

# TRANSCRIPT

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

### Inquiry into the public housing renewal program

Melbourne — 5 December 2017

#### Members

Ms Margaret Fitzherbert — Chair

Ms Nina Springle — Deputy Chair

Mr Joshua Morris

Mr Daniel Mulino

Ms Fiona Patten

Mrs Inga Peulich

Mr Adem Somyurek

Ms Jaclyn Symes

#### Participating Members

Mr Greg Barber

Ms Georgie Crozier

Mr Nazih Elasmar

Ms Colleen Hartland

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

#### Witnesses

Cr Steve Stefanopoulos, Mayor, Stonnington City Council;

Cr Coral Ross, Boroondara City Council; and

Cr Laurence Evans, Mayor, Bayside City Council.

**The CHAIR** — Welcome Cr Stefanopoulos, Cr Ross and Cr Evans. Good morning and thank you for joining us. Welcome to this public hearing of the Legal and Social Issues Committee. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege; therefore you are protected for action against what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things those comments may not be protected by this privilege. I invite the three of you to address the committee, if you wish to do so. We have been asking people, if they can, to keep the introductory comments to between 5 and 10 minutes. Then we will open up for questions. We are in your hands.

**Cr ROSS** — I will commence. Before I begin I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners as the original custodians of this land and pay my respects to their elders past and present, and the elders of other communities who may be here today. My name is Coral Ross and I am the councillor for Gardiner ward in the City of Boroondara, which is where the Bills Street, Hawthorn, redevelopment is being proposed. On behalf of the cities of Bayside, Boroondara and Stonnington I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues for the opportunity to present our submission to the inquiry into the public housing renewal program. For succinctness I will just call it the program in future.

Our municipalities have formed the Proper Planning for Public Housing Alliance, as we collectively believe the program is fundamentally flawed and needs to be changed. We believe the government should delay any decisions in relation to these projects until after this parliamentary inquiry has been completed. We believe the program fails in four critical areas. Firstly, it fails to deliver a sufficient number of public housing units. Secondly, it relies on the sale of a substantial proportion of these estates to private developers to pay for only 31 additional public housing apartments within the alliance councils, removing opportunities to provide further public housing at these locations in the future. Thirdly, it breaches the government's own planning controls and fails to achieve high-quality design outcomes fit for their respective locations. Fourthly, councils are being removed as the responsible planning authority. The program fails to follow the usual transparent planning processes where the local council is the responsible authority and third-party rights for the community are preserved.

Let me just say this at the outset: the alliance councils are not opposed to public housing. In fact we are calling on the government to deliver substantially more public housing than is currently being proposed by this program. Victoria is facing a housing affordability crisis on a number of fronts. There are over 35 000 applicants on the waiting list for public and community housing in the state. These people are amongst the most vulnerable individuals and families in our community due to their significant socio-economic disadvantage.

Public housing is a vital component of the safety net to halt homelessness, and homelessness is not confined to the conventional idea of sleeping rough. The Australian Bureau of Statistics definition of homelessness is informed by an understanding of homelessness as 'homelessness, not rooflessness'. A 2016 report to the government entitled *Victoria's 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, Infrastructure Victoria identified that between 75 000 and 100 000 vulnerable low-income households are not having their housing requirements appropriately met. That is 75 000 to 100 000 households, not individuals. These households would meet the ABS definition of homeless.

All of this paints the picture of need — a need that is growing, not diminishing. Compounding the demand is the fact that Victoria's public housing asset base is deteriorating. In 2012 the Victorian Auditor-General found that around 10 000 properties are at or nearing obsolescence. We know in the time since the Auditor-General's report that 56 units at the Markham Avenue public housing estate in Ashburton have been demolished. In 2014 the Markham Avenue estate was described by the *Age* as:

... one of the city's most run-down public housing sites and embodies decades of neglect.

This is not a crisis that has come out of nowhere. This has come about through a systemic failure to adequately fund and manage public housing assets. Infrastructure Victoria suggests that about 30 000 new affordable dwellings are required in a 0-to-10-year period to contribute to the current unmet demand for housing. Even then they expect that quantum would not fully meet demand. Furthermore, Infrastructure Victoria is of the view that:

... in the 0–5-year period ... much of the 'heavy lifting' in expanding affordable housing provision will need to be undertaken directly by government.

Despite this, the government's own plan, as set out in *Homes for Victorians*, is to fund only 2200 new social housing places over the next five years. That is a shortfall of 27 800 places. The result will be an ever-increasing presence of homelessness in our cities. The Victorian Auditor-General's Office is also critical of the high level of unmet demand, noting that:

The total stock of public housing decreased by 581 dwellings between 2006 and 2016 ...

