

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Budget estimates 2020-21 (Leane)

Melbourne—Friday, 18 December 2020

MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mr Danny O’Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

Ms Bridget Vallenge

WITNESSES

Mr Shaun Leane, MLC, Minister for Suburban Development,

Mr Simon Phemister, Secretary,

Ms Emily Phillips, Deputy Secretary, Local Government and Suburban Development, and

Ms Sara Harbidge, Executive Director, Office for Suburban Development, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions.

The CHAIR: Welcome back, Minister Leane, this time for consideration of the suburban development portfolio. We again invite you to make a 5-minute presentation, and this will be followed by questions from the committee.

Visual presentation.

Mr LEANE: Thank you, Chair. The suburban development portfolio plays a key role in connecting the community with government to deliver on shared priorities. It acts as a bridge between government and suburban communities to help communities understand what government is doing and support government and independent advisory bodies to deliver community feedback and advice to the heart of government. It does this in three ways: by engaging to understand communities' priorities, delivering programs and grants, coordinating stakeholders and leveraging contributions to achieve common goals. In recent times the portfolio has taken a lead role in working with suburban communities to understand the impacts of the coronavirus and their priorities in the recovery.

The 2020–21 state budget builds on the portfolio's success in partnering with communities and stakeholders to revitalise suburbs and neighbourhoods. This is even more important as Melbourne's suburbs recover from the impact of the coronavirus. The budget does this by providing funding for suburban revitalisation and the work of the metropolitan partnerships, including \$20.2 million for suburban revitalisation and growth and \$3.1 million to extend the metropolitan partnerships. This investment is in addition to other funding announced throughout the year, including \$9.4 million for the suburban revitalisation, as part of the Building Works stimulus package and the \$1.3 million for the Let's Stay Connected Fund, which has been funded through departmental reprioritisation.

Through the 2020–21 state budget we are investing \$20.2 million in the revitalisation of Melbourne's suburbs. This is an important program which will support the community-led economic and social recovery of our suburbs. This \$20.2 million program will provide support for the ongoing revitalisation of Frankston and Broadmeadows; the revitalisation of Boronia, Lilydale, Noble Park, Reservoir, Tarneit and Melton town centres; and improvements to the Altona seawall to protect and improve community access to the open space at Altona Beach.

Our \$3.1 million investment in the metropolitan partnerships will ensure that local voices are heard and are informing government decision-making. The metropolitan partnerships have a key role to play in community-led economic and social recovery across Melbourne. They are engaging with local businesses and communities to share on-ground insights on COVID-19 impacts in their local areas and have an important role in delivering place-based engagement for COVID-19 recovery planning.

The metropolitan partnerships investment will enable the partnerships to continue their work through 2020. The partnerships have successfully engaged with over 800 Melburnians, focusing on local COVID-19 impacts and of course recovery. Hosting recovery round tables brings together partnership members and key local stakeholders focused on regional recovery opportunities and working with local communities to identify community priorities for economic and social recovery.

Through the state budget the government has listened to the partnerships and responded with initiatives that we all would well know—the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build, \$860 million for mental health, \$34 million for economic recovery for multicultural communities and young people, \$6.7 million to address social connection

across the generations, \$1 billion for TAFE and training and \$58 million to expand opportunities for apprentices and trainees.

The Let's Stay Connected Fund is another example of how we have listened to and acted on the priorities of the metropolitan partnerships. This funding has helped people overcome loneliness and social isolation to stay connected with their communities during the coronavirus and beyond.

The CHAIR: Forty seconds, if you want to use that.

Mr LEANE: Okay. Can I reiterate that the \$20.2 million investment in suburban development builds on the expansion of the suburban revitalisation program during 2020, building on the success of the Frankston and Broadmeadows revitalisation boards. Of course those boards are well led and well chaired by Mr Edbrooke and Mr Frank McGuire. As part of the building stimulus work package, the government announced \$9.4 million for suburban revitalisation across Melbourne. This includes the very popular \$3 million neighbourhood—

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Ms Pauline Richards, MP.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister. Thank you again, to the officials. Like so many people I love suburban revitalisation, so this is an opportunity to go through this really interesting and important area. I would like to take you to budget paper 3 page 84 and the allocation of \$20.2 million. How will this recent budget investment support suburban revitalisation and growth in our suburbs?

