

The **CROWAG** Cryer

The Combined Residents of Whitehorse Newsletter

Edition 1, March 2024

Su Dempsey Gets a Gong

On Sunday the 26th of November 2023, Su Dempsey, a fifty-year veteran in volunteering, was recognised in a ceremony for her contributions to a long list of causes. Su was selected to receive the *Annual CROWAG Volunteers Award*, ('Lifetime Achievement'). And what a list of contributions she has made to the *Jeffrey St Residents Association*, *Blackburn Lake Visitors Centre*, *Melbourne Water Watch*, helping establish the *KooyongKoot Alliance* (improving the health of Gardiners Creek) and working with the *Field Naturalists Club of Victoria*.



Simone Taylor (JSA Inc.), David Morrison and Anne Payne OAM, (CROWAG Committee members) with Su and Peter Dempsey at the Volunteers Award Ceremony, BLVC.

In presenting the award, Anne Payne (AO) noted that the 'list goes on' (and it did), including years of teamwork helping to educate the community, including children, about the value of the environment. *CROWAG* and all of its thirteen affiliate group members congratulate Su and thank her for her great work.

Free CROWAG Public Forum

'The Clash: Higher Density Living and a Changing Climate'

When: Saturday 4th May 2024, 12.30 for 1.00 pm, finish 4.30 pm

Where: The Arbour, *Whitehorse Community Arts Centre*, Cnr. Combarton and Station Streets, Box Hill. Ample free and unrestricted parking opposite and on nearby streets.

The Combined Residents of
Whitehorse Action Group

Advocating for appropriate planning
and development within
Whitehorse, enhancing the amenity
and quality of life for all citizens.

Email: crowag.inc@gmail.com

Website: www.crowag.com



Hear from climate and planning experts about the realities of what we can expect in Whitehorse from further destabilising climate change including the known and the surprises. Explore how dramatically recent (2023) changed state government housing policy will inevitably clash with climate change mitigation and adaptation objectives. **And** have your say about what the government and *City of Whitehorse* are doing to address the climate emergency and the threat of the new housing policy.

This is a **FREE** event with tea/coffee on arrival and afternoon tea at about 2.45pm.

BOOK NOW via [Humanitix link](#) or QR Code. As *CROWAG* is a not-for-profit organisation, please consider making a donation to help cover costs.



Mandatory Tree Cover for Victoria

On 25th January 2024, we wrote to the Ministers for Planning and Transport, the Environment (DECCA) and Paul Hamer MP Box Hill, seeking support for the mandating of urban canopy tree cover in all of the Greater Melbourne Planning Schemes to reverse its present decline and to achieve the stated goals of the State Government. Strengthening planning controls for vegetation protection on both public and private land is urgently needed due to the impact of our population explosion, urban densification, and the failures of *ResCode* standards and the cultural shift to building McMansions with minimal opportunity for replacement tree planting, plus the huge numbers of mature trees being felled for Victoria's *Bigbuild*. The request was well documented using the state government's own legislation and policies from recent years. We await replies and will be liaising with the City of Whitehorse to reinforce the need for mandatory tree cover.

Council Responsibilities & Facing Realities

The need for change on so many fronts is staring us all in the face. Council has been hamstrung on numbers of issues due to rate caps imposed by state government for some years. This doesn't actually serve taxpayers well. Council also has huge, fixed costs for its essential service delivery. Yet, it also has discretionary, project-based funding, all of it being subject to community request, pressures from interest groups, politics, and fundamental priorities. We say that Council has much room for improvement in this area if it is to keep up with the realities of change in society and the environment. Some priorities need tweaking. In light of growing inequality, increasing poverty and homelessness in the municipality, more emphasis needs to be placed on wellness and liveability. We especially need to enhance natural landscapes and create more open spaces. The decline in these areas is noticeable. For example, the extremes of the New Box Hill, Surrey Hills and Forest Hill



Affiliate Members of CROWAG Inc.

