tends to burn into the image of communities. Once they have seen it, they think that the next one is going to be not there. It is difficult because a lot of it is in the eye of the beholder, but I think, yes, having a specific group that can be part of looking at 'What does good design look like?' and who could talk to the community about that is important. I do not know if you have got any other thoughts, Goksel?

**Ms KARPAT:** Yes, I think any research or any evidence from other global cities shows that there is no choice other than densification. The question is not about 'whether to densify or not' but how we get it right, so I think there is a lot to draw from Infrastructure Victoria's work. It is great to hear community perspectives around the benefits of high-density living. And when we talk about things like walkability, access to jobs, transport, services, that vibrance and a sense of safety and security, it highlights that we have got the key principles right. We have got all the right ingredients. Not to point at a particular project, but if there is any failure, it is this ongoing anxiety or concern from communities about getting it right and lack of comfort for

consciously choosing to live in apartment settings, for example. How we address these concerns is so important, how we bring all these ingredients together in a meaningful way.

**Ms GREEN:** The development community just seem worried that if they get community involved it will automatically lead to lesser outcomes, so they then cannot deliver the profits that they have promised their investors, or within council or within government saying, 'We want to deliver this density'. And it seemed to me that when the councils presented the other day all they wanted to do was say, 'We want less people here'—at that Preston site.

**Ms DAPIRAN:** Yes, and that is a challenge. And there are plenty of really great developers out there working closely with community, and they understand that and they are doing a really good job. We have got some exemplars out there. There are always cowboys, but I think there are actually some people doing some really good work as well. But it is a difficult one, and we always say are we sort of an agent of change. As I said, we are not a regulator. You are out there talking about changing areas, and people often do not love it. You understand that, so you need to take them with you and show them the good examples of it. But it is not easy, because we all love our neighbourhoods, and often people will look back and go, 'I didn't like that 10 years ago but actually I think it's all right now because I've seen what it brings, the vitality and vibrancy'. It is finding that balance. It is a tough one.

**The CHAIR:** Unfortunately we are out of time. Thank you very much for coming this morning and talking to us. Some really interesting discussion and information.

**Witnesses withdrew.**