

MEG Online Submission Re Better Apartments

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Part A - Contact Details

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I am submitting on behalf of a: Community-based organisation
1a. Do you currently live in an apartment?
1b. Have you previously lived in an apartment?

Part B - Ranking of Issues

Most important issues: Daylight, Space, Noise, Landscape, Car Parking
Least important issues: Natural Ventilation, Adaptability, Universal Design, Waste, Entry and Circulation

Part C – Structured Issues based responses

Issue 1: Daylight: The minimum separation of windows from other buildings must be 9m. This removes the need for excessive screening. An objective which must be met is a high standard of amenity within the new development and with adjoining developments. This must be a basic requirement. Building separation must ensure privacy and no overshadowing. Minimum ceiling height must be 2.4m. Higher ceiling heights maximise access to daylight. Living rooms, kitchen and bedrooms must have access to direct daylight. Direct daylight is not vital in secondary spaces. There must be no 'borrowed light.'

Issue 2: Sunlight: All apartments must receive sunlight. It is reasonable to assume that the amount of sunlight will vary but the minimum must be 3 hours per day to the living areas. This can be achieved with adequate light wells, landscaped atriums as well as with appropriately placed windows.

Issue 3: Space: It is vital that minimum apartment sizes must be set. The present situation has resulted in "slum." Purpose-built Student Accommodation developments are the worst examples of this. Some apartments in such developments have less space than is required for a car space. The NSW Residential Flat Design Code has a requirement

of 58 sq.m. for a 1 bedroom flat. It is rare for us to see developments with 1 bedroom apts. larger than 50 sq.m. We believe that the minimum should be 60 sq.m. Increasing the minimum ceiling heights would contribute to an increase of daylight and sunlight. Applicants must put forward proposals that include different types of apartments catering to different types of households. The proliferation of one-bedroom, poorly designed apartments is damaging to communities. Commonly, The basic essential quality developments have an excess of one-bedroom apartments, with a token offering of two-bedroom apartments. Few offer three bedrooms. To our knowledge none offers even one apartment in a development for a disabled person.

Issue 4: Outlook:

The basic essential quality of a good outlook is GREEN. Several studies have concluded that a green outlook results in better health of individuals and consequently the community. The advantages of trees cannot be exaggerated. In Malvern East we have seen an entire "small neighbourhood activity centre" stripped of every green leaf on development sites. Some of the trees were designated "significant" because of their size. They were deemed 'healthy' but comments in Council reports have said 'if the building is to go ahead the trees' must go.' Successive State Governments have wanted buildings not trees. Clearly living spaces must have the "green" outlook as a priority for the stated reasons.

Issue 5: Natural Ventilation :

Cross ventilation can be achieved through appropriate design. Indeed appropriate design is missing in many of the developments that come to our attention. Too often we have seen from planners for applicants producing "copy and paste" jobs of poorly conceived proposals that provide the "maximum site yield." In a recent case before it VCAT actually refused to issue a permit for a variety of amenity issues and agreed with Stonnington Council when it said that "the driver here is simply maximisation of yield at any cost." We regret that this was said for one case when clearly most of the developments we have dealt with have had the same "driver."

Issue 6: Noise:

It seems that the flushing of toilets is a major concern for many people. My personal major concern re noise is the heavy bass in music. Clearly residents have issues with traffic noise. So many apartment buildings are being built on major roads because that has been the policy of successive State Governments. Major roads carry a heavy concentration of traffic...that's a statement of the obvious. To achieve maximum site yield there is generally little or no setback from the road, no landscaped forecourt and as a consequence noise from the traffic causes major disturbance to residents. Insulation must be a basic requirement. Insulation of walls and ceilings occurs in some developments but it is rare. We are aware that this would add to the cost of an apartment but we suggest that rather than increase the price of an apartment the applicant could make less profit and produce a quality product.

Issue 7: Outdoor Space:

All apartments must have a balcony even if it's a shared balcony and size is important. Balconies must be of sufficient size to allow 'landscaping' in pots to provide the necessary 'green' outlook which is so necessary for the health and well-being of occupants. Clearly this

excludes the notion of having space on the balcony taken up by air-conditioning units. It is our contention that landscaped communal open space should be a significant component of any development. In the case we cited previously VCAT commented on an area to the rear of a nearby development there was a number of well-established trees which served as "an oasis" for the occupants of that development as well as providing a certain amount of screening.

**Issue 8:
Adaptability:**

Of course proposals should be designed to be adapted. In our submission to Panel re Council's Student Accommodation Policy we suggested that a condition of any permit for purpose-built student accommodation include this as a condition...e.g. that 3-4 units should be built in such a way that they could easily be adapted to form a one-bedroom unit. The Panel wouldn't allow it. A recent development in Malvern East for student accommodation had units ranging from 16 to 19 sq.m. Four 16 sq.m. units should be able to be converted to one 64 sq.m. unit. When countries such as China develop their own system of tertiary education the need for masses of student accommodation will drop dramatically. Make them adaptable to for a different demographic. Buildings would need to be based on a modular design.