At best, the program will barely recoup the stock lost over the past decade through chronic failures to adequately maintain public housing and will contribute little towards achieving a real net increase in public housing stock. At worst, the program can be described as a fire sale to fund a decades-long backlog of public housing maintenance. The Victorian Auditor-General's Office said in its June 2017 report *Managing Victoria's Public Housing* that this model is unsustainable and is unlikely to translate into meaningful social housing growth that will address the significant gap between supply and demand. With such a critical shortfall these sites should ideally be developed solely for public housing.

Poor access to housing is strongly linked to poor health and education outcomes, so improving access to housing can help meet other infrastructure and service challenges faced by the government. Put simply, it will cost this state more in health services and lost productivity if the government does not solve factors contributing to housing stress and homelessness than providing the money needed to meet the demand for public housing within our alliance councils. The land within the alliance councils is perfectly positioned to deliver high-quality public housing, as each of the sites is located in an area with good access to public transport, jobs and services. But the government's approach of making a quick buck from the sale of these properties to likely fund cheaper public housing on the fringe of metropolitan areas will only serve to entrench areas of disadvantage. By focusing on well-serviced locations we can also begin to curb disadvantage by tackling issues such as education and social exclusion.

Independent research carried out by NERA Economic Consulting found a significant shortfall of public housing within the alliance councils to meet the projected demand. NERA found that in the next five years more than 1100 additional public housing dwellings will be needed to meet the demand across our three alliance councils alone, but only 31 are proposed by the program. The uplift in public housing proposed by the program needs to be exponentially increased to stem the crisis and meet the expected demand in the alliance member council areas in the five years to 2022.

The government's approach of trading the delivery of a combined total of 31 new public housing apartments within the alliance councils in exchange for large swathes of land to build close to 1000 private apartments for private super profits is neither adequate nor an appropriate response to the housing crisis. It will satisfy only 2.8 per cent of the expected demand for public housing in the alliance councils in the next five years. It is an insult to the most vulnerable in our society.

I move on to the subverting of the planning process by denying council and the community input. We are also very highly concerned by the planning approach the government is taking to redevelop these public housing sites. In Victoria the rights of third parties to be involved in the formal decision-making process around planning permit applications and planning scheme amendments have been entrenched for decades. The test under the Planning and Environment Act to give notice of a permit application is arduous. Section 52 requires the responsible authority to give notice of an application unless the responsible authority is satisfied that the grant of the permit would not cause material detriment. No person could come to a reasonable conclusion that the grant of the permit for these proposed developments meets the threshold test of 'no material detriment'.

The Department of Health and Human Services is seeking a planning scheme amendment to change the responsible authority for these sites from council to the Minister for Planning. The request to the minister also seeks the minister's approval for exemption from notice and for the subsequent planning permit applications by adopting an incorporated plan. Amendments to the planning scheme should not be made lightly. In this instance it is not necessary to change the status of the responsible authority — our councils — in their ordinary roles as the responsible authority. We are entirely qualified, capable and experienced in assessing and determining planning applications of equal or greater complexity than is currently being proposed and within the time frames allowed for by the act. The removal of notice and review rights for the local community is a denial of natural justice.

The Minister for Planning has appointed a standing advisory committee to provide him with advice on the suitability of the planning proposals to facilitate the redevelopment of the nominated estates. However, our councils are concerned that the standing advisory committee is prevented by their terms of reference from hearing submissions or making recommendations in relation to matters that are directly relevant to the consideration of the social and economic effects of the proposal. The minister's advisory committee cannot look at the number of bedrooms being provided, the suitability of the joint venture or even the suitability of the model itself. If the minister refuses to hear from the council, its community or its own advisory committee on these vitally important issues, who will he hear from? The government should not proceed with the public housing renewal program until this parliamentary inquiry has been completed.

But let us focus on the core issue: the need for more public housing. Let us put people before super profits and ensure that the sites are developed in a manner that meets the projected demand for public housing within the alliance councils. The Victorian government has formed a policy basis that the redevelopment of these sites should be — and I quote — ‘cost-neutral to the Victorian taxpayer’. However, it is our view that the government has artificially inflated the cost of the development by including the value of the land despite having owned the land in fee simple for decades. In fact part of the Bills Street development in Hawthorn was gifted to the government in the 1950s by the former City of Hawthorn for the purpose of housing single women and the elderly.

