



Annual Report to Members March 2021

On behalf of the East Melbourne Group, I present our annual report to members.

The past 12 months has been a challenging year for everyone, including the East Melbourne Group. The lockdown has meant organised social events have had to be cancelled.

However, it has brought about increased support of our more vulnerable residents.

Your committee have met each month using Zoom. Whilst less personable, it has meant we have been able to continue the many tasks we perform. We finished the year in March with a face-to-face meeting.

We also emailed you monthly newsletters to keep you in touch with our activities.

Your Committee and Subcommittees have given much of their personal time to help make East Melbourne a better place. I thank them and their families for this untiring volunteer work.

Tonight sadly, we bid farewell to Murray Hohnen, Anita Steinbarth, Sue Henderson, and John Gurrieri who are stepping down from the Committee.

I shall mention Murray later.

Anita joined EMG 18 years ago. She has participated in many different roles including Treasurer, convenor of Social, Communications, Membership, and valuable member of Heritage & Planning Committees. When deadlines were tight, Anita rolled up her sleeves and brought about terrific social events, the magazine, and tight financial control and advice.

Sue Henderson has been with us for 2 years as Amenities convenor and valuable Committee member. Sue thought of and set up the EMERG group during the COVID-19 lockdown to organise "Buddies" to help look after our more vulnerable East Melbourne residents. This was a huge success and has been the role model for other inner city resident groups.

John Gurrieri has been an active and valuable Committee member for 2 years. John has represented residents well, whether in outdoor cafes or community issues. On the difficult issues of aircraft noise, he opened doors at multiple levels of government including the Senate.

We thank Anita, Sue, and John for their great contribution to EMG and the community.

Our Administrator Carolyn Fyfe does a great job providing cheerful and valuable assistance to members, potential members, and Committee.

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Heritage and Planning (Greg Bisinella)

“Local heritage can promote community empowerment, social and racial justice, and sustainability. People-centred conservation is a way to place the community at the heart of heritage.” - Dr James Lesh – Melbourne Uni Research Fellow specialising in urban history and heritage conservation.

Along with colleagues Anita Steinbarth, Moira Raynor, Peter Hendrickson, Murray Hohnen, Tom Hogg, John Gurrieri, Ian Mitchell, and Bill Gillies, we have worked to preserve and protect our heritage.

We have tried to ensure planning applications adhere to regulations and don't impact the amenity of our suburb.

We extend our thanks to the East Melbourne Historical Society (EMHS) particularly Barbara Paterson and Sylvia Black for working closely with us. Their knowledge, resources and diligence have been a great support.

Similarly, Urban Design and Heritage expert Trevor Westmore has been an invaluable resource, providing advice and written reports for our submissions.

We continue to see development applications exceed community expectations of what is acceptable. Excessive height, massing, bulk and overshadowing of parks are proposed as appropriate and respectful design outcomes.

Subjective planning regulations allow developers to “go for broke” and then use substantial finances to fight their case at VCAT.

The existing planning controls and overlays are inconsistent, ad-hoc, and discretionary. They lead to exceeded recommended building heights and increased visual clutter. These developments dominate other heritage properties and streetscapes. They change the heritage fabric of East Melbourne to a more modern, dense, and unappealing architecture.

It is clear from recent experiences that VCAT is prepared to approve development applications that do little to enhance the unique heritage of our suburb.

Prior to the last Council election, we asked candidates for commitments on mandatory height limits and a heritage review of East Melbourne. Councillors provided written support of these initiatives and we are now working to ensure they fulfil these commitments.

We do not oppose development applications per se. There are many applications to which we haven't objected. We voice our objections strongly to large scale development applications that seek to diminish the heritage, character, amenity, and liveability of East Melbourne.

In the past 12 months we have been working on getting a suitable outcome to the following major planning applications:

