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Arden Vision Submission – John Widmer

This document will discuss the issues related open space planning for the “Arden Vision” and its impact on residential amenity. It will redefine the issues of *densification* and *open space*.

Over the past thirty years, the City of Melbourne has had actively increasing inner city urban densification. The “Postcode 3000” planⁱ had a significant impact on the numbers of residents living in the City of Melbourne LGA. This densification has now flowed to areas adjoining the Moonee Ponds Creek. Densification has had a profound impact on the shared availability of urban open space for residents. The City of Melbourne has responded by resuming roads and changing built form rules. It has a prevailing strategy of non-compulsory acquisition of private property for open space. I believe that the failure to define an open space density metric will inevitably reduce residential open space amenity.

Residential communities adjoining the Moonee Ponds Creek have, since 2012, been participating in what initially named the “Arden-Macaulay Structure plan” (referred to as C190). This genesis of this plan is described as “In February 2012, Council adopted the Arden-Macaulay Structure Plan 2012. This plan provides a long-term strategy for the urban renewal of the Arden-Macaulay area to develop as a dense, mixed-use inner-city suburb whilst protecting key industrial sites”ⁱⁱ. The Council document did not provide a measurement that could define “dense”.

Measurements of Density

Population density is taken in this document to mean the number of residents that live within a statistically defined area provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics known as the SA1. The residential densities in this document are taken from the 2016 Census. The table below lists some of the areas incorporating and contiguous to the area defined by the 2012 (C190) Arden-Macaulay Structure Plan.

North Melbourne Population Densities					
Statistical Area	Principal Street	Residents	Area (hectare)	Density (#/hectare)	Density (#/km2)
2112316	Elm Street	653	11.4	57.28	5,728
2112318	North of Spencer Street	516	10.1	51.09	5,108.9
2112320	Boundary Road	525	17.9	29.33	2,933
2112321	Alfred Street (south)	636	2.3	276.52	27,652
2112322	Melrose Street (north)	558	1.3	429.23	42,923
2112324	Langford Street	447	34.1	13.11	1,311
2112325	Shiel Street	554	6.30	87.94	8,794
2112326	Caytree Crescent	261	4.2	62.14	6,214
2112327	Melrose Street	648	4.4	147.27	14,727
Totals		4798	92	52.15	5,215

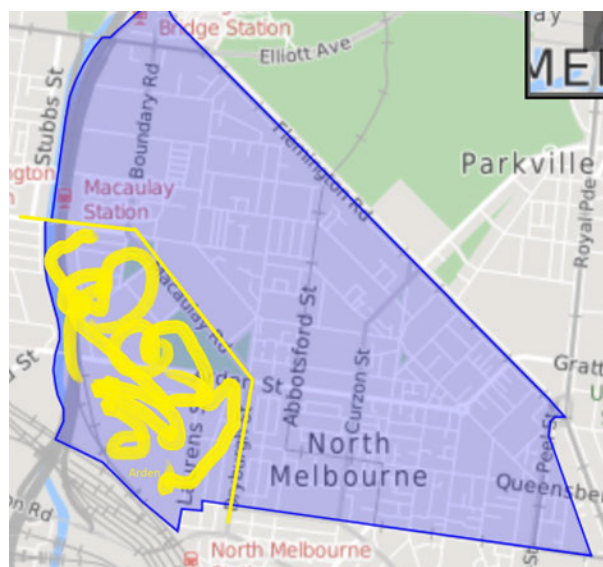
The density of the whole of North Melbourne is usually measured at 6,230 residents per square kilometre.ⁱⁱⁱ This figure is roughly comparable to the 5,215 figure of this study area. The City of Melbourne LGA is quoted as 4,840 from the same source.^{iv} Whilst the population density figures for the whole of Melbourne are roughly equivalent to the whole of Melbourne, fine-grained analysis of the ABS data shows considerable variation between each statistical area. Each area varies in size but could be reasonably defined as a neighbourhood within a precinct.

It is useful to regard the SA1 boundary as a space that a resident might visit neighbours by foot or walk the dog. Open space in this regard is not regarded as space that could incorporate wheeled movement, such as bicycles or skateboards.

Note that the areas of high residential density are associated with the DHHS towers with associated open space surrounding each tower. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that “tower blocks” have significantly higher neighbourhood density above the surrounding low-rise residences.^v

Densification Planning

The Arden-Macaulay Refresh proposes a population increase of 25,000. This densification has been broken into the Arden component with a planned resident population equivalent to the current numbers^{vi} in the suburb of North Melbourne on 20% of the existing area. This is indicated in the diagram. I believe that this is an extreme five-fold densification. It is worth noting that the Arden area largely occupies the “100 Year Flood” zone of the Moonee Ponds Creek and the provision of new open space is largely driven by the planning requirement of flood mitigation. The open space proposed in the existing Council works and the Lost Dogs Home is equivalent to the North Melbourne football field and the North Melbourne Pool. The open space associated with Langford street is 2.6 hectares. There are 230 references to *open space* in the draft Arden Refresh document, so the planners are aware of the significance of high-density rezoning and the adequate provision of *open space*. It is my view that densification of the inner city should not consider existing open space as part of the tally.