Bellbird Residents' Advocacy Group, (BRAG)

Glenburnie Road Residents Association Inc, (GRRRA)

Jefferey Street Residents Association Inc., (JSRA)

Holland Road Residents

Blackburn South Raiders

Friends of Blackburn Lake

Surrey Hills-Mont Albert Progress Assoc. Inc. (SHMAPA)

Blackburn & District Tree Preservation Society (BDTPS)

Whitehorse Active Transport Action Group (WATAG)

Glengarry Avenue Group (Burwood)

Blackburn Village Residents Group. Inc. (BVRG)

ACF Community Chisholm (ACFC)

Bungalook Nursery

Melbourne East Bicycle Users Group (MeBug)

If you know someone who might like to join the above groups or CROWAG, please let them know about our combined work.



passive recreation space has been progressively savaged. But what is Council doing about it? Quite a bit actually, but it is proving to be too little to counter growing heat island effects and the threats which you, and families across the city face from climate change. More could also be done on health and community welfare and assistance for the aged. Yet at the Council level, we are in a partial time warp with some budget allocation erring on the side of what was relevant 10 years ago. Seismic shifts are needed. Huge investments are made in major projects and big builds by the Council, then it finds that it needs to find savings and outsource and privatise some *Home Help Services*, like *Meals on Wheels*. It is now obviously planning to do the same with your *Aqualink* pools in Box Hill and Forest Hill (Jan. 2024). We predict lesser services and higher prices if the shift to outsourcing proceeds. It's these issues which CROWAG will continue to impress upon Council.

CROWAG Branches Out

In addition to attracting more affiliate members over the past two years, CROWAG has decided to slightly broaden its appeal and advocacy. While sticking to our bread and butter (seeking improved planning legislation, better governance, improved active transport opportunities and protection of the environment and heritage, and growing tree canopy), this year, we have slightly reworked the nature of our advocacy to more directly support '*improved liveability*'. We will be seeking better amenity and well-being for all people and families (of all configurations) wherever they live, in apartments, units or houses, and those who are renters across all municipal wards and including those who have nowhere to live. We will also be inviting more residents from all walks to get involved as volunteers, given the growing need for them.

What Climate Emergency?

After finally acting in 2021 to declare a 'climate emergency' Council has taken multiple steps in policy and some budgetary improvements to protect and enhance our environment. It is shifting slowly to EVs on the road, has a well-planned lighting and energy reduction program being implemented and is deeply committed to the circular economy (yes, making multiple uses of products and waste). Its recent Sustainability Strategy is a beauty. But CROWAG says that it is not doing anywhere near enough to justify saying there is an emergency. Any business whose Board says it has an emergency, acts like there is an emergency and spends much more in the field of the emergency. That usually means diverting large amounts of spending from one area to another. At Council, big attitude changes and visioning are required of the Councillors and Officers to manage this thinking process. Our tree canopy, for example, is declining and we have been advised by the CEO in a meeting with him (Dec. 5th 2023), that it will not meet its target to achieve a 27% tree canopy cover in Whitehorse by 2031. CROWAG has been saying this for years in our budget submissions and proposals to the Council. Having already fallen from 19% in recent years, we are at 16% tree canopy cover and going back-

wards. If you run a business and have a business plan, you must have a strategy to achieve it, step by step, action by action. At *Whitehorse Council* some of the basic actions are missing because the focus is too much on policy (what we say we will do), and not actually allocating anywhere near sufficient funds and focus to do what they say they are doing. To *CROWAG* the answers have been obvious for years. For example, Council should allocate many hundreds of thousands of dollars to assist in a wide public education campaign (in multiple languages) to help residents see the value in urban forest and especially to stop unauthorised tree removal on private and sometimes public land, and to plant many more trees itself. It can't do that if, for the past 16 years, the allocation to nature strip tree planting has remained at about \$300,000 per year. This is so obvious and makes our advocacy much harder.

City of Whitehorse and Developer Compliance Exposé

Over the past five months or so, the residents in Glenburnie Road and surrounds in Mitcham have been in a battle with the *City of Whitehorse* over multiple compliance issues at the notorious big development at 42-48 Glenburnie Road. *CROWAG* has supported the case against overdevelopment at the site since 2019. The *Glenburnie Road Residents Association* and others had a big win at *VCAT* over this site back then, limiting the development from 11 X 2-storey X 4-bedroom homes, to seven, including the house '*Minamere*' being declared Heritage listed by the *National Trust*. Hard work and advocacy can pay off. But now, the developer, *Golden Oak*, has been exposed as routinely ignoring the Permit Conditions at the site.

