

**Healesville Chamber of
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SUBMISSION

from the

Healesville Chamber of Commerce and Industry (HCCI)

to

The Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee of Parliament

Mr D.A. Nardella
Chairperson
The Outer Suburban/Interface Services
and Development Committee of Parliament
Level 3/ 157 Spring St
Melb VIC 3000

By Email: osisdc@parliament.vic.gov.au
cc: Hard copy by mail

28/09/06

Dear Mr Nardella,

Please accept the following submission as the Healesville Chamber of Commerce and Industry's initial registration of our key areas of interest within the terms of reference of this Inquiry.

We would be pleased to submit further and fuller support for the main issues raised; unfortunately this inquiry only came to our attention when two staff members of the Shire of Yarra Ranges happened to be attending our meeting last week.

As you would understand, this timing competes with the school holidays and several of our executive committee and other members are away during this time. We are confident the main topics presented are representative of the membership but we know this is not an exhaustive expression of those concerns.

If it was possible for the HCCI to present our issues more fully in another format, forum or face-to-face meeting, at a time convenient to your committee or their staff representatives, we would certainly welcome the opportunity.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Healesville Chamber of Commerce and Industry (HCCI) Issues

1. Local Government Economic Development Programs;

The Shire of Yarra Ranges published an Economic Development Strategy in May last year but have only appointed, within the last month or so, a manager to the overseeing role for its implementation. Consequently it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of any on-going strategy.

It needs to be remembered that this present Council is a relatively new organization as a result of prior amalgamations. Before this, with a small, consequently under-funded local Council, planning policies and procedures in the Healesville area did not always exemplify up-to-date outcomes.

In short, past economic development within this area would not consistently meet today's standards or expectations, and the new prospective framework is still in a conceptual, theoretical mode that may not hold the necessary pragmatics of commercial realities, or the effectiveness for complex community requirements.

Therefore, we would like to address the imperative nature of finding mechanisms to review the unfolding of economic development programs that will be reflective of standards and requirements across the whole State.

(While the regional shire and local groups, HCCI included, have an essential role to play, local/regional interest and expertise may not provide the full extent of the skills and knowledge available to resolve some of the pressing concerns posed within this area.

There is a broad repertoire of other case studies, development models and success stories that can enhance the progress in this area. It is important that review, over time, has included this level of comparative analysis.)

We would like to expand on this at a later opportunity in the Inquiry's progress.

The HCCI is concerned that there are inherent contradictions within the evolving town planning scenario which, in spite of stated policies will, in effect, seriously inhibit development within the area.

As an example, there is a stated policy to provide employment for local residents within the Shire. However, the reality is that zoning for new or expanding businesses is highly restrictive- if not literally repellent within the Healesville area, (examples available, when required). For the health of the local economy there is valid argument supporting the need for, at least, an increase of two to three larger businesses (larger employers) within the area. Currently, there are certainly two larger businesses already situated in the area, looking to re-site (for reasons of modern operational efficiencies). Preferably this can occur within the locale but the present zoning restrictions for any such re-location, are inhibiting the change.

The likely outcome of such inhibitors is that these businesses may have to move outside the region. Other businesses interested in locating in the area will, in all likelihood locate elsewhere for lack of proper space. This could result in a loss of employment per se and a diminishing prospect for employment over time.

By way of further elucidating, this area has a skewed demographic; larger than average unemployment and other welfare recipient population sectors. There is also a high teenage and growing family sector within this locality. The need for dedicated focus on current employment issues is already imperative, the future requirement is vivid if not compelling.

(There is a Council ambition for economic development in this area to revolve predominantly around the tourist industry. While this is an attractive and valuable position it is not automatically obvious that this will match with the excess labour surplus as it is currently constituted).

Therefore, the complexity of local planning issues has to be recognized. We re-iterate, mechanisms for reviewing and overseeing the resolution of these issues may well be benefited by broader expertise than will automatically be present within the local arena.

The HCCI believes it has valuable and constructive input (useful models) to pose regarding these aspects and would welcome, as said, fuller opportunity to do so as the Committee's work progresses.

2. Identifying local barriers to economic development and ways to address these;

(There is not sufficient time for this submission to properly attend to this point for reasons stated. However, we would be pleased to do so at a later stage.)

In the meantime we identify, as per the above point, that land use zoning restrictions, interconnected with State Government requirements for maintaining the green wedge, pose major inhibitors to necessary growth in the area.

Often this is, as identified above, also inhibiting solutions to other objectives requiring urgent attention for the socio-economic well-being for the community overall.

A further example is the concern regarding minimal police presence in this area. The population size, for instance, gives poor economic justification for a larger force. However, given the nature of the socio-demographic composition of this local population; for example, poor youth employment prospects and a significant youth substance abuse factor, there is an urgent need for greater police intervention.

In the immediate term, the lack of such presence is a major intrusion to the local businesses within the area. For instance, youth vandalism, break-ins, drug trafficking with intimidating 'protection' activity in the local car parks is not only costly but presents staff safety issues and a general disincentive to operating business in the area. Over time, this may reduce current business activity and even where growth is permissible, may repel future interest. In turn, this reduces employment opportunities and so on and so forth.

(In the long-term, apart from crime control, increased police intervention programs provide an important crime prevention factor, thereby achieving pro-active social effectiveness outcomes for the overall well-being of the community).

Other Issues relevant to the Inquiry;

There is a major lack of transport infrastructure for viable economic development within this area. Constructive strategies regarding the commercial issues are being formulated within the HCCI membership and would be readily presented to the Inquiry when the time is right.

(This is not restricted to the need for improved commercial opportunities, inadequate transport options pose major inhibitions for school age and tertiary students, employment access for jobs not available within the region and youth recreation opportunities, as examples).

As mentioned, there is a predominant focus within the Shire Council for economic growth in this specific area to revolve around tourism. As desirable as this proposition is, and as plausible as it may seem on paper, it has fundamental limitations if a more comprehensive approach is not additionally adopted.

At present this 'endorsement' encourages start-up businesses singularly focused on a fickle and transient market (tourist) that is not resident-based. It reduces formal interest/support and competitiveness for businesses providing local services, and these are gradually disappearing; local people are then put to the cost and inconvenience of long-distance purchasing. If/where/when the tourist dollar shifts to other locations, for instance, the area will lack a basic economic infrastructure to support the town during such a transition.

It is obvious that commercial economic development in this area is closely interconnected with the socio-economic development of the locality and the resolutions of development dilemmas are intricate. Whilst it is tempting in such circumstances to reduce solutions to philosophical or ideological preferences, realistic outcomes will require more rigorous and comprehensive application.

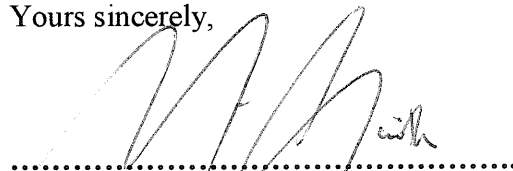
Mechanisms for improved long-term outcomes need to include best practice and state-of-the art strategies that have shown proven effectiveness in other settings with similar make-up and requirements.


(It is attractive, for instance to consider bench-marking the development of this area against other 'like-areas' across the State, and review progress periodically.)

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We appreciate the opportunity presented by this Inquiry. Please accept this submission as a commitment to our interest and willingness to contribute to the valuable work of the Committee.

Yours sincerely,


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Mr Mark Gunther
Vice President
Healesville Chamber of
Commerce and Industry


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Ms Connie Comber
Executive Member
Healesville Chamber of
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