For the nine sites of the program the DHHS has proposed a public-private partnership whereby substantial proportions of the land will be made available for apartment developments by private developers and sold as private apartments. The proceeds of the sale of the nine sites will go to the Victorian government for unknown purposes. The proceeds of the sale of the private apartments will go to the private developers. The project itself also acts to artificially inflate the value of the land as the scale and the density of the proposed redevelopments are significantly more intensive than would normally be able to be contemplated. In fact in a number of instances they would be prohibited by the planning scheme controls that the government itself introduced only a matter of months ago.

We have a fundamental objection to the sale of public land for private gain, particularly where the net community benefit is only going to be an additional 31 apartments across our alliance councils. It is difficult for the government to procure new sites for public purposes. The legacy of public landholdings created in the 1950s and 1960s should not be so readily given up for so little public gain. The Victorian government should be providing substantially more public housing on the sites by decreasing or removing the private units and making less or no profit from the redevelopment. Furthermore, it is unclear how the sale of public land, housing land, meets the government's own policy requirements. The Victorian government's landholding policy requires that public land may only be sold having been declared, and I quote, ‘land surplus to agency requirements’. With a waiting list of over 35 000 people, it is inconceivable that these sites could have been declared surplus.

Finally, we seek a commitment from the government that the proposed housing will be public housing owned by the state in perpetuity rather than community housing. We have been advised of instances where social housing has been incorporated into developments on a limited-tenure basis in the order of 10 years, with the developer then able to sell the social housing apartments into the private market for maximum profit at the end of the tenure. I will now hand over to Cr Evans, who will continue our presentation.

**Cr EVANS** — Good morning. My name is Laurence Evans. I am here to represent the people of Bayside as the mayor of the City of Bayside council. Thank you very much for the opportunity to present this morning. I would probably like to start by saying that Bayside City Council supports the provision of public housing and that we have committed to advocating for improved social housing in Bayside in our new council plan. The New Street development is the first development proposed in our municipality during the term of this current council, and the redevelopment of New Street, Brighton, is an opportunity to deliver a fit-for-purpose and much-needed social housing dwelling in a location with very, very strong local amenities. Importantly it is an opportunity to provide housing choice and affordability in accordance with the government's broader strategic aims. I am here to tell you this morning that this current proposal fails to go even part of the way in realising these opportunities. My message is that while there is a need to upgrade this site, the state government can and should do better. I repeat that: they can and should do better.

The New Street site is located only 100 metres from Elsternwick Primary School. It is close to preschools, maternal and child health centres, playgrounds and the open space of Elsternwick Park, so it is an ideal place for

families. However, under the current proposal not only is there a minuscule increase in the number of apartments at this site, but in real terms it results in about a 32 per cent reduction in the number of bedrooms provided by social housing. This means that while there is a tiny increase in the number of apartments, there is actually a net decrease in the number of people that these apartments can house. The buildings in the site currently contain 76 three-bedroom apartments, and the new buildings will only provide seven. We are talking about families. We are talking about 76 three-bedrooms and the new buildings only providing seven. We think that is important to note.

The families who have grown up and continue to grow up in these apartments have done a fantastic job in integrating themselves in our community. The fact of this integration is a key finding of the recent social housing renewal standing advisory committee hearing to examine the amendment C157 development. It should be noted that over 30 local community members or groups presented at this hearing. All of them supported social housing at this site and the need for more social housing and spoke of the location's strong suitability for the provision of family accommodation. I am hitting on family accommodation. This means that not only is the New Street public housing renewal scheme failing to address the appalling high waiting list for public housing at this site, but it is a site for young families who miss out. It is a young family crisis that we are talking about. The rushed process has resulted in a cookie-cutter design response that does not reflect the state government's own local planning conditions or the broader context in which this development occurs. The government can and should do better. That is the message we are getting across: it can and should do better.

No policy or analysis to justify this model and the impact of selling public land with subsequent local amenity has occurred. Councils are required to prepare strategies that meet forecasted population projections based on an assessment of supply and demand and an assessment of social and economic benefit. These strategies look into the future rather than being blindsided by short-term economic need such as we are currently seeing through the proposed redevelopment of the New Street site. The government should be acting as a strategic leader in this place, not calling on the Minister for Planning to act as a quasi-land broker on the majority private housing development. We strongly question the government's intent in stripping council of its planning authority just to fast-track a development that will see construction of 170 private apartments and result in a net 32 per cent reduction in the number of bedrooms provided through social housing. Better developments are possible.