Issue 9: Landscape:

This is one of the most neglected aspect of development in Melbourne. Moonscaping sites must be the first thing to be banned. Buildings must be designed AROUND existing significant trees. We mentioned previously the denuded sites in the small neighbourhood activity centre in Malvern East. One of those buildings actually has a tree inside the existing building but in order to "maximise yield" the developer proposes to destroy it and not replace it. If in the past buildings can be designed AROUND trees there is no reason why this can't be done now. For the health of the entire population a mandatory requirement should be that some form of landscaping is vital. All developments can be designed with at the very least a landscaped forecourt. In the space between buildings landscaping must be part of the proposal.

**Issue 10: Universal
Design:**

What is proposed by LHA is common sense and should be adopted. This would circumvent the present situation which is largely given over to creating not only the slums of the future but the slums of today.

**Issue 11: Energy and
Resources:**

Residents require dwellings that can be easily and cheaply heated or cooled. Well-designed apartments should be able to capture as much winter sunshine as possible and cooling breezes in summer without having to resort to continual heating or cooling appliances which add so much to the cost of living and contribute to environmental damage. Individual metering should be compulsory. Arguments about power and water costs would be eliminated if developers were required to provide separate meters to each unit. It would also provide an incentive to unit-dwellers to conserve scarce and costly resources. We approve of minimum industry standards but as has been exposed recently developers and their building surveyors don't seem to be able to meet minimum building standards we wonder how (or if) they would bother with even more standards.

- Issue 12: Waste:** There must be communal waste areas with contractors employed by the Owners' Corporation collecting the waste. The sorting facilities that house-dwellers have are a basic requirement...i.e. rubbish, recycling and garden. We include "garden waste" in this section because we are promoting landscaping and balcony gardens as mandatory requirements.
- Issue 13: Car Parking:** We have observed that if developments do not have sufficient car parking that unit-dwellers use the nearby residential streets for parking. Often these side streets are narrow and parking on both sides creates hazardous conditions. If State Govt. does not want this to continue it has to come up with adequate public transport solutions. Clearly this is not what we have at the moment. Myths abound in the situation re car parking and a myth of long-standing is that "students don't drive cars." We have tertiary institutions in Malvern East and thousands of students and a plethora of purpose-built student accommodation developments. Students can easily access the tertiary institution nearby for study but they need a vehicle to go to their part-time jobs. There is little or no parking on site so their cars are parked in residential streets. Car-sharing is something that Government and Councils can promote. Cycling (safely and legally) is another but the most significant of all solutions is public transport and successive governments have not solved the problems regarding this.
- Issue 14: Entry and Circulation:** On-site loading is a basic requirement and provision must be made for this. In the interests of safety the lobby areas of developments must be clearly visible. With regard to internal corridors we suggest that the end(s) of corridors must have external daylight.
- Other:** We are greatly concerned about the adverse impact of development proposals on residential areas at the interface of Commercial and Residential zones and although we are aware that residents in these areas must expect a lower level of amenity than those in other residential areas provision must be made to temper the impact. We cite as an example a permit issued by VCAT for an 18 storey monolith in a Commercial area in Malvern East that is adjacent to and directly opposite single storey homes. This is to replace a 2 storey commercial building. There is the usual token acknowledgement that the 18 storeys of 1 & 2 bedroom dwellings is in a Commercial Zone by the addition of 3 shops on the ground floor. There is little acknowledgement that the 18 storeys imposes a huge burden on the residents living at the interface on terms of noise, a mass of artificial light every night, wind tunnel effect, traffic and a general intrusion on an established way of life with no nett benefit. It is our contention that between commercial and residential zones there must be "an oasis" of trees, even where there is a lane and that the VicRoads edict that developments must not have car access from a main road be overridden by State Government.
- Implementation: getting the tools right:** In IMAP Minutes of Nov.28/14 Jane Monk, Director of Inner City, Melbourne Planning Authority, advised "that MPA is interested in inner city employment and is keen to progress this" and is interested too "in engaging regarding the difficulties seen of a tsunami of residential development pushing manufacturing out." She

recommends "a tool." "For example,'as of right' residential on the first floors could be modified to keep space for business use." Clearly Ms Monk has ideas about managing the 'tsunami of residential development.' At the same meeting Cr.Viahogiannis, Mayor of Yarra CC said, "cannabalisation of one use by another is of concern." Obviously, the implementation of the suggestions we have made lies in the hands of applicants and the people they employ to carry out the developments but improvements will only come if State Government legislates clear requirements. Decision-makers rely almost entirely on State Government requirements. VCAT the ultimate decision-maker consistently ignores Local Policy saying repeatedly that State Government requirements override all other considerations. It is a rare VCAT decision that considers anything else. 18 Porter St. Pty Ltd. v Stonnington CC is one such decision. We recommend it to you.

Part D – Additional Comments

**Additional
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