1. 10 Wellington Pde/Hoddle St – A major planning application which proposes to dominate this corner site with a 33-metre-high building (the DDO recommends 24 metres) with 2 buildings of considerable mass and bulk is deemed unacceptable by the EMG, EMHS and a large number of adjoining residents. There were previous applications over the last several years to develop this site. The outcomes have been found in favour of the EMG and residents or not been viable for building to be undertaken. A new developer is now seeking to develop the site and after a strong community objection to the proposal the matter is now set down for a VCAT conference in April and hearing in May.
2. Tie Station in Yarra Park – A tie station is an electrical protection and voltage regulator located between substations and is about half the size of a substation. EMG and residents have provided submissions to the proposed building of a tie station on the parcel of land at Wellington Pde South and Vale St. beside the Jolimont station. A 3-metre-high fenced area to “conceal” the building is an unsuitable outcome for this important site which is the gateway to the city and MCG along Wellington Parade.
3. 140 Jolimont Rd – Eblana - Planning application has been lodged and 109 community members have submitted written objections. The significant heritage property on the site is at risk of being partially demolished and a 42-metre residential tower and ground floor cafe being built on the property, dominating the landscape, and becoming the tallest building in Jolimont.
4. 204-206 Albert St – After several years and delays EMG and residents will have the opportunity to present their case at a 10-day VCAT hearing in May. Considerable time and finances have been committed by residents to ensure this application is defeated.
5. 250 Albert St – RANZCOG building. Has been lodged at VCAT due to council failing to decide on the application within the required time frame.
6. Wellington Pde South. - Treasury Square – The planning ministers’ decision to approve CBD zoning of land on the VIC track site at the end of Wellington Pde South has caused much angst amongst residents and some city councillors. With limited community consultation and a concurrent tender process, we believe the process and proposal are seriously flawed. Having CBD planning regulations in East Melbourne and 3 proposed towers (residential, commercial and hotel) is a concerning precedent. We continue to lobby our local representatives to ensure a community focused outcome is achieved that considers local amenity, no overshadowing of Birrarung Marr and public open space.

We have worked to assist residents with development applications that could adversely affect them.

Media –

In 2020 we have taken an increasingly active role with the media regarding heritage, planning, and development applications. The Age, Herald Sun, Inner City News and ABC radio have provided us with forums and have been largely positive and supportive of our aims.

2021 will require ongoing planning vigilance. We shall engage with residents, council, politicians, and the media to ensure our beautiful suburb retains its unique character.

Amenities (Susan Henderson)

We thank the community for the input and assistance offered to the Amenities sub-committee during a very unusual and uncertain year.

COVID-19 reminded us of the need for a strong community, and we were pleased and reassured by the overwhelming show of support for one another.

Despite COVID-19 imposed limitations, our cohesive group – Susan Henderson, Shelley Faubel, John Gurrieri, Jennifer Noyce, Ian Mitchell, Greg Bisinella and Christopher Ley, continued to work for our community throughout the year.

Our team liaised with politicians, City of Melbourne, Police, DHHS, and the MCG on your behalf on matters including aircraft, traffic and parking issues and the general amenity of East Melbourne.

Residents' concerns and needs were addressed and promoted. We instigated and supported initiatives that enhanced the wellbeing of residents and improved the infrastructure of our suburb.

Aircraft Issues

The Aircraft Group, a sub-committee of the EMG Amenities Committee continued working on key submissions. We were encouraged by the successes of groups in other parts of Australia and several major cities in other countries.

Initiatives over the last year have included:

- representations to candidates in the lead-up to the last council election.
- representation to the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman Kieran Pehm
- achieved unanimous support from City of Melbourne to strengthen and review the Fly Neighbourly Agreement.
- invitation for the new Aircraft Noise Ombudsman to meet with EMG to express our concerns.
- questions to the Senate Estimates Committee by Senator Rice and Submission for discussion of the proposed new policy settings.
- questions raised by Senator Rice in the Senate regarding noise issues relating to aircraft.
- CAAA submission re General Aviation.

Traffic and Parking Issues

By working with council and regulatory bodies we advocated for:

- the introduction of 40kph speed limit within the confines of East Melbourne
- Black Spot funding for pedestrian crossings at Hotham and Simpson St intersection
- a traffic calming plan and pedestrian crossings for East Melbourne
- consideration for residents during the Wellington St tram terminus upgrade
- planning for electric vehicle charging points
- resurfacing Simpson St to Grey St and correction drainage issues for pedestrians
- cycle safety at the intersection of Albert and Lansdowne Streets.

General Amenity Issues

- We have been working with council to roll out the installation of a new type of non-slippery footpath tile for the visually impaired.
- Liaison with DHHS and VicPol regarding the safety issues raised by the Housing the Homeless program and East Melbourne apartments.
- Initiating and managing a program to link vulnerable residents with younger "Buddies" – EMERG - during COVID-19
- More recently we are advocating with City of Melbourne to ensure that the Pavilion in the Fitzroy Gardens is not torn down. The site of the Pavilion has been occupied by a building open to the public since 1903.

Parks and Gardens (Murray Hohnen)

The parks and gardens of East Melbourne have had a good year. The weather has been comparatively mild and the rain consistent. The wind-back of sporting activities in Yarra Park had until recently curtailed the use of the park for event parking with a reduction in traffic on the grassed areas.

All the reserves and gardens have been well used during the COVID-19 lockdowns with residents using their hour of freedom among the trees and parklands. The contractors responsible for maintaining the gardens managed their tasks well despite lockdowns. The major elm removal and replacement program continued.

The Parks and Gardens subcommittee met only once during the year and deferred several items on its agenda until the controlling authorities regained a semblance of normality. Rethinking the children's playground in Fitzroy Gardens and installing sports equipment in Yarra Park are two deferred items. Advocacy for an end to event parking in Yarra Park continues.

Social (Judy Hogg)

Myrna Bull, Krystyn Hendrickson, Asja Jaksic, Moira Rayner, Ruth Roshan

The Social subcommittee has dual roles - to organise social events so that East Melbourne residents can meet with each other, and to raise funds for the work of the EMG.

6 social events were organised - all had to be cancelled due to COVID-19.

The subcommittee is aware that people want to enjoy each other's company at social events. We also know some people are in tight financial circumstances. Efforts are made to enable all residents to attend some events. There is a short free list, and every effort is made to reduce the cost of attending.

In March 2021 a cocktail party was held at the Lyceum Club. This was very popular and oversubscribed. It was a very enjoyable evening and raised funds.

FUTURE EVENTS

27TH April Wine and Cheese night at "Life's too short" wine Bar.

27th May Musical Soiree.

Planned Events: Formal Dinner, Trivia night, Cox Plate Eve party, Christmas Carols at Bishops Court.

The social committee welcomes new members and ideas. If you wish to assist and be involved, please contact Judy Hogg on judy.hogg@vardon.net.au

Communications (Anita Steinbarth)

Lockdown has meant only one special COVID-19 edition magazine was released. We especially thank Sue Henderson as guest editor and team including volunteer deliverers. It was well received.

We also thank our advertisers for their ongoing support.

We have given monthly email updates to members advising them of activities and generally keeping in touch.

Membership (Greg Watson)

Overall membership for the year remained around 500 members. COVID-19 stopped social events where we try and recruit new members. Member numbers influence decision makers.

We hope to increase membership through initiatives such as the EMERG Buddy-volunteers.

We welcome your suggestions. We are investigating the following:

Welcome Pack - to new residents with information on EMG, surrounding facilities and businesses

Social Media – using Facebook etc to inform new members of EMG activity

Noticeboards – EMG information displayed in community places like crèches etc

We ask you to encourage your friends and neighbours to join the EMG. At \$55, it is a small commitment to help safeguard our suburb.

Life Membership

From time to time, the EMG recognises a small number of individuals for their outstanding contribution to the work of the association by granting them honorary life membership. There are currently 12 such members. This year, the Committee nominates Murray Hohnen and Stuart Hamilton.

Murray Hohnen has been a Committee member for many years. He has served in many roles including President, Vice President, Convenors of Heritage and Planning, Parks and Gardens. He has been a mentor to many Committee members including myself, indeed he was the main reason I joined. He has been instrumental in guiding and growing the Group. Whenever extra help was needed Murray would volunteer. His creative mind and laconic wit have been welcomed during dry or challenging times.

Stuart Hamilton joined EMG in 2007 and has been on the Committee since 2008. He was EMG President for 3 years from 2009 to 2011, and Secretary for 6 years from 2014 to 2020. He was an enormous support to the EMG in keeping the wheels turning, setting procedures in place, and getting things done. He was also a great personal support to me prompting me with tasks to be completed, wise counsel and timely suggestions.

Finance

Profit and Loss - 2020 was a difficult year due to COVID-19. As a result, the Group made a loss of \$1,329 (compared to 2019 surplus \$14,881).

Subscriptions received were in line with budget but a little above the previous year.

We did not have any social events during the year and our only fundraising event for the year was the sale of the Melbourne jigsaws and the sale of some cards and tea towels which raised \$1759. In 2019 we raised \$11,837 from social and fundraising events.

One edition of the magazine was produced during the COVID-19 lockdown. We were fortunate to get a grant of \$2,500 towards the production of the magazine from the City of Melbourne.

The employment expenses for the year were \$14,251 (2019 \$15,360) as Carolyn only worked the hours needed to carry out her agreed duties as well as assisting Committee members when requested.

There were several planning and heritage issues this year and consequently we incurred \$8,661 in expenses (2019 \$30) obtaining expert opinions to support our various objections to planning proposals.

At the end of the year, we had cash reserves of \$102,790 of which \$7,041 were subscriptions paid in advance.

Based on our strong financial position, the Committee recommends that subscriptions remain the same for the 2021 year.

Subcommittee Opportunities

We are seeking members for all Subcommittees - Heritage and Planning, Amenities, Social, Membership and Communications. If you or someone you know would like to assist and be involved, please speak to me or a Committee member.

We have a lot of fun and make a real difference to East Melbourne.

Ian Mitchell
President

31st March 2021