In its own experience — in our experience — in 2015 Bayside City Council worked with a not-for-profit developer, Mecwacare to facilitate a redevelopment of the former council's own social housing facility, which resulted in a 120 per cent increase in housing — that is, it went from 10 to 27 in the amount of social housing provided at this site. The message here is find the right developer, not the one that yields the most profit but the one that returns the best social return for the community. On behalf of the people of Bayside I urge the government to stop and undertake appropriate strategic work to ensure that the redevelopment of the New Street site does not let this once in a generation slip through its hands.

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — My name is Steve Stefanopoulos. I am the mayor of the City of Stonnington and I represent south ward, and the estate that I will be talking to you about is actually in my ward. My ward covers Prahran, Windsor, Armadale and Malvern, and I am a resident in that area too.

Just so that you understand, the City of Stonnington is not, as many would perceive it to be, quite a wealthy municipality. We have a unique balance. We have one of the lowest socio-economic groups of people in Victoria living in Stonnington, as well as one of the highest in the City of Stonnington. So we have a huge breadth of population. We have about 40.8 per cent of our residents who rent privately, and 3 per cent live in social housing, so that is 46 per cent of our residents are purchasing a home at the moment. So we are not what you may think of as a wealthy municipality. We have a very disparate and widely diverse community.

We have an estate in Prahran that is quite large in area, and in that it is rated as the 0.3 to 4.5 per cent of the lowest socio-economic index in the state of Victoria. We have a number of people who live in these estates who are in desperate need of support by the City of Stonnington, and also by the state government of Victoria. As we always advocate for in local government, and as my colleagues would say, we are the closest level of government to these people. We see them every day. We hear from them every day. They will approach us in the supermarket, down the street or at a sporting field. They will engage with us on a day-to-day basis, so we feel we are the strongest ones here to advocate on their behalf.

As we know, the City of Stonnington is an inner-city municipality, and land in the inner city is very, very expensive. Population growth is exceeding our demand and affordability will continue to decline. There is no

way in hell that if I had a son or daughter would they be able to afford to buy a house in this municipality today, or in 10 or in 20 years if they were not earning anything over \$200 000 a year, so we need to get a reality here.

We have a site in Bangs Street in Prahran that is over 950 000 square metres, and we estimate that that land value is about \$70 million, and that is a conservative estimate. When we take the entire public housing estates in Prahran and South Yarra we estimate that value to be close to between \$250 million and \$300 million land value. That is land that the state government, that you, that I and that all of the people of Victoria own. It is not owned by an institution, it is not owned privately, we own it. There are no opportunities — none — that the state government nor the council could buy such land in the inner-city ever again. It was accumulated in the 1950s and 1960s, including by force in some instances in the City of Stonnington, by ‘slum removal’, and I use those words as they were used at the time. There is no way in hell that we would be able to do that today.

We have a great inner-city location close to a brand-new high school that is being built at the moment by this state government in Prahran, and we have amazing services and a great opportunity for job development. The entire Chapel Street–Toorak Road precinct is the largest retail activity precinct outside of the CBD. That is the largest of any activity centre outside of the CBD, with a huge volume of retail, commercial and business activity functions that could be supplemented by people living in this estate.

We want to maximise and create additional public housing in this area and not decrease it. We have a once in a generation opportunity to do this in partnership with the state government. We want the short-sightedness of this decision by the state government to progress the redevelopment of the site to be put on hold. We do not want privatisation by stealth, nor do we want profit before people.

But let us get real about the public housing crisis in Victoria. Our research tells us that there are over 1800 social and public housing dwellings in Stonnington. One hundred and seventy-eight dwellings will be brought online as part of this current renewal process. So we have 1800 social housing dwellings currently. The estimated requirement by 2022 — that is in five years — needs to be over 2500. That is a shortfall of over 500 dwellings within five years; that is not acceptable.

We are giving inner city land to a developer in perpetuity; we will never get this land again. We need to ask will this program improve and make the situation better or worse? We — the three of us here — see that it will make it worse. There will not be a net increase in bedrooms. Whatever you say about dwellings, it is not about dwelling numbers, it is about bedrooms. If we remove the number of bedrooms on these sites and decrease the number of bedrooms as has been proposed, fewer people will live here.

In Stonnington the Bangs Street estate, which is the one that is up for renewal at the moment, was built in the 1970s and has about 120 public housing dwellings: 40 one-bedroom dwellings and 80 three-bedroom dwellings. What is proposed is a net decrease in three-bedroom and two-bedroom apartments. So families, be they mums, dads, older children, kids, grandma and grandpa — that family unit — whatever that configuration will be or is, is not going to have any opportunity, or very minimal opportunity, to live in this precinct.

