

This is a submission by [REDACTED] of Boongarry Ave, Blackburn to the Department of Transport and Planning as part of the Phase 2 round of community consultations concerning the Department's plans for a new Blackburn Activity Centre.

For many years, the Whitehorse council has been working together with the residents of Blackburn to maintain the unique environment in our area. They have forced developers to comply with the special overlays that protect the land, and hence the trees and native vegetation, and hence the birds and other native animals. They have kept the "village shop" atmosphere in South Parade by keeping the shops and cafes along it to no more than 3 storeys (usually 1 or 2), and the commercial and apartment buildings across the railway line in Railway Terrace to a maximum of 3 or 4 storeys. Higher rise developments in Blackburn have been limited to 7 storeys (to date) and have generally been located along the busy arterial road, Whitehorse Road, which is well away from the village shops.

The revised activity centre proposed by the State Government is not in keeping with this planning philosophy. To their credit, after receiving community feedback in Phase 1 of the consultation, the State planners have decided to respect the special residential overlays in Blackburn that have enabled the creation of the unique environment. But now they seek to allow tall buildings (up to 12 storeys) to be built in the Blackburn village shop area along South Parade, and up to 10 storey buildings along Railway Terrace. This is incongruous with the village atmosphere. It appears to be an attempt to juxtapose an impersonal high-rise apartment lifestyle with the many shops and restaurants that would inevitably come with it, with the family and neighbourhood centred lifestyle of the "village" of Blackburn.

According to the Whitehorse Council, the State Government planners have categorised Blackburn as being a HG3 zone with "High" access to public transport, employment, shops and services. Nunawading and Mitcham have been categorized as HG2, with "Good" access to public transport, employment, shops and services. And yet, it appears that there is very little difference in the amenities provided by these 3 suburbs. This has enormous implications for Blackburn, in that the core height range is allowed to be a whopping 16 storeys, which then translates to 12 storeys in the Blackburn village shopping area. This is 9 to 10 storeys higher than any of the existing buildings in the village shop area and would adversely transform the community-friendly low-key shopping strip to something much larger and impersonal (and, in my opinion, ugly!).

The council has presented excellent arguments for reducing the HG level for Blackburn to HG2, to bring it in line with Nunawading and Mitcham. Nevertheless, as I understand it, this would mean that buildings along South Parade and Railway Terrace could potentially be up to 8 storeys. **Personally, I do not think this is acceptable, and that the heights of buildings along South Parade and the areas south of it should be kept to no more than 3 storeys, and those along Railway Terrace should be kept to 4 storeys, to maintain the "village shop" vibe. In effect, this special family-centred area with its Saturday markets and adjacent one-storey library,**

would become an outer catchment area (instead of a core area) along South Parade (including the area south of this), and an inner catchment area (instead of a core area) along Railway Terrace.

Note: In my opinion, the area within the activity centre south of South Parade, **along the full length of South Parade**, should become outer catchment. The village shop vibe is very important to the Blackburn residents, as is a transition from the activity centre to residential zones such as the area south of Laburnum St.

As far as I'm aware, prior to the State Government's call for an activity centre around Blackburn Station, the Whitehorse Council would not have allowed buildings to be any taller than 3 storeys south of the railway line along South Parade, and 4 storeys north of the railway line along Railway Terrace, in this community-sensitive area. I assume that the situation in Nunawading and Mitcham would have been similar. The council has seemingly been forced into accepting something it would never previously have entertained.

The activity centre for Blackburn currently proposed by the State Government seems destined to create two very different ways of life for the residents:

- one in which the residents have their own yards with play spaces for children, tall trees and beautiful gardens and the native birds and animals that accompany these, and easily accessible playgrounds and green space close-by.
- the other in which residents live in high-rise apartment buildings with no outdoor play spaces for their kids adjacent to them, very few tall trees and hence few native animals and birds. The plans by the State Government do not show any new playgrounds, parks or gardens and there doesn't appear to be any regulation that will force developers to provide ample green space around the buildings, suggesting that there will be no buffer zone from Whitehorse Road, with its noise and vehicle pollution, or from the railway line, for the unfortunate future apartment dwellers.

