

FUTURE MELBOURNE

Future Melbourne Seminar Five – Building our city for the future

Carillo Gantner Lecture Theatre, Asialink building, Melbourne University
6pm Wednesday 11 July 2007

Moderators notes, prepared by Peter Mares

Key speakers:

Tom Kvan – Dean of Architecture, Building and Planning, Melbourne Uni, challenged us to think the unthinkable, particularly in the built form of the city. Melbourne is polarised between the high-rise, high density inner city, and the low rise, low density residential suburbs. Does the unthinkable future lie in the space between these two poles – in medium rise, medium density living?

Carolyn Parker – MD, Kador Group – talked about the role of developers in Melbourne's future. Developers need to be convinced that sustainability is not just a passing fad or a Y2K style panic – it must be a permanent component of our planning and building. But Melbourne must also realise that it needs developers as much as developers need Melbourne. They play a key role in renovating and rejuvenating the city and if policy settings are not right, they seek opportunities elsewhere. Carolyn also stressed the need to deal with traffic congestion and argued that transport is not an either/or question, public transport versus the private car – motorists are not the enemy.

Elizabeth Proust, company director, former CEO City of Melbourne, talked about the importance of social capital to the fabric of the city, and expressed concern about the fact that sometimes that fabric is frayed by alcohol fuelled violence in the streets. She also discussed the governance of the city and suggested that a Brisbane style solution – one overarching metropolitan mega council rather than the current patchwork of individual municipalities – would be a more efficient and still democratic model.

Rob Moody, Professor of Global Health, Nossal Institute Melbourne University, outlined the key aspects of a health city – it is connected, active, economically viable, safe, manages conflict, manages and balances risk.

Key issues arising from questions and discussion:

Environment – climate change is not the only environmental issue and should not be the sole driver of policy. Even without the problem of global warming, we still need to protect the environment.

We need to better demonstrate the business case for sustainability to get business on board.

Governance and leadership

The power to make real changes does not reside with the City of Melbourne – eg energy issues, Docklands.

Actions don't follow words – eg Vic government reduced stamp duty on big cars
Need to reduce the complexity of planning rules to make business simpler for developers – a single metropolitan council would facilitate this.

People do have power – witness the return to strip shopping and small retailers

Would a Brisbane style mega council be democratic – local government is the most grassroots and active level of political engagement?

Public transport

Business says it wants an efficient public transport system – but where is the private sector investment in public transport?

Funding questions

Could superannuation funds be channelled into investments in public transport (and/or affordable housing).

Do we need a 'Melbourne future fund' to fund investment in public transport?

Or should we just pay more tax and be happy with that public contribution.

The built environment

How do we deal with the established investment in non-energy efficient buildings (eg giant shopping malls)?

Can the population of the City of Melbourne keep on growing? Tom Kvan says yes, you could have hundreds of thousands of people living and still have it just as green and livable

Key Values:

From the overall shape of the discussion it is possible to conclude that panellists and audience members want a city that is:

- Environmentally sustainable
- Efficient for doing business
- Has top quality public transport (for both business and environmental reasons)
- Encourages a healthy lifestyle (walking, cycling)
- Is democratic but also efficient – in which residents have influence and the local government also has the power to set and implement policy
- Finds innovative ways to fund future changes to the city (eg superannuation investment for affordable housing, a Future fund for Melbourne)