So what are we going to do? Perpetuate the activities centre that is known for having young people, younger than me, living here — is that all we are going to do? Do we not want families living in this precinct? We are living in la-la land here. We do have families living throughout this precinct. We have families living in apartments — two-bedroom, three-bedroom apartments, that are brand-new, that are privately owned. We have families living in larger homes in this area that walk to this precinct. The government is now saying we do not want families living in this precinct, and we do not want families who are disadvantaged to live here, although in reality they do live there.

Public housing will only form about 29 per cent of the total mix, which is about 2.6 per cent of new dwellings that are going to be part of the private-public housing social mix, and 98 per cent are going to be part of the redevelopment into private dwellings. That is 2.6 per cent in our hands, in Victorians’ hands, and 98 per cent we are going to lose control of. The overall number of persons accommodated in public housing will be reduced due to the loss of three-bedroom units and family-sized units. We will lose 63 bedrooms; that is a pure number. The configuration, as I said, will mean a loss of a number of families, and we are not going to see an increase in the number of bedrooms on the entire housing estate. There are four housing estates. We have been told we will not see any increase in bedroom numbers at all.

So let us go back to planning for a minute here. We are known as a leading municipality in terms of planning. We have engaged with the state government. We are encouraging the state government to work with us. We always have been. We have developed *Chapel reVision*. It was a large document that went out for consultation on numerous occasions over the last number of years — two, three, four years. It recognises the importance of social housing. It says it in our documentation. We have had discussions with the state government about it. However, there is significant disconnect between council's adopted *Chapel reVision* and the preliminary plans for the Bangs Street estate, especially inconsistencies on the built form and the amenity aspects. The proposed heights are grossly excessive and out of character for the area.

The adopted and government approved plan — this has been approved by the government — allows for five storeys. Yet — throw it to us — 12. We asked for five. They said, 'Yes' — ticked it off on the planning scheme — but we will come back to you with a proposal for 12'. That is what a developer does, not what a government agency does and not what a government does. We played ball. You ticked it off, threw it back at us: 'We will approve it, okay'. But then you come back to us with a proposal that is 12 storeys. We have residential private dwellings across the street, literally across the street, that are single dwelling. Can I say to you: would you want to be living opposite a dwelling that is 12 storeys when the planning scheme allows for five? That is ridiculous, in my opinion.

The city is committed to taking on this additional residential housing. We do not trust the government in terms of this, because there is a wonderful building — and I use that word very, very loosely — on the corner of Surrey Road and Malvern Road, opposite Joel's auction house. It is smack bang on the street frontage, rising at about 12 storeys, bang on the street — no setback, no nothing. That is what we are afraid of. If you think those lovely, ugly, wonderful towers built in the 1950s, 60s and 70s by the government are ugly, come and see this monster. It is elevated off the road. There is no activation on the street. It is pure concrete ugliness. We think, and my collective councillors in the City of Stonnington think, it is the worst building in the City of Stonnington by far. No private developer has built anything like that, nor would they be allowed to do so, because there are setback requirements in the planning scheme that the state government has implemented across the state that we all have to meet. Yet they went in and built it up on the street, and it is an abomination on that site.

So we want to be involved in the process. We have been involved in the process. We have given the state government *Chapel reVision*. They took their time to approve it. Okay, it has now been approved. We are happy to work with that, but we want to be the responsible authority. Do not take away us as the local authority to make planning decisions. We have been constantly doing that. Look at the developments that we have approved in Forrest Hill, in Chapel Street North. We are not afraid of development, but we want appropriate development, and we do not want our rights and our residents' rights removed from us. We want to become the responsible authority — yes, become — because we are not at the moment. The City of Stonnington has lost that.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much for your submissions this morning. I might throw it open to questions now.

**Cr ROSS** — Sorry, if I could just speak to you about Bills Street in particular?

**Ms CROZIER** — We have got questions.

**Cr ROSS** — I will just briefly talk about Bills Street. I will just highlight a few things. We are highly concerned about the inadequate amount of public housing which is being proposed on this site; the sale of public land to private developers, which is really just to fund a tiny increase in public housing; and the failure to deliver high-quality demands. One particular point which I do want to raise is that this land was sold and gifted to the state by the former City of Hawthorn for the purpose of housing vulnerable people. The provision of mainly one and two-bedroom apartments as part of the redevelopment lacks future planning by the Victorian government. We know that in Boroondara there is a significant demand for public housing by single elderly women, and this will continue as a growing issue in an affluent suburb like Hawthorn because they are being priced out of the private rental market. Accommodation for this cohort needs to be acknowledged as does the regular role that they would have as carers for the children and their children's children.