Mr LEANE: Thank you for the question again, Ms Richards. The suburban revitalisation program supports economic and social renewal of key metropolitan activity centres across Melbourne by establishing locally led suburban revitalisation boards. The revitalisation boards are designed to address local disadvantage and develop projects that encourage local employment and business investment and create more livable suburban activity centres. The 2020–21 Victorian budget includes a further \$20.2 million over two years for suburban revitalisation and growth, including \$3.6 million in ongoing support for the existing Broadmeadows and Frankston revitalisation projects and \$12 million over two years to deliver infrastructure and projects for the six new suburban revitalisation sites, which include Boronia, Lilydale, Noble Park, Reservoir, Tarneit and Melbourne. Projects which may be funded include local infrastructure upgrades, local business improvements, place-making and activation initiatives, such as improvements to attract people to these places. And also investment into the social programs to support vulnerable people, as we know, is very important, and it is very important to target these sorts of activities in these particular locations.

Also in this is an additional \$9.4 million investment in suburban revitalisation, announced as part of the \$2.7 billion work packages on the 18 May 2020. I think that I have mentioned the new revitalisation boards, which will do great work, and I have had conversations with a number of people that are really excited about that. I was actually in Melton only yesterday—the days seem very long lately, but it was only yesterday—and I spoke to a number of local councillors there. They have already enacted part of their plan around their revitalisation. It is great; they have already put in some money and earmarked some money for an old courthouse there. They want to transform and reinvigorate a beautiful old building, and they want to get some hospitality in there. And it is right in the centre of their own civic hub. I know Steve McGhie, the Member for Melton, is really keen to get his teeth into this particular revitalisation. I also visited Boronia, and Jackson Taylor, who is going to chair that particular revitalisation board—you would not be surprised—is all over it.

Mr RIORDAN: We would be surprised!

Mr LEANE: They have already earmarked some projects that he is pretty keen to get into as far as revitalising that particular area is concerned. I think the proof is there. There are a couple of boards that have already been established for a while. Broadmeadows—you can see the investment that the board has worked towards to get into Broadmeadows. I think if there is ever proof of a revitalisation board's value, it is the transformation of Frankston. A trip to Frankston and having a look at the streetscape and the facilities and what has been advocated by that board—you know, the TAFE, the hospital. Frankston is just a fantastic suburb where people want to visit and want to live. And I think that is what this is all about.

Ms RICHARDS: So how and where will these suburban revitalisation boards support suburban renewal efforts in Melbourne? You know, it is great to hear about those ones, but we are interested as well in getting some evidence on how that actually works.

Mr LEANE: Thank you for the question. Look, initially, as I mentioned, there was already work done on the new boards that were announced only a number of weeks ago. I think in Boronia the first project will be the streetscape improvement, including public lighting in Lupton Way, which I was lucky enough to visit with the Member for Bayswater only last week. Meantime, a mural will be installed at the Tarneit Gardens Shopping Centre to improve visual appeal and complement place-making initiatives in the area. In Reservoir a laneway and streetscape upgrade will enhance pedestrian connections in the activity centre.

In Noble Park works will kick off for upgrades to the all-abilities playground. The playground provides an inclusive outdoor experience for a diverse range of children, youth and adults of all ages and, most importantly, all abilities. In Lilydale initial works have started with the Lilydale community garden project located on Main Street. The community garden will include a new vegetable garden, fruit trees, seeding, a workbench, a storage area, water supply and public art. In Melton upgrades will be undertaken to the cafe facility. I think I spoke about that before. It is a former historic courthouse. The upgrade will include outdoor dining adjacent to the Melton amphitheatre.

I think these are the sorts of important works that are coming out of the revitalisation board. I think that this is a great indication about what suburban development is all about. It is pulling people together. I have got to say that I really want to acknowledge the members of these boards. They are high-level people from a lot of different sectors that are prepared to volunteer their time, and they care enough about their area, their local suburb, to give up a lot of time to add their expertise, their local insight, their passion, to advise the state government on their priorities, and that is the way it should be. It should be from the suburbs up to the state government, not the state government deciding what might be good for them. So, as I said, I think these boards are a perfect example of what suburban development is all about.

Ms RICHARDS: Just in the short time I have got left I am interested in understanding a little bit more about the benefits of the neighbourhood activity centre renewal program and what that program is and how it benefits the local community, and I will reference budget paper 3, page 84.