Won't this lead to polarisation of the residents in Blackburn? Won't both the new apartment dwellers and the existing residents feel compromised by this approach?

Another great concern to existing residents is that they may not have the opportunity in the future to object to what they may consider to be inappropriate development.

On the State Government's website, <https://engage.vic.gov.au/project/activity-centres-program-stage-two/page/blackburn-mitcham>, it is stated that within Blackburn, Nunawading and Mitcham "parks, shops, schools, and healthcare services are all within easy reach. These qualities make the neighbourhoods convenient and highly liveable." On this site it also mentions the convenient public transport that is available. But to what extent will the liveability of these suburbs be adversely affected by a doubling of the population? Isn't it likely that the public transport, parks, schools and healthcare services will be overwhelmed, leading to a decline in the

well-being of both existing and new residents? Also, will parking problems become severe as in other over-developed areas in Melbourne?

There has been no indication by the State Government as to what new infrastructure they're going to provide. **Where are the actual plans for community facilities, public spaces and parks, adjacent to the planned apartment buildings, and who exactly is going to pay for them and the land they are established on?** There is overwhelming evidence that children benefit greatly from playing outdoors and need outdoor space at their "doorstep" just like children living in detached dwellings. **Clearly, buildings with more stories require a high percentage of green space than is usually provided, since there are even more children to cater for.**

The sustainability of the new developments is also in question – to what extent has consideration been given to sustainable building design, the varying of building types so there is not a Soviet-like uniformity of design, adequate provision for storm water and the recycling of water, the use of natural ventilation and solar energy...?

In conclusion: The scale of the buildings proposed by the State Government for the Blackburn Activity Centre is incompatible with the lifestyle of the current residents. Tall buildings have never been desired by the Blackburn community members, as reflected in the council's previous very careful and measured approach to development.

Why not limit the apartments and buildings taller than, say, 8 storeys, to areas such as Box Hill as was previously planned by the Whitehorse Council, since this is in line with community expectations? As I understand it, by doing this, the council was still able to provide for the number of new apartment dwellings that the State Government wants to achieve in the overall Whitehorse area. Box Hill would already provide the amenities that many apartment dwellers are seeking: an excellent transport hub, job opportunities within the suburb, and a large number of restaurants and shops. These things are largely missing in a family-centred suburb like Blackburn. The State Government would, of course, need to provide adequate new green spaces close to the areas with concentrated population growth such as Box Hill, for example on the old brickworks site in Box Hill.

If developments within the proposed Blackburn activity centre were limited to a maximum of, say, 8 stories in the core (**with, importantly, the area south of the railway within the proposed activity centre, becoming part of the outer catchment (rather than the core), and the area along Railway Terrace from the station to Blackburn Road becoming part of the inner catchment (rather than the core)**), and 3 or 4 stories in the outer and inner catchments, there would still be a significant contribution from Blackburn to higher density living compared with the status quo. If provision were then made for a generous improvement in the available infrastructure such as public transport, parks and playgrounds, schools and healthcare services, and adequate provision for parking was mandated in the new developments, it should be possible to cater for the increase in population.

Summary

Blackburn is a suburb known for its natural beauty; something that has been achieved over the last 75 years by a succession of environmentally minded residents. These residents, aided by sympathetic council members who have largely reflected the values of the locals, have embraced controls on housing and other buildings, giving priority to the environment. Successive State Governments have previously applauded the resulting increase in tree canopy.

Blackburn is not a transport hub and does not have large businesses that employ many people or a large shopping mall (other than Blackburn Square adjoining North Blackburn), and residents do not want these things. Its low-key village shops and small businesses deliver a personal level of service.

Whitehorse Council's existing housing plan already provides for the extra housing that the state government requires, while enabling the protection of Blackburn's crucial ecological and heritage values by providing appropriate SLOs. In areas of Blackburn where multi-storey buildings will be allowed, it is the Council's and State Government's duty to ensure that the limits on what developers can do are very strict and fit in with our community's character and values. The Council should retain oversight of planning controls, because they have a more intimate knowledge of community concerns.