With this particular site, again, part of it was gifted for single women and the other part was sold for accommodation for the elderly. The legacy of this gift should be honoured. Public land should not be sold for private gain, especially this public land which was actually given by the former City of Hawthorn. What we

would like to know is who is it in this government that has decided that these projects need to be cost neutral to the Victorian taxpayer? I do not remember it as being an election issue or an election promise. I am not sure where that mandate comes from. What we are concerned about is the permanent loss of public land for private housing, because once this land is sold it will be gone forever.

Again we are very concerned about the transparency model and the lack of public consultation that there has been with Bills Street, with people not knowing about it — the local stakeholders and the local schools do not know about it. We are very concerned about the design that has been proposed. It is something which is not design driven; it is yield driven. Coming up with a 12-storey proposal for Bills Street as against what is currently a one and two-storey development and which is surrounded by one and two-story developments is not an appropriate response to this particular site. Really what the government is doing is looking at the yield rather than looking at the designs.

**The CHAIR** — I think we might need to move on now to questions, but the committee was aware that one of the sites has a history in terms of being gifted specifically for public housing. If there is some documentation on that front that the council could provide regarding the terms of the gifting and so on and what the framework has been for that site since then, it would be really useful if that could be forwarded.

**Ms SYMES** — I might start with Cr Ross. Just following on from the comments that you were making around support for single, older women, I am not quite sure why you think that single women are not being supported in the program; it is part of the aims of the program.

**Cr ROSS** — I made a particular point of that because the City of Hawthorn had the foresight to actually give the land for single women. We know in the City of Boroondara that we actually do have an issue of homelessness amongst older women, so we want to make sure that that particular cohort is catered for.

**Ms SYMES** — I understand that. My question was: why do you think they are not when it is part of the aims of the renewal program?

**Cr ROSS** — I have not seen any evidence to show that it is.

**Ms SYMES** — Right. On that I guess what I found a little bit surprising from the joint presentations today was that in one breath you want families and then in another breath you want smaller units. I was a little bit confused as to how you reconcile those two views.

**Cr ROSS** — Quite simply, if you are an older woman who has caring responsibilities, you are going to have caring responsibilities for your children's children, and they will be staying with you.

**Ms SYMES** — So are you advocating for small units for single women or large family homes for single women?

**Cr ROSS** — If you are a grandmother with caring responsibilities, you will have your grandchildren stay with you. It will be impossible for you to have your grandchildren stay with you in a one-bedroom place, so they would have the need for having more than just one bedroom.

**Ms SYMES** — So two bedrooms is something you are —

**Cr ROSS** — It is, but we live in a family area as well, so what we are concerned about is that the focus seems to be on one and two-bedroom apartments. As the mayor of Bayside spoke very eloquently on the number of families that are needed in Bayside, we do need to accommodate families and we do need to accommodate single people, but do not think that single people need just a single bedroom.

**Ms SYMES** — No, I do not. I stayed with my grandmother plenty of times when I was little. I was just seeking clarification on your comments; that was all.

**Cr ROSS** — The comments would be that we know we are having a growing problem of homelessness amongst single, older women, but do not think that they can only be accommodated in single, one-bedroom apartments; they need to have more than that.

**Ms SYMES** — Can I just clarify: is there support for a mix of private and public housing at all?



**Cr EVANS** — If you are asking me, from the City of Bayside's point of view the 10 per cent is very inadequate. We are seeking 50 per cent public to private. We see that the government can do better. Part of it is trying to pick who you do it with. We are interested in a social outcome rather than a yield outcome. I reckon it is just a matter of doing better.

**Ms SYMES** — Was that the same as the other witnesses? I could not quite determine. You have made yourself clear. You are concerned about selling off. Both Cr Stefanopoulos and Cr Ross seemed concerned about private apartments in a mix with social and public, at all? Is my understanding of the presentations today correct?

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — The issue really is we own it, you own it, I own it. I do not want to sell it off and not provide sufficient housing for what is on the site now, let alone what is projected in the future by this government.

**Ms SYMES** — No, I was asking if you were supportive of a mixture on a housing estate.

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — My answer is: if the state government cannot accommodate the current residential dwellings on the site and adds private dwellings, then that is not appropriate; and if it cannot accommodate what the future projections are for residential social housing on the site and it sells the land off, that is not appropriate either. Does that make sense?

**Ms SYMES** — Yes. You have not really answered my question. I understand what you are saying; it is not the question I asked, though.

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — If the government is going to sell off land and not provide sufficient housing for its current stock, then the answer is no.