Mr LEANE: Yes, thank you for the question. ‘Neighbourhood activity centres’ I think is a fancy name for local shopping strips, and I think, as we know, the local shopping strips became very important in recent months. I think we all got to know our local shopping strips very well. This is a program where we have rolled out \$3 million from the Neighbourhood Activity Centre Renewal Fund. Applications were opened up for the 31 local councils that fall inside the metropolitan area and also the Mitchell shire as well for up to \$100 000 per project. Project applications were received from all of those councils which were eligible, which is fantastic. This fund supported a broad range of activities, improving pedestrian safety, pop-up parks and shops, and streetscape improvements. Also, the good thing about these projects is they provide work for local tradespeople and suppliers, and the nature of—

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Ms Bridget Vallence, MP.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and department, for appearing today. Secretary, first up to you—you are not going to get away without answering something this afternoon. Budget paper 3, page 267 demonstrates a \$33 million increase for the local government and suburban development portfolios, so nearly \$179 million for both. Can you please provide a breakdown of that figure for the suburban development portfolio and obviously the local government portfolio?

Mr PHEMISTER: I absolutely can. So are you looking for a staffing breakdown and then program by program?

Ms VALLENCE: Yes. So of the nearly \$179 million, how much is for suburban development and therefore how much is for local government—and also an FTE.

Mr LEANE: Can I ask, Chair—and forgive my confusion if I am confused, but these are two different portfolios. We have just been through the local government portfolio, and I think there could have been an opportunity for this particular breakdown. I mean, we are not fussed either way, and of course I would have been happy to respond to a breakdown in the suburban development portfolio, the portfolio we are currently discussing. I am more than happy to actually hand over to the Secretary to ably do that as well. But I kind of—

Ms VALLENCE: Minister, I would have liked to ask it, but we ran out of time in the last section.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Ms Vallence, the minister is seeking a clarification in relation to the question. I would remind the member that the questions do need to be relevant to the portfolio that we are currently considering.

Ms VALLENCE: Yes. So page 267 of budget paper 3 has local government and suburban development all in one title. So in one output, on the bottom of page 267, it has it at \$178.6 million, and I am just asking: of the \$178.6 million how much of that is suburban development?

Mr LEANE: Chair, I appreciate Ms Vallence—

Ms VALLENCE: I would have thought it was a fairly simple question.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, could you—

Mr LEANE: It is a fairly simple question, and I—

Ms VALLENCE: And also how many FTE?

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, could you stop interrupting, please, so that we can clarify the situation?

Ms VALLENCE: Protection coming out again.

Mr LEANE: It is not protection at all. I think that this is one we are more than happy to take on notice. I think it is—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Well, the Secretary said he can do it.

Ms VALLENCE: The Secretary straight up said he had that available. Are you trying to hide that, Minister?

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, Mr O'Brien, could you allow the minister the opportunity to explain?

Ms VALLENCE: I am just surprised that this would be something that would not be a fairly simple question.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, I am not surprised that you are not allowing the minister the opportunity to answer the question and to seek the clarifications necessary, because you have not allowed anyone to do that for the duration of most of these hearings. But if the minister could be afforded that opportunity—

Ms VALLENCE: Chair, I reject that entirely. I asked a question to the Secretary, and he immediately said, 'Yes, I can provide that' before the minister started talking over him.

Mr RIORDAN: And then we have proceeded to chew up minutes of time.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, you have not been given the call. Minister?

Mr LEANE: I am happy to, and I think it is best to start with suburban development, given that is the portfolio that we are currently discussing. I am happy to give the breakdown of the programs in the budget in suburban development. So there is \$3 million for the new suburban revitalisation projects at Lilydale, Boronia, Noble Park, Reservoir, Tarneit and Melton. There is—

Ms VALLENCE: Minister, the question was: of the \$178.6 million—I am not asking for a breakdown; I am just asking aggregate—how much of that \$178.6 million is for the suburban development portfolio? Just one number.

Mr LEANE: Well, I am happy for you to be supplied the one number, but I kind of feel like will we compare the amount of money to every portfolio?

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, that is what we do in the budget estimates, Minister.

Mr RIORDAN: It is sort of what our job is.

Mr D O'BRIEN: It is sort of the job.

Mr RIORDAN: Sort of the job.

Ms VALLENCE: Is it, Minister, because this portfolio is meaningless that you cannot actually describe to this committee today how much money is in your portfolio?

Mr LEANE: I think that I am more than happy to—

Ms VALLENCE: As your colleagues say, as your colleagues describe this portfolio as meaningless, is it because you cannot tell us how much money this portfolio—

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence! Mr Riordan!

Mr LEANE: I would have actually hoped that we would all think suburban development is a really important thing.

Ms VALLENCE: So you reject the fact that your colleagues call it meaningless?

