



GREEN WEDGE

Reg. No. A31739L

PROTECTION GROUP INC.

GWPG Submission to Plan Melbourne Refresh

December 2015

Introduction

The Green Wedge Protection Group (GWPG) was formally incorporated in 1995, following municipal amalgamations. Less formally, the Group has existed since the early 1970s. The Purposes of the Green Wedge Protection Group include:-

- Working to ensure that residents and public officials of the Shire of Nillumbik act together to protect the environment; develop a high quality urban lifestyle within limited designated areas; and promote a rural lifestyle with sensitive farming and enhanced conservation objectives.
- Ensuring the Green Wedge is the strategic focus of the Shire of Nillumbik as outlined by the Local Government Review Board's final recommendation.
- Providing input to the Shire of Nillumbik and other decision making bodies on any matter considered relevant to the Green Wedge.

The Green Wedge Protection Group is heavily involved in state and local planning issues, both currently and prior to the group's formal inception, and will continue to provide advice and direction to authorities to ensure the intent of our Green Wedges is upheld at all levels of Government, and the values protected. The GWPG has involvement in the Green Wedge Coalition, and makes many submissions on state-level planning and environmental issues.

Planning Commentary

Planning, done correctly, is an evolutionary process. Presently, planning is the domain of large commercial developers, and as a result has had serious impacts on the planning decisions made at a political level. Planning has become a political football that lacks credibility because of its ad hoc approach to a myriad of issues that interact and require immense understanding, detailed knowledge of past, present and future trends and a comprehensive understanding of planning principles. Politicians are not planners and over the last ten or so years have proved this beyond any doubt. For planning to remain at arm's length from developer influence, it is imperative that developer contributions to political parties be banned.

A consistent commitment to a planning strategy requires its regular review. A review should consider, at the very least, present and projected trends with regard to population, job prospects and location, family sizes, lifestyles, energy requirements, investment in commerce and industry, transport systems, land use and environment, and the equitable use and distribution of community resources. Collection and analysis of this information must be done by an independent, well supported government department. Planning must deliver consistency with adherence to solid planning strategies that will allow long term financial planning and commitment by all stake holders.

While the Green Wedges Coalition (GWC) is focussed on the preservation of those assets that make Melbourne one of the most liveable cities in the world, this group (the Green Wedge Protection Group) is also well aware that planning must be viewed in a holistic manner but focusses on the Shire of Nillumbik.

Preservation of the Green Wedges depends on the commitment to ensuring that the Urban Growth Boundary is inviolate. This has not been the case within the not too distant past. The GWC has been extremely disappointed by the incursions into the Green Wedges on grounds that lacked planning strategy – for example, grounds such as housing affordability or boundary anomalies. It is obvious that the requirements for expansion of the UGB are inadequate, thus strategic criteria needs to be included in Plan Melbourne Refresh.

Presently, the pressure on the Green Wedges is both external and internal to the UGB. Externally, the problems are extensive as covered within this submission. Internally, there are strategies that can be put in place that will reduce future pressure to expand the UGB. The 1981 MMBW Metropolitan Strategy Implementation recommended (p10 3.2 Metropolitan Objectives, dot point 3) "to optimise the use of the existing infrastructure and resources of the metropolitan area" - this objective is still relevant today.

There is also an urgent necessity to increase the density of green field development. If there was a doubling of density within green field development it would double the life span of the land currently available within the UGB. This would provide 50-100 years of future growth, depending on whose planning statistics are used. The GWC accept that future population growth predictions will be -at best - rubbery, however independently researched figures are a planning requirement.

It is time to re-establish planning as "above" politics. A uniform approach by all parties to the future of our great city is imperative if certainty for all stake holders is to return.

Green Wedges Coalition Submission:

This group (GWPG) is a member of the Green Wedges Coalition (GWC) and fully support and endorse their submission to Plan Melbourne Refresh.

Local Concerns re. Shire of Nillumbik

Green Wedge Protection Group share many concerns with the Green Wedges Coalition. However, our submission focusses on the local issues that would result from the proposed planning changes within Plan Melbourne Refresh.

Planning Issues

Our concerns with the current version of Plan Melbourne Refresh include the following:

- Loss of in-conjunction rule within Rural Conservation Zone (RCV) - removal of In Conjunction requirements will open up a Pandoras box, paving the way for a plethora of inappropriate land uses in an area that is valued for environmental values and open spaces
- Loss of Section 173 agreements – without on-title protection of certain land values, there remains few options to guarantee ongoing protection of those values into the future, and places the security of existing Section 173 Agreements in doubt.
- Allowing subdivision of Lots less than the zone minimum lot size - this would then open the door to be potentially subdivide again, Lots that are already smaller than allowed in the land use zone.
- Within RCZ, loss of prohibited innominate default, insofar as the Plan Melbourne Refresh proposes a change in control of innominate used has from prohibited to permit required – removal of Prohibited Use opens the gate to a plethora of inappropriate land uses that potentially may be permitted.
- Commercialisation of the Green Wedge and Rural Conservation Zones.
- Reducing the Net Gain policies relating to vegetation loss to No Net Loss – the GWPG has major concerns with this, as it is seen as a major step backward. Decades of research and development have been input into the formulation of the Net Gain policies and procedures, in an attempt to address crumbling ecosystems due to ongoing vegetation and habitat loss. Reverting to No Net Loss lacks insight.
- Green wedges should be recognised as an entity within the Plan Melbourne.
- We are seeking the introduction of a Planning authority for the administration of Green Wedges.
- We would suggest that there needs to be a review of the Green Wedge, Green Wedge A, and Rural Conservation Zones. This could encompass a full review – or just a straight reversal of the changes made in Sept Nov 2013 by Minister Guy.
- Grazing of domestic animals in bushland. There is a major lack of planning controls to adequately protect against incremental loss of habitat values in remanet

vegetation due to the placement of grazing stock (horses, cattle, sheep, goats) in bushland environments.

- Nillumbik has experienced difficulties due to lack of strong planning controls to adequately protect remnant habitat in our municipality. This is likely to be a widespread issue, and not just restricted to the Shire of Nillumbik.
- Changes to vegetation clearing controls (formerly the Native Vegetation Management Framework) have created major concerns, with the destruction of quality native habitat and ground story vegetation within the areas covered by Significant Landscape Overlays (SLO's), Environmental Significance Overlays (ESO's), and Vegetation Protection Overlays (VPO's). We need tighter, enforceable controls. This includes incremental (and sometimes rapid, broad-scale) losses from impacts such as grazing of domestic stock within bushland environments, mowing/slashing of vegetation, pasture-sowing within native vegetation, uncontrolled environmental weed infestations, etc.

Financial Issues

Grants commission needs to be reviewed. Rural areas within the urban growth boundary should be treated as such...that is, as rural areas.

A Green Wedges Planning Authority, if created, could be funded by a levy on all Melbournians, similar to the Parks charges on Melbourne Water rate notices. These funds could be used to assist Green Wedge areas to fund restructure overlays, land management and capability studies, feral pest and plant control, and a myriad of other land sustainability concerns.

Green Wedges are the Lungs of Melbourne. It therefore would be appropriate for the greater Melbourne populace to fund the protection of these assets.

In Conclusion:

We look forward to Plan Melbourne Refresh being a document that recognises the values of Melbourne's Green Wedges, and being a document that creates a sustainable vision for Melbourne's growth into the future.