

**Submission  
No 154**

**INQUIRY INTO THE PROTECTIONS WITHIN THE VICTORIAN  
PLANNING FRAMEWORK**

**Organisation:** City of Casey

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# PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO PROTECTIONS WITHIN THE VICTORIAN PLANNING FRAMEWORK

## Submission

### Introduction

The City of Casey (Council) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliament of Victoria's inquiry into the protections within the Victorian planning framework. Planning plays a crucial role in ensuring Victoria remains a healthy, resilient and liveable place for our diverse communities, and it is important that the legislative and statutory framework underpinning Victoria's planning system supports such outcomes.

Council recognises and welcomes the significant investment in planning reform currently being undertaken by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP). These reforms, informed by the Red Tape Commissioner's review, recognise the need to balance the demands of growth, employment, sustainability, climate change, housing affordability, and liveability for our community.

For the purpose of its submission to this Inquiry, Council wholly endorses the submission of the **Municipal Association of Victoria**. Further comments are provided on the following subjects:

- Economic development
- Housing affordability
- Heritage protection

### Economic development

Over the last two years we have seen the City of Casey's local economy hit by our changing world. The pandemic has resulted in the need to create over 3,300 jobs each year to 2030 to return to pre-COVID forecasts. We are seeing a growing reliance on a few dominant industries, such as the fact that a third of our local economy depends on construction. This lack of diversity and innovation brings economic risk to the quality of life for our residents and means we need to build in more resilience into our local economy.

The planning system plays an essential role in facilitating and encouraging economic growth and development through land use planning and policy. Any review of the planning framework must recognise these objectives and explore how it can better:

- Support the revitalisation of existing and preservation of future employment land.
- Facilitate the creation and growth of local businesses and reduce the costs of doing business in Victoria.
- Respond to changes in the needs of the business community, such as emerging sectors and the future ways of working.

Council acknowledges the investment in reform to support economic recovery and growth, including the aforementioned planning reform agenda and the creation of the Regulatory Reform Incentive Fund (RRIF). The City of Casey welcomes its recent receipt of grant funding from the RRIF program to deliver an ambitious planning reform project which seeks to reduce the cost of doing business in Casey.

## Housing affordability

As one of the fastest growing municipalities in Victoria, Casey faces the significant challenge of connecting a growing population with supporting facilities, services and infrastructure. More lower-price housing is being located in areas with limited access to public transport, local jobs, and other services; this increases the costs of living and worsens health outcomes. Casey's homeless, marginally housed, and residents in mortgage- and rental-stress are acutely vulnerable in this context.

The City of Casey is proud to have adopted its first *Affordable Housing Strategy* in 2020. This strategy recognises that housing is an essential infrastructure, a right for all members of the community, and a key element of a liveable city. Whilst Council is taking a stronger role in supporting the housing needs of its residents, and connecting vulnerable residents with housing and homelessness services, greater support is necessary from all levels of government.

Council welcomes the Victorian Government's investment in social housing through the Big Housing Build and the establishment of Homes Victoria. Continued investment and coordination across all levels of government is required.

A key opportunity for the Inquiry is to address the lack of clarity, consistency, and support for councils, developers and community housing organisations in negotiating affordable housing contributions. Negotiations are often lengthy and complex, which causes unnecessary delays for development and inconsistent (and often poor) outcomes for the affordable housing sector. The implementation of mandatory contributions and a supporting framework would provide certainty for all parties, improved affordable housing outcomes, and a streamlined development approval process.

## Heritage protection

The City of Casey has a rich and proud history, forming part of the territories of the Bunurong and Wurundjeri people and through its pastoral settlement commencing in the 1830s. Council recognises the need to conserve, enhance and celebrate its history and heritage for the benefit of current and future generations. Heritage plays an important role in providing a meaningful connection to the land.

Planning for heritage protection is a significant challenge for councils. Councils must continually expand and update its knowledge and information on natural, cultural and built heritage sites. They must apply and ensure the accuracy of statutory controls to protect such sites from inappropriate development. They must support the owners and managers of heritage sites to ensure their maintenance and conservation. And they must promote this valued history and heritage through awareness, understanding and appreciation. Collectively, these roles require a significant commitment of resources, political will, and technical expertise. This Inquiry provides an opportunity to investigate how the planning framework can support councils to address capacity and capability gaps in this space.

Perhaps the greatest challenge in the preservation of heritage is demolition by neglect. Whilst this is an industry-wide challenge, it is especially notable in a growth area context. As one of the fastest growing municipalities, Council faces the significant challenge of trying to protect and integrate its most valued heritage into a rapidly developing urban area. Relevant factors include:

- Lack of knowledge or appreciation of conservation values in heritage places resulting in poor outcomes through the subdivision process.
- Lack of maintenance of heritage buildings before, during, and after surrounding urban development contributing to demolition by neglect.
- Decline in the health of trees due to age, damage and disease.
- Increasing land values and subsequent pressure for urban development within heritage curtilages.
- Lack of funding, resources and appropriate expertise to properly care for heritage places before, during, and after urban development.

An opportunity exists to ensure that the planning system, in particular for growth areas the Precinct Structure Planning framework, creates a strong foundation for the preservation of heritage throughout development.

Council also acknowledges the recent implementation of additional protections for heritage sites against unlawful demolition by the *Planning & Environment Amendment Bill 2021*. This Inquiry provides an opportunity to further explore avenues to positively enforce and encourage the active maintenance and management of heritage assets going forward.

**Contact the City of Casey:**

**Web:** [casey.vic.gov.au](http://casey.vic.gov.au)

**Email:** [caseycc@casey.vic.gov.au](mailto:caseycc@casey.vic.gov.au)

**Phone:** 03 9705 5200

**Post:** PO Box 1000, Narre Warren VIC 3805

**NRS:** 133 677 (for the deaf, hearing or speech impaired)

**Customer Service Centres:**

**Narre Warren:** Bunjil Place, Patrick Northeast Drive

**Cranbourne:** Cranbourne Park Shopping Centre

**ABN:** 43 320 295 742