Mr LEANE: You will get that figure, but I need to take up that if you think that suburban development is not an important thing, then I kind of—

Ms VALLENCE: You are verballing me, Minister.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, could you—

Ms VALLENCE: Well, Chair, the minister is verballing me. It is his colleagues that think this is meaningless. He must think it is meaningless if he cannot describe how much money his portfolio has.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, you have put a proposition to the minister, and you need to allow the minister the opportunity to answer your proposition.

Ms VALLENCE: After 4 minutes he still cannot give me one figure—or 7 minutes.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, the minister cannot offer an explanation because you—

Mr LEANE: I do not think it is meaningless. I am actually a little bit sad that you might think it is meaningless, but I think that—

Ms VALLENCE: You are verballing me, Minister. I think that you know that.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence!

Mr LEANE: Listening to the community and taking their advice—

Ms VALLENCE: Well, I think the community would really like to know how much taxpayers dollars are going into this, because quite frankly, you as the minister do not know.

Mr LEANE: on what policies and what infrastructure they would like in their suburbs, I would have thought, is a very important thing for governments to do.

Mr RIORDAN: Mr Phemister said he knew.

Ms VALLENCE: Mr Phemister knows, and I know Mr Phemister is usually very helpful, but clearly the minister does not want to be.

Mr LEANE: I find it a little bit disappointing that you might think that way. You will get that figure. Look, I will hand over to—

Ms VALLENCE: You descend to being denigrating—

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, could you allow the minister an opportunity to answer your question and proposition, please.

Mr RIORDAN: He's had 6 minutes, and he can't tell us how much money he's got to spend in his portfolio.

The CHAIR: Well, I think Ms Vallence has continuously talked for 6 minutes.

Ms VALLENCE: You descend to being denigrating. Really maybe you do not like women asking you these questions. It is a simple number question. What is the number?

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, could you allow the minister—

Ms VALLENCE: What is the dollar value aggregate for your portfolio?

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, instead of repeating the same question—

Ms VALLENCE: We are at 6½ minutes, and you cannot even articulate the total dollar value for your portfolio.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, your rudeness is unbelievable.

Mr LEANE: Of the 6½ minutes, there is probably 3 minutes of you repeating the same question and getting—

The CHAIR: Yes, exactly.

Ms VALLENCE: Denigrating again.

Mr LEANE: I am not denigrating—

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, you do continuously repeat the same question time and time again without giving those opposite the opportunity to respond to them.

Mr RIORDAN: It's not that hard, Chair.

The CHAIR: No, it is not that hard to ask the question once and allow the person opposite the opportunity to answer it—unless you like the sound of your own voice.

Ms VALLENCE: Ten, nine, eight—

Mr LEANE: It is not that hard. I will get the Secretary—we will give it some extra time. Mr Secretary—

Ms VALLENCE: Mr Phemister, please bring some sense of—

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence! I am sorry, Mr Phemister. I am sorry, Minister, but the member has again wasted her time. The call is with Mr Sam Hibbins, MP.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Chair, a point of order.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Chair, on the question of relevance, I appreciate you did not have the question in front of you, but in the budget paper that Ms Vallence referred to on page 266 there an output for this department, for DJPR, that is 'Local Government and Suburban Development'—

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, there is no point of order. A point of order is not—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, can I just finish the point of order? I haven't finished my point of order.

The CHAIR: A point of order is not an opportunity to re-ask the member's question.

Ms VALLENCE: You haven't even heard what the point of order is.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence—

Mr D O'BRIEN: I said, 'on the question of relevance', which is the point of order, and spare me—you have told us off for two weeks now for interrupting people when they are trying to answer a question. Can I at least get this out? That was a very simple question. The budget papers have two separate portfolios listed under one output. The Secretary actually said at the start, 'I'm very happy to do that', and then we got this obfuscation and rubbish from the minister, who spent the whole—

Mr LEANE: I was trying to get there.

Mr D O'BRIEN: No, you weren't.

Mr LEANE: Yes, I was.

The CHAIR: Minister, please—

Mr D O'BRIEN: You said you wouldn't do it.

Mr LEANE: I was trying my best to get there—

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr LEANE: and I was constantly getting badgered—

Mr D O'BRIEN: No, no, that's not right.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien! Minister!

Mr LEANE: I am here to help, Mr O'Brien. I am here to help—

Mr D O'BRIEN: You don't even know your own numbers in your portfolios.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien!

Mr RIORDAN: In 7 minutes you could not give us one number.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan!

Mr LEANE: On the point of order, Mr Hibbins, would you mind if we eat into 10 seconds of your time for the Secretary to give this response?

