



7 March 2014

Yarra Climate Action Now (YCAN) would like to take this opportunity to comment on the New Residential Zones for the City of Yarra.

The draft New Residential Zones propose implementing the new residential zoning categories in line with the requirements of the State Government new zone types, namely: Neighbourhood Residential Zone, General Residential Zone and Residential Growth Zone.

We believe that all Government policy and strategy needs to be visionary particularly in the areas of sustainability and reducing the effects of climate change. Despite the new zones being introduced by a right-wing State Government keen to ease the way for large-scale multi-residential development, the new zones are an opportunity for Council to be pro-active in shaping a sustainable built environment for the future. If Yarra Council is going to meet its stated objective of continuing to be “innovators and leaders in sustainability” (Yarra City Council Proposed Budget 2013–14, p.3), then it must do this in every Council strategy & policy.

On the whole we feel that the proposal misses the opportunities for innovation and is instead endorsing a "business-as usual" case and even trying to restrict development further by imposing mandatory height controls. It is very conservative and lacks vision of future needs. Sustainability has not been considered at all.

YCAN believes that the following issues need an innovative and forward-thinking approach.

Residential Growth Zone

- YCAN agrees with the Council planners that the Residential Growth Zone is not required in the City of Yarra as there is already potential for higher density residential development in the Mixed Use Zones.
- It is important to try to retain a diversity of local building uses to enable people to be able to work close to where they live. This is an important factor

for sustainability as people can walk or cycle to work and thus have minimal carbon emissions for their transport needs.

- Mixed use zones are vibrant and are part of what we love about this area!

Density

- YCAN believes that the proposal really fails in this area as it seeks to maintain the current housing density in the Neighbourhood Residential Zone – at approximately 150m² per dwelling.
- It should be remembered that the number of people living in the area has reduced dramatically since the majority of houses in the area were built. In Victorian times it was not uncommon for families with 6 children to live in terrace houses. Now the average household is much smaller. The Australian Bureau of Statistics says "The average household size in Australia is projected to decline from 2.6 people per household in 2001 to between 2.2 and 2.3 people per household in 2026."¹
- At the same time the number of households in Victoria is projected to increase by between 35% and 41%, from 1.8 million households in 2001 to between 2.4 million and 2.6 million in 2026.
- The number of single person households may double over the same time period.²
- Smaller households are more likely in the inner city than in the State average figures.
- YCAN believes that, if the number of occupants in the houses is decreasing, then the most sustainable way to deal with this is to reduce the size of the average house (or alternately, to convince people to co-house!)
- Strategic planning in the City of Yarra should be pro-active about welcoming increased housing density – we are well located for public transport, services, proximity to the city etc. Numerous Planning strategies, for example Melbourne 2030, Plan Melbourne, have recognized this fact and sought to encourage increased density living around “activity centres”. The whole of the City of Yarra has the features of an activity area as it

“is a vibrant hub where people shop, work, meet, relax and often live. Usually well-served by public transport, they range in size and intensity of use from local neighbourhood strip shopping centres to universities and major regional shopping malls.”

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Household and Family Projections, Australia, 2001 to 2026', 16/06/2004

² ditto

Linking them to good transport networks (road, public transport, pedestrian and cycle) is crucial as they attract high numbers of people and generate a significant volume of trips in metropolitan Melbourne.

Activities areas are more sustainable, more vibrant communities and will be the focus of major change over the next 30 years.”³

- If increased housing density is not accommodated in the inner city then it will be pushed to the urban periphery, which certainly is not sustainable.
- If increased housing density in the City of Yarra is confined only to Mixed Use and Commercial Zones this will take the form of massive apartment towers looming above single-storey heritage housing stock. A much better sustainable housing model sees mixed uses happening in all zones, greater parity between building heights across the whole suburb and well-placed public open spaces. Have a look at the work of the Victorian Eco-Innovation Laboratory for explorations of how this could be done
http://www.ecoinnovationlab.com/project_content/visioning-2032-films/
- The Neighbourhood Residential Zone seeks to replace the Residential 1 zones covered by Heritage overlays. YCAN believes that this is an opportune time to reconsider the precedence of Heritage over all other criteria in the consideration of Planning applications. This is the big stumbling block on the way to housing with better environmental performance. But of course Heritage is popular as it is pretty. There are tricky questions about how to integrate heritage controls with a plan for suburb-wide denser and more energy efficient living whilst retaining the intrinsic character. The dwellings must be able to support the way we live now and into the future.

Mandatory height controls

- Whilst there is some merit in trying to get the Planning Minister to commit to limits to development the height levels proposed are so conservative, especially in the General Residential Zone, they are unlikely to get signed off.
- The inner suburbs of most major cities have been through periods where they had to change, eg Hausmann’s Paris, the Eixample district in Barcelona just to name a couple. The areas of City of Yarra immediately abutting the city, in particular, are inevitably going to change dramatically. Please don’t miss this opportunity to plan it.
- As mentioned above, YCAN believes that a better model for green living includes higher density but that this should be spread more evenly across the municipality and not confined solely to Mixed Use commercial zones or large development sites where the Planning Minister has overridden Council desires.

³ <http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/planning/plansandpolicies/activitiesareas>

- Planning controls are good to provide guidance but no matter how well they are written they cannot predict every single situation. Invariably there will be situations where the requirements make no sense. Mandatory controls will invariably create great hardship to some. YCAN believes this could be improved if it were written up like the current Planning Scheme with overarching Objectives which the application is assessed against with the Planners having some discretion when making their decision ie not mandatory.
- There should be able to be transition between the zones, ie larger development stepping down towards smaller adjacent properties, and the ability to increase size at the edges of Neighbourhood Residential Zones where near or abutting higher density zones.
- YCAN believes there are opportunities to play off planning a denser and more sustainable municipality with the height controls with the Planning Minister. But there needs to be some give and take and higher height controls would need to be proposed. The current height limits proposed seem like a knee-jerk response. We would suggest a maximum of four storeys may be possible for the Neighbourhood Residential Zone (Rescode setbacks would still apply so most properties wouldn't be able to go this high). The General Residential Zones seem to be mainly along major roads where current planning guidelines would allow 4-6 storey construction. So proposing an 11.5m mandatory height limit there is simply inflammatory.

We would like to thank Council for the opportunity to make this submission and we trust that Council will give it serious consideration.

Ande Bunbury
Built Environment Spokesperson
YCAN