The Macaulay Refresh document contains 126 references to *open space* in the draft document^{vii}. The planners are conscious of a densification equivalent to the current population of Kensington that requires a reference to *open space*. Unlike the Arden document, there is no specific reference to the location of new open space. It is unclear that the previously stated policy of the City of Melbourne, of no compulsory acquisition, has changed.





Maps of both the Arden and Macaulay Refresh plan appear to indicate that the Moonee Ponds Creek is an important part of the open space consideration. It is important to consider the actual state of public access to creek that floods. The creek has six significant pumping stations on both the eastern and western side of the creek. It is conceivable that the creek could and should become a viable open space.



International examples of this planning have reclaimed inner city waterways. The Seoul City project that resulted in the Cheonggyecheon linear park is an outstanding example.^{viii} A Nineteenth Century drain can be repurposed for inner-city densification now.

Moonee Ponds Creek Issues

The Moonee Ponds Creek was planned as open space in the first iteration of C190 in 2012. Densification on the western side of the creek is already taking place. The multiple issues of management, however, have not resolved. These are listed below.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public access. The Creek is dominated by the elevated road viaduct with little access for cross pedestrian traffic. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The creek is an electrical easement. Sub-contractors routinely reduce the size of the trees with severe pruning. Photograph was taken in August 2020. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parts of the creek bank that are in public ownership have not been acquired for public access. 	<p>Insert picture of Stubb street “nursery garden”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conflicting management issues with the fundamental functions of the creek as a drain. Melbourne Water and the City of Melbourne have strategically differing interests in the use of the creek. Photo taken in June 2020 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The eastern side of the creek is dominated by a concrete cycle path that has heavy use of cycle commuters to suburbs beyond North Melbourne. 	

- The potential of the creek even now is limited by poor access from the roads that cross the bridge. No significant change to the access has occurred since the first iteration of C190 in 2012



The Problems of Definition – *Open Space* and *Densification*

In this document, I am attempting to define the terms *open space* and *densification*. It is not clear that either the City of Melbourne or the Victorian Planning Authority have done this. In my view that “definition” has considerable impacts on the open space residential amenity for both existing and future residents. From the 1920’s the suburbanization of Melbourne took place over the expanding electric rail network. The “quarter acre block” became the desired residential format. The suburb of Box Hill is a good example of this residential density.

Whilst *open space* often meant the private back yard, there was a clear desire for residential buffers between neighbours as the suburbs expanded. It is for this reason that I believe that public *open space* is space that is shared by pedestrians within reasonable walking distance of their residence. It cannot be a cycle path or a skateboard rink. *Open space* which is used by people playing sport is problematic. Dog parks may also present a problem, as these places may be used by people who have driven to that place from other suburbs. The Moonee Ponds Creek might be considered as open space in the sense that it provides a vista. Bird watching or fishing might be regarded as reasonable *open space* activities. I also believe that densification must provide new open space. It is unreasonable that existing open space should be absorbed in a process of rapid densification. The table here shows that new open space for a residential area to occupied by 15,000 new residents is barely equivalent to existing open space available to the immediate local neighbourhood.

Type	Catchment	Size	Character
Existing			
North Melbourne Recreation Reserve	Municipal 2km	4.5 hectares	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restricted sporting • Recreation
Clayton Reserve	Local 300m	0.7 hectare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal use • Seating/viewing
Macaulay Road & Canning Street Reserve	Small local 300m	0.2 hectare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal use • Seating/viewing
Railway Place & Miller Street Park	Small local 300m	0.1 hectare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal use • Seating/viewing
Total existing unencumbered, unrestricted open space		1.0 hectares	
Total existing open space		5.5 hectares	
Proposed new space			
Arden Central Capital City open space	Capital city N/A, regional function	0.6 hectare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic • Events • Square or urban plaza • Water feature
Arden Central neighbourhood open space	Neighbourhood 500m	1.0 hectare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation • Informal use • Play
Arden North and Arden Central integrated stormwater management open space	Municipal 2km	6.0 hectares	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal use • Heritage • Nature conservation • Water feature
Munster Terrace linear park	Small local 300m	TBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linear • Informal use • Seating/viewing
Western edge green link	Small local link N/A	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linear • Seating/viewing
Total proposed unencumbered, unrestricted open space		1.0 hectare	
Total proposed open space		7.6 hectares	

The continued construction of residential towers in Southbank and Docklands have led to the assertion that Melbourne is now more densely settled than Sydney.^{ix} I believe that this sort of analysis fails to recognize the nature of densification upon a residential neighbourhood. Gross densification measurements include areas where residents are unable or unlikely to walk. A more detailed measurement of area might include a lake or a creek. Road areas are commonly aggregated in the measurements of area with significant impacts on the calculation of density. Since residential density is the number of residents divided by the area they occupy or use, a fine-grained analysis of the area is vital. I believe that taking the above factors into consideration allows for a comparison between the suburban density of Box Hill (for example) and North Melbourne and its neighbouring inner city suburbs.^x

Summary

Densification of the inner-city suburbs must inexorably produce a pressure on the shared use of open space. *Densification* means that more residents use the same space.