Mr HIBBINS: I was actually going to ask the same question.

Mr LEANE: Okay, so can you help us all out and ask the same question?

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR: Okay. On the point of order, a point of order is not an opportunity to re-ask the same question. I will give the following member the opportunity, given he has indicated that he is going to ask the same question, and those opposite the opportunity to answer it. And perhaps with the Member for Prahran's slightly more intelligent interrogatory style, he may actually listen to an answer rather than speak over—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Did you listen to the answer?

The CHAIR: Well, I do not think anyone could hear the answer, because the Member for Evelyn continued to speak over him, as she had rudely done on so many occasions. So Mr Hibbins has the—

Ms VALLENCE: Were you just not rude by suggesting that I—

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, you do not have the call.

Ms VALLENCE: Were you just not rude then?

The CHAIR: No, I said that the Member for Prahran was intelligent in the way he questions.

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR: Mr Hibbins has the call.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Chair.

Members interjecting.

Mr HIBBINS: Secretary, what is the total output for the portfolio of suburban development?

Mr LEANE: Thank you for that question, Mr Hibbins.

Mr Riordan interjected.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, could you allow them to answer Mr Hibbins's questions.

Mr Riordan interjected.

The CHAIR: Deputy Chair, you do not have the call; Mr Hibbins does.

Mr LEANE: If you do not mind, I would like to pass that over to the Secretary.

Mr D O'BRIEN: We asked him. You are a clown.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien!

Mr PHEMISTER: Thanks, Mr Hibbins—two responses. Firstly, portfolio aggregates come in two forms: there is the portfolio breakdown of the \$176 million, and I have got that listed in 22 different outputs, and then I have a departmental base which I then assign to different parts of the portfolio. So the departmental output is the outputs that are measured in the budget, but in a different part of the budget papers I have a departmental base that also applies to all portfolios. I need to bring those two numbers together so I can give you a detailed staffing breakdown and the aggregate cost of salaries and on-costs, which do not appear as part of the \$176 million, and then I can give you a detailed breakdown of the \$176 million and the components of those that sit within the suburban development portfolio. So if are you happy with that, I can provide that detailed breakdown on notice.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Thank you.

Mr LEANE: I could have said that.

Mr D O'Brien interjected.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, Mr Hibbins has the call.

Mr LEANE: You never gave me a chance. You just started badgering me.

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien! Mr Riordan! Mr Hibbins has the call.

Mr HIBBINS: Within that breakdown, in the absence of knowing whether these were included or not, would it be possible to provide both the cost of the administering of the metropolitan partnerships and the total figure provided to the 20-minute neighbourhoods initiative?

Mr PHEMISTER: Mr Hibbins, on that, \$3.1 million is the answer to the first question because that is an explicit, called-out program. That is all administration, the \$3.1 million for the metro partnerships. For a detailed breakdown of your second question I will have to take it on notice. We will have to split apart staff who work across multiple programs, but I will do my best to deliver that on notice.

Mr HIBBINS: In the time remaining, Minister, on the 20-minute neighbourhoods, which have been described as a really significant part of *Plan Melbourne*, from what I can see from the suburban development portfolio it is around urban renewal and infrastructure. When you start calling it a 20-minute neighbourhood initiative how does that differ from any other urban renewal project that you are operating?

Mr LEANE: I suppose the answer to that, Mr Hibbins, is that, as I stated before, we are really relying on the metropolitan partnerships giving us advice and sharing their expertise and their actual local knowledge and passion, and I think you would probably be pleased that this is an outcome of a real advocacy for people who have had to travel around their neighbourhood without relying necessarily on their car. There has been a great advocacy for things like more bike lanes. There has been a great advocacy for I think some of the programs that I spoke to before around people having available to them the things that they need to enjoy their lives as far as good strip shopping centres that have the facilities and the types of shopping that they particularly want. I think in Melbourne good cafes and things like that are really part of it, as is access to, as I said before, a number of facilities—early learning centres and so forth. So there has been really strong advocacy from these groups that that is what they believe is the policy that our government should be embracing. I do not know if you have had a chance to read the metropolitan partnerships reports, the last ones, but I think that you would probably be pleased with some of the things that they have actually prioritised.

Mr HIBBINS: Terrific. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hibbins. That concludes the time we have available for consideration of the suburban development portfolio. The committee thanks you and your officials for appearing before the committee in this capacity today. We will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within 10 working days of the committee's request. We will now take a short break before moving with you to consideration of the veterans portfolio. I declare this hearing adjourned. Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.