

ELECTED MEMBERS' BRIEFING SESSION COVER SHEET

Date of Workshop:	18 October 2021
Subject:	Future Development: Local Governments taking the lead
Department:	Office of the CEO
Presenter(s):	Cr Jennifer Bonham Euan Williamson, City of Yarra Grant Meyer, City of Maroondah James Senior, Nightingale Housing
Session:	Open to the public.
Attachments:	Nil

PURPOSE

To provide Elected Members with insights into new approaches being taken to infill development and the role local governments are playing in guiding that development.

We want to begin a conversation on what steps Unley Council might take to improve development outcomes in our locality and how to bring our community along on that journey.

DISCUSSION

Urban infill will play a critical role in creating (or undermining) the sustainability of our cities. Over the past three decades a significant body of research has accrued on the potential of urban infill largely in terms of low carbon living.

From the late 1980s, it has been argued that increasing the density and diversity of population, housing and land uses in cities will:

- reduce travel distances with people having access to services and facilities within walking and cycling distance of their homes;
- make public transport more viable as it services higher concentrations of people;
- reduce the materials and therefore embodied energy in housing because of shared walls, floors/rooves;
- reduce the operational energy of individual dwellings as they are insulated by surrounding dwellings.

Also, by increasing densities within the existing urban area, we can reduce or stop development sprawling into our agricultural hinterlands and those vanishing pockets of native vegetation.

More recently, ambitions have gone beyond 'low-carbon' objectives to consider circular economy principles in materials used in new developments, household waste generation and management, water supply and waste-water management, urban greening and fostering a sense of community.

However, many variables have worked to undermine low-carbon, circular economy and sustainability ambitions for infill development. Infill has been taken in a very different direction to that anticipated by many practitioners, researchers and policy makers working in the space of sustainable cities. We are all aware of the two, three and four 'for one' developments where blocks are cleared of all vegetation, replaced by impermeable surfaces including dwellings, double garages, and paving. While this increases housing supply to some extent, it doesn't address issues of transport, waste, water or greening. Alternatively, we have 7+ storey apartment buildings situated on arterial roads: without good quality public transit, with minimal (if any) landscaping, with no communal open space, and limited (if any) innovation in thermal efficiency, low-carbon building or circular economy principles. Both types of development significantly undermine urban greening and it can undermine community cohesiveness as established residents become resentful of 'new arrivals' and where new arrivals find it difficult to form the relationships that would normally occur in streets and communities.

Unley Council's participation in the ERA housing project was a valuable response to current infill practices with the aims of increasing housing supply and enabling aging in place without increasing the overall housing footprint or character of our neighbourhoods. This approach can work alongside others to meet the needs and expectations of diverse and younger households. We can however strengthen opportunities for improved responses to this wicked problem for our residents and community.

In this session, representatives from two local government areas and a housing development firm will be speaking about how they are working to improve urban infill outcomes at the single block and neighbourhood scale.

The local governments are the City of Yarra and the City of Maroondah. The City of Yarra is an old, established, inner-suburban area that is slightly larger than the City of Unley (19.5km²) but has more than double Unley's population (98,000). Like Unley, it has multiple main streets, high levels of through traffic, limited open space, variations in housing density across the locality and similar pressures for mid-rise redevelopment. The City of Yarra has created guidelines to encourage environmentally sustainable design in new developments.

By contrast, the City of Maroondah is an outer-suburban council area that is much larger than Unley, but its older neighbourhoods have block and house sizes similar to our suburbs of Black Forest, Millswood and Clarence Park. It is experiencing similar pressures for two, three and four for one redevelopment as Unley. The City of Maroondah has been working on the 'Greening the Greyfields' approach to improve development outcomes.

The housing organisation, Nightingale Housing, was born out of the firm 'Breathe Architecture' to offer a new approach to mid-rise housing at both the individual site and the precinct scale. From the first build in the City of Moreland, Nightingale Housing is now partnering with architecture firms in other localities (e.g. Fremantle, Bowden) to build mid-rise housing based on sustainability principles. Representatives from each of these organisations have been asked to speak about their experiences of infill development.

SPEAKERS

Cr Jennifer Bonham

Euan Williamson, City of Yarra: Guidelines.

Developing and implementing guidelines for 'Environmentally Sustainable Design in Planning', including their 10 key building categories, tools for ESD, Zero Carbon Developments and Case Studies.

Grant Meyer, City of Maroondah: Greening the Greyfields

Maroondah's experience of Greening the Greyfields. From concept to planning scheme amendments including: issues with infill, what is the 'greening the greyfields' model, how was the model developed, resourcing development of the model, issues and barriers to implementing the model and how they were addressed, community engagement and responses, elected member engagement.

James Senior, Nightingale Housing: Sustainable Housing Developments

The Nightingale Housing model such as its principles, site selection and, in particular, Nightingale's experiences of working with local governments to implement the model (e.g., how receptive are local governments – EMs and administration – to the model, what are the main issues that need to be addressed, how do local communities respond to the developments, how is sustainability maintained over time?).

THE BRIEFING IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC