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Department of Planning & Community Development
planning.schemes@dpcd.vic.gov.au

Dear Madam/Sir,

Yarra Climate Action Now! (YCAN) submission on the Yarra Planning Scheme Amendment C133

Following the public exhibition of the above Amendment to the Planning Scheme YCAN offers the following comments to the proposed changes through its Built Environment Working Group.

YCAN

The focus of YCAN is as follows:

There is a climate emergency. Something must be done. YCAN is an independent community group based in the City of Yarra. We are doing something.

Our vision is to create a strong and high profile local climate movement that will effect political change until we have a safe climate and to transition Yarra to a zero carbon and 100% renewable energy neighbourhood.

With these objectives, we have reviewed the draft amendment C133 to the Yarra Planning Scheme and offer limited feedback.

Overview

YCAN fully support the incorporation of Amendment C133 into the Planning Act. We believe that the environmental requirements of the Building Act are really strong but are being enacted too late in the building design process to be truly effective. It is at the Planning stage where the design can really be improved in

marked ways. Incorporation of Amendment C133 into the Yarra Planning Scheme would help support developers, designers and property owners in the City of Yarra by providing consistency & support for improved environmental performance in new buildings right throughout the project from conception to construction.

Comments

1. Consideration of ESD objectives at the time of Planning Permit submission is extremely important as, now the energy rating requirements associated with the Building Permit process have become more rigorous, it is necessary to design with energy & water efficiency in mind right from the outset. Adding in double glazing & a water tank at the Building Permit stage is no longer enough to meet the minimum energy requirements. Now that building designers have to consider more fundamental issues such as siting & building orientation it is vital that this is checked early on before years worth of design & documentation has taken place.
2. Not having ESD considerations assessed as part of the Planning Permit means that many residential projects currently need to obtain amendments to their Planning Permit when they realise later on they need to change the building design to get their 6 star energy rating for their Building Permit. This bogs down Planning Departments and frustrates property owners as they waste time repeating tasks & having to pay for re-documentation. Looked at in this light it could be considered that ESD assessments required at the Planning stage actually encourage building development by streamlining the approvals process.
3. The STEPS and SDS assessment tools have been used by a large number of Victorian Councils for quite a number of years now but, not being incorporated in the Planning Act, they are relatively weak as they can't be enforced. The fact that so many Councils are using the same tools helps add some consistency for developers & building designers working across a number of municipalities. Incorporation into the Yarra Planning Scheme after DPCD assessment ensures that the requirements have parity with other similar clauses for ESD & EED in other local Council areas thus reducing confusion.
4. It is our understanding that the existing environmental performance reports requested by many Councils including the City of Yarra are not a compulsory piece of documentation to be submitted as part of a Planning Application and cannot be until ESD & EED clauses are incorporated into the Planning Act. YCAN believe that environmental assessment during the Planning stages is imperative given the impacts the buildings have on so many aspects of the environment. Currently these tools are toothless tigers –adoption of Amendment C133 would give them some teeth!

5. The categories for assessment under the tools mentioned above are the same as the Green Building Council's assessment areas thus making it easy for (larger) projects to use both tools for assessment & verification, & marketing purposes.
6. In the City of Yarra, at least, green buildings are not an aspirational target – they are what this market demands.

Recommendation

YCAN believe that Amendment C133 should be adopted but the wording in Section 22.17 is a bit vague. Incorporation into the Planning Act is meaningless unless a clear environmental benchmark is set that new buildings must achieve (like the 6 star house, for example). What is "best practice"? YCAN recommend that section 22.17 be expanded to include a Standard as well as an Objective for each of the environmental categories under consideration, or a requirement to reach a score of xx using the STEPS or SDS rating tools.

Yours Sincerely
Ande Bunbury
Yarra Climate Action Now
Built Environment Working Group