On 28th January *CROWAG* wrote to the CEO of Whitehorse, to all of its Councillors and some senior officers in Planning, calling for them to disallow all of the amendments that have been proposed (Sept 2023) by the developer, most of which were seeking retrospective approval for doing



7 day/week parking non-compliance at 42-48 Glenburnie Rd.

things it had no legal right to do. They have even proceeded to do more, while the application was being assessed. Brazen? Yes. Like what? Well, a detailed case study has been developed by residents. It shows that despite Council having 100% responsibility to ensure that numerous conditions and parts of state laws are followed, it has taken a feather duster approach to lots of matters. Let's start with some unauthorised tree re-



removals, the absence of a completed Building Site notice posted at the front security fence (OHS Act), the developer running illegal 7-day per week operations for over 3 years, discharging water from the site, allowing litter to be spread along the road, damage to reserves, blocking the pathways for pedestrian traffic by routine illegal parking across both of its crossovers, when all vehicles were required to be parked on site (by order of VCAT). There is no posted sign advising site tradespeople to this effect as required. They have built an imposing paling fence, shifted a boundary by 2.97 m, and installed a path at the heritage 1926 'Minamere' site. The developer was warned in mid-2023 by its own Arborist (*BlueGum*) that it was in breach of the location of Tree Protection Zone (TPZ) standards, that there were missing trees and that unauthorised earthworks put a special canopy tree at risk. That tree died over just 5 days in November 2023 after an application for it to be removed was refused. Council says that it is still alive, and its decline was due to natural causes. We await the resurrection. The resident case study reveals how campaigners across Whitehorse have beseeched Council to act on all of these issues as they came to light, in multiple emails, phone calls, at a meeting with a planner and at a Public Forum. Council has been variously ignorant of the issues raised and very slow, in most cases, to act. It has also been secretive about what it may or may not have done on numbers of the matters. Regrettably, this case seems to point to the impotence of the Council's compliance regime. We have asked Council to act and beef up its compliance, to employ more qualified staff and to review the way it handles compliance. The case was heard at Council on 25th March 2024. Council in a split vote allowed the amendment, with new enforceable conditions, thus rewarding bad behaviour. Improvements in compliance and enforcement at Council are urgently needed and CROWAG will continue its advocacy for better outcomes.

2023: A Year's Advocacy for Better Governance in the City of Whitehorse

CROWAG has a broad remit. Lots to cover. In the mix is our advocacy for better communications from the *City of Whitehorse* on all matters, especially about applications for tree removals, more transparent access to arborist information and more anything, for that matter, as is important to participatory democracy. As in previous years, last year, we continued to make submissions to the *City* and to the state government and to meet with their officers, pointing out weaknesses in budget allocations, priorities and neglect where it was obvious. Our position is to always suggest changes and how to solve problems.

A Question of Politics

As you know CROWAG is apolitical. But that doesn't mean we haven't got views on democracy. The truth is that our election process for Councillors every 3 years is a bit strange really. It seems that most residents don't care much. Large numbers don't even vote. That means that candidates with limited skills or certain political persuasions, which influence their decision making, do get elected. Candidates with political connections get more shoe leather on pavements to back their campaigns. So, Councils



can be stacked and also be not quite as representative of the cross section of community views as they should be.

We need more independent candidates to stand for election. Elections are due in October 2024. Interested?

The Media and What Helps Make a Democracy Work?

Information and knowledge are the big contributors to democracy. We need more people to take notice, follow what candidates are proposing and to be better informed. Who makes that happen.? Well, the Council officers can do some of that by better informing the whole community (including their own staff and councillors). Advocacy groups like your own and CROWAG and via the media can help and keep matters a bit more transparent. It's a pity that the local *Leader* newspaper is now gone. That's where ***Eastsider News*** is a terrific alternative.



Eastsider News is an online newspaper that is only four years old and already kicking goals. Amongst much else, it covers interesting local stories which are sympathetic to the environment, good governance, the arts, sport and the welfare of the whole community, heritage and conservation. Why not subscribe. It's dead easy. Just go to eastsidernews.com.

Positions Vacant

CROWAG has a vacancy for **1.** A website manager; **2.** A Social Media manager, and; **3.** A tiny bit of help advising here and there on legal matters, mainly to do with planning.

To make inquiries, call or email President; Ross Gillespie 0419 873 743 or crowag.inc@gmail.com

Now the Bite....

Why not become a member or consider making a donation to CROWAG to help defray its growing expenses, not the least of which is insurance and our growing presence as a presenter of public events? This would help us to be even more effective. A \$50 donation is two sips of coffee or tea per week, over a year. To DONATE, simply go to www.crowag.org and follow the directions.



If you have any ideas or copy for our next newsletter, please submit to crowag.inc@gmail.com by 28th April 2024.