I believe that inner city Melbourne is already densely settled. Infill developments and changing demographics have seen 20% increases in residential numbers across the suburb.^{xi} This densification is reasonable and sustainable. It has been achieved with strict planning controls on height limits and built form controls. The construction of multi-storey towers adjacent to the Moonee Ponds Creek poses particularly extreme pressures on the residential access to open space. I believe that this planning of extreme densification has been a result of the failure to define *open space* and *densification*.

I believe that the City of Melbourne has participated in a strategy of urban densification in parts of North Melbourne since 2012 without acquiring sufficient open space. The C190 Structure Plan and its more recent iteration are examples of extreme densification without reference to *existing* residential amenity. I am not opposed to densification but believes that sufficient open space is a vital element of inner-city life.

Open space must be regarded as public space. The tendency to highlight, for example, spaces on the roof of a building is highly misleading. Open space implies passive use. It does not involve organized sport or vehicle traffic of any kind.

Gross comparisons to Hong Kong, New York and London are not a revealing comparison for the Melbourne urban density context. As the urban area of Melbourne expands it is not unreasonable to redefine the residential density of North and West Melbourne. It is not clear that planning such as C190 is sufficiently considering the significant impacts of densification and open space. Significant public open space should be acquired as part of the process of densification. A metric with a fair comparison with existing open space is the only fair way of achieving this outcome.

Appendix

This is a table submitted to the first C190 Planning Panel.^{xii} It shows a densification comparison study for a suburb with the typical “quarter acre block”. Residential data was taken from the 2011 ABS Census.

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ABS 2011 Population Density Calculations for Kensington and other Melbourne suburbs					
Location	2011 ABS Statistical Area	Population	Area (ha)	Density (persons/ ha)	Density factor above Foch St, Box Hill
Kavanagh St, South Melbourne	2112616	407	0.29	1,403	87
The Kensington Apartments, cnr Bent & Hardiman St, Kensington	2112804	100	0.21	476	30
64 Barnett St Kensington (our house)	2112103	2	0.02	100	6
<i>Statistical areas in Kensington 'east' (bounded by Macaulay, Eastwood, Racecourse & Lambeth Sts)</i>					
Barnett St Statistical Area, Kensington	2112103	463	7.8	59	4
Parsons St Statistical Area, Kensington	2112105	498	8	62	4
Lambeth/Smith St Statistical Area, Kensington	2112104	391	5.5	71	4
<i>Summary for Kensington 'east'</i>		1,352	21.3	63	4
<i>Statistical areas in Kensington 'banks' (redeveloped area west of Epsom Rd)</i>					
Mercantile Parade, Statistical Area, Kensington Banks	2112119	594	8.5	70	4
Speakman St, Statistical Area, Kensington Banks	2112120	710	10	71	4
Cornish Lane, Statistical Area, Kensington Banks	2112122	492	6.3	78	5
Howlett St, Statistical Area, Kensington Banks	2112123	645	8	81	5
Bayswater Rd, Statistical Area, Kensington Banks	2112117	722	11	66	4
Newton St, Statistical Area, Kensington Banks	2112118	476	6.3	76	5
<i>Summary for Kensington 'Banks'</i>		3,639	50.1	73	5
<i>Statistical areas in other Melbourne suburbs</i>					
Finlay St Statistical Area, Albert Park	2112804	426	7.6	56	3
Page St Statistical Area, Middle Park	2112826	493	11	45	3
Ringwood St Statistical Area, Ringwood	2126638	559	18.3	31	2
Foch St Statistical Area, Box Hill	2116328	374	23.3	16	1
<i>Results of my Capacity Population model of the Arden Macaulay Structure Plan for Precinct 4 (North-West Quadrant)</i>					
Arden Macaulay Stage 1 - NorthWest quadrant ->		8,804	9.7	908	57

ⁱ <https://www.domain.com.au/news/twentyfive-years-since-melbournes-postcode-3000-strategy-started-the-city-is-hotter-than-ever-20171025-gz719y/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/building-and-development/urban-planning/melbourne-planning-scheme/planning-scheme-amendments/Pages/amendment-c190-arden-macaulay.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Melbourne,_Victoria

^{iv} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_Melbourne

^v https://www.designingbuildings.co.uk/wiki/Storeys_of_a_building

^{vi} 14,940 - https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC21954

^{vii} <https://participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/macaulay-refresh>

^{viii} <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheonggyecheon>

^{ix} <https://www.news.com.au/national/victoria/news/theres-a-reason-melbourne-feels-so-crowded-its-the-most-densely-populated-area-in-australia/news-story/8ccbaa220544ff3702164b57a35caf57>

^x See attached Appendix to this document.

^{xi} 2011 and 2016 ABS Census comparison for Elm Street SA2112316 statistical area

^{xii} <http://scitech.net.au/population/>