**The CHAIR** — I think we might need to move on, because we have others who need to ask questions.

**Ms SPRINGLE** — Can I just have a point of clarification on that? You talked about 50-50, but this is a 10 per cent uplift — it is not just 10 per cent of the estate — so my understanding is that some of it will end up being more than 50-50. Are you talking about a 50 per cent increase on this?

**Cr EVANS** — If you are asking Bayside —

**Ms SPRINGLE** — Yes, I am.

**Cr EVANS** — We are concerned immensely about the families. We are only catering from 76 to the new of seven. That is important to us. The other things that are important to us are the nine storeys as against three in our planning scheme; that is very important to us. We are quite comfortable with private-public development — no problems whatsoever about that — but again it is the uplift that we are after. Is that —

**Ms SPRINGLE** — Sort of. My next question really leads on from that. What would need to change about this program for you to support it?

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — We need to become the responsible authority.

**Ms SPRINGLE** — That is it?

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — And do not sell off the land — easy. Once you sell land off — if I go back to Jeffrey Kennett, he sold off housing, sold off schools. Come to Stonnington —

**Ms CROZIER** — The state was broke.

**The CHAIR** — Let us not start this one.

**Ms SPRINGLE** — Let us talk about what is before us today, not what has happened in the past, because we could talk about that all day, and let us not.

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — Okay. But if we do not learn from the past, we will not know what to do in the future. What I am saying is once you lose land and it is out of your control, you cannot buy this type of land in

Stonnington. It is \$70 million for this one estate. The entire estates would be worth over \$300 million. There is no way a government would be able to afford to buy it or justify it to its constituents.

**Ms SPRINGLE** — Is that the same response for both of the other —

**Cr ROSS** — We would say that you have got to stop the sale of public housing land for private gain and that we as a council, especially given the history of Bills Street, would like the whole site to be public housing. We do think that the development needs to be design led, not yield led. We should remain the responsible authority. You should stick to the planning scheme that the Minister for Planning only put in place in March of this year, which put a three-storey height limit on it, and yet we are now getting a proposal for 12 storeys.

We need to also make sure that the apartments created remain state-owned public housing in perpetuity, that they do not end up being sold off in the future. These are prime sites in an inner-city area. This is where our vulnerable people have their support networks. This is the area that has got easy transport for people getting to the city. Do not push them out into the outer suburbs. They live here. They live in our municipalities and they belong in our municipalities. We do not want to become a monolithic type of society. We are richer by having diversity. We want to have public housing, and as far as we are concerned it should all be public housing. There is very, very little land that we have that is public housing. We have lost so much of it. We have lost so many of our rooming houses. We really want to keep this as public housing.

**Ms CROZIER** — Thank you to the three of you for your very passionate presentations this morning. You mentioned homelessness, and I would like an understanding of what the current numbers of homeless are in each of your municipalities as you understand it today.

**Cr ROSS** — I know the last set of published figures that we had from the 2011 census showed that we had, I think, 385 people that put themselves down as being homeless, but we know from our own work that we do that that number has increased because we are getting more and more demand.

**Ms CROZIER** — So what is that number?

**Cr ROSS** — We are getting more and more demand. We would not necessarily be able to put a figure on it. I am sure our team might be able to come and give you something more than that, but we know that the demand has gone up. We are getting more and more calls dealing with people that are homeless.

**Ms CROZIER** — That would be interesting for all three municipalities in terms of just getting an understanding of the trend.

**Cr EVANS** — I do not know.

**Ms CROZIER** — But I think that is an issue. Cr Ross, there has been quite a public issue with the Markham estate and the fact that the government did not provide the necessary consultation to that community in relation to that particular site. Has Boroondara council got a view of the government's consultation process in relation to that particular development?

**Cr ROSS** — That particular development is not one of the sites that you are looking at.

**Ms CROZIER** — Yes, it is.

**Cr ROSS** — We would say that the state government needs to follow the normal consultation processes of any planning application, which they do not seem to be doing. We did not get the detail of the Markham application until right at the very end. We have got no detail of the application for Bills Street. We have no idea what it is that is being proposed. These ones seem even worse, if you like, than Markham, because we actually have got nothing in writing. We have got no plans for what is being proposed. We have just got coloured bits of paper showing heights in particular areas.

**Ms CROZIER** — But where are those coloured bits of paper coming from?

**Cr ROSS** — From the department.

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — Yes, we are the same at Stonnington. We get blob maps with some figures on them, but we do not have any detail at all.

**Ms CROZIER** — So what is their rationale for providing you with that? What is the government's rationale for providing you with that?

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — I think you would have to ask the government that question.

**Ms CROZIER** — What have they said to you?

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — That is all they have been giving us.

**Cr ROSS** — That was part of the community consultation. The community received that before we did, or at the same time, and part of that was little coloured blobs with heights in particular areas, not detailing what the private-public breakdown would be. It was saying, 'Up to 400 apartments in Bills Street' and not allowing any forthright discussion. I went to a meeting with stakeholders and there was one other stakeholder there. The local schools had no idea that this was being proposed. The consultation has been very scant and the details even more scant.

**Ms CROZIER** — I know there are other questions and we are fast running out of time, so can I say I think those planning issues for school and amenity are very important in terms of what everybody is suggesting. Markham estate is part of our inquiry, just so you know.

**Cr ROSS** — I am sorry, I did not know.

**Ms CROZIER** — It is very much a part of it. We have had evidence from the local action group there and heard those concerns, so that is why I asked you that question. I have got many more questions, but I know others do too.

**Ms PATTEN** — Thank you for the evidence. I just have one question, and it is about that social housing development you spoke about in Bayside, where you were able to double the number of dwellings. It seems that that has not been possible in any of the developments that we are looking at. Could you tell us a little bit more about that?

**Cr EVANS** — I can tell you a lot about it. I stood for council in 2012 because I was disappointed in the previous council getting rid of our aged-care facilities, selling off our community's facilities. There was a site in Sandringham Road where the council did sell off the site, but it sold it to what I call the next best thing to a council — that is, a not-for-profit organisation, which was Mecwacare. Mecwacare bought it. They are a very good organisation, and they built up from something like 10 to 27. That was in aged care, so what we would say is 'choose your developer'. Make sure that the developer is somebody that is socially aware, now Mecwacare were a not-for-profit and socially aware, so it is a very good example of giving a social problem to people that have a social conscience, and Mecwacare does.

**Ms PATTEN** — Do you think the government may be being a tad too generous to the developers when they are selling this land to them?

**Cr EVANS** — I think that is probably the message we are giving.

**The CHAIR** — Cr Evans, I just had a question as well in relation to the New Street site. I went to one of the community consultations about that site, which I note was held within driving distance from the estate, which made it difficult for many people to go, but there was no suggestion then — and that was only a couple months ago — that people would be asked to move out imminently. Can you update us on where things are at with tenants on that site as to their moving out?

**Cr EVANS** — I do not know. I am not sure about that.

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — I can tell you about the Bangs Street site.

**The CHAIR** — Okay.

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — They will be vacant within a couple of weeks.

**Ms CROZIER** — Where are they going?

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — I do not know.

**Ms CROZIER** — Do they know where they are going?

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — They have been moved, yes. They have been moved to other social housing that the government owns within the state, but by the end of December, we were told, it will be vacant. I would suspect by the new year there will be demolition happening at that estate.

**The CHAIR** — When did the moving out start?

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — I think it happened about a month ago. Yes.

**The CHAIR** — But, as I understand it, there is nothing beyond concept plans of what the new development will look like, so what is the hurry?

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — Correct. Good question.

**Cr EVANS** — I think that is the message we are getting across: what is the hurry?

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — Okay. I think we may have to close here, but Ms Crozier asked a question.

**Ms CROZIER** — I think it is very obvious to the committee that there is little —

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — Detail?

**Ms CROZIER** — detail, and also that you are not being brought along in this process. Is that a fair assumption that I am making?

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — Yes.

**Cr ROSS** — I am happy to leave you the community consultation paper for Bills Street, just showing the blobs.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. That would be great.

**Cr ROSS** — So you can see what that maps.

**Ms CROZIER** — Coloured bits of paper.

**Cr ROSS** — Yes, literally.

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — Coloured bits of paper — that is it.

**The CHAIR** — Ms Crozier asked earlier about the numbers of homeless people within your municipalities, I think the question was. If you are able to come back to us on that for each of your respective municipalities, that would be appreciated.

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — Yes, we will do that.

**Ms SPRINGLE** — Is there any way of getting a breakdown of numbers on the public housing list per municipality?

**Cr EVANS** — Yes, we can get that for you.

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — I think so.

**Ms SPRINGLE** — Could you?

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — We will try our best.

**Cr ROSS** — One of things that I was going to say in my presentation was about the numbers in our region. We cover all of Boroondara, and the Box Hill region waiting list is 1724, so that is Boroondara and some suburbs in Manningham and Whitehorse.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. On that note if you were able to provide us with the further information that has been requested, we would very much appreciate that. We do need to finish now. Thank you very much for your time and for the information you have provided. You will be provided with a draft transcript of today's proceedings for your review within a few weeks.

**Cr STEFANOPOULOS** — Thank you.

**Witnesses withdrew.**