A Submission to Plan Melbourne Refresh

Prepared by the Inner Melbourne Planning Alliance Inc. (IMPA)

December 2015-12-18

Introduction

Inner Melbourne Planning Alliance inc (IMPA) is a not-for-profit community/professionals based organisation that is committed to promoting good urban planning processes. In particular we support a more transparent and evidence based planning process, and a commitment to community participation in that process.

As such we are pleased to see the review of Plan Melbourne is committed to involving the community in the process and is prepared to discuss difficult and competing issues.

As IMPA is primarily about good process we strongly support the commitment to a more open and transparent planning process.

We would add to that the proposition that it is equally important to adopt an evidence-based approach to making planning decisions. By emphasising the importance of backing opinion with real world data IMPA have demonstrated in a number of projects that it is possible to work with disparate groups to achieve a surprising level of consensus.

IMPA has a wide membership made up of most of the Inner City community residents organisations and a significant direct membership by highly committed professionals, individuals and academics involved in the urban development field. Further information about IMPA is available on our website at www.impa.org.au
Dispute resolution Vs collaborative engagement

IMPA is strongly committed to a collaborative engagement process as being more effective than traditional community engagement. We suggest that a problem with past consultation processes associated with Plan Melbourne has been the lack of technical evidence or expert analysis put in front of the community. This leaves the community naturally wary of change and encourages groups to fall back onto vested interests.

We propose that as part of Plan Melbourne Refresh, a commitment is made to engage in collaborative engagement with an emphasis on consensus building, including the following techniques:

- Communities of Interest are identified and represented by selected leaders
- Presentations by leaders are limited in time
- Propositions must be backed by evidence
- Skilled facilitators apply nominal group techniques (NGT) to ensure all relevant views are tabled
- Technical expertise is available to assist the facilitator to determine evidential disputes
- Plenary sessions and publication of discussions ensure a high level of transparency for the communities of interest.

It is notable that very similar techniques we applied in the recent Paris COP 21 conference leading to a historic resolution despite the many and varied vested interests across so many countries.

IMPA as an independent organisation that is committed to process rather than particularly outcomes, would be very pleased to assist with the on-going engagement process as the review of Plan Melbourne proceeds.

We would be happy to provide further information about recent IMPA workshops including:

- Fisherman Bend Community Forum – July 2013
- Cities In Crises – Federation Square Forum – August 2014
- Community Forum – 30 speakers – July 2014
- What have we learnt from Docklands – December 2015
A Victorian Planning Exhibition and Research Centre:
The Melbourne Planning Hub ("working title")

A core policy of IMPA is support for a more transparent and evidence based planning process, and a commitment to community participation in that process. As such we are greatly heartened by the government’s stated support for a more open and transparent planning approach within the refresh of Plan Melbourne.

However we are disappointed that the discussion regarding New Planning Tools does not cover any pro-active or collaborative tools.

We propose that the government can best demonstrate support for a more open and transparent process by establishing a Victorian Planning Hub. A Planning Exhibition has been proposed before, most recently as an unfunded policy of the former Plan Melbourne: however our proposal is for a more exciting and advanced institution that would have four key elements:

1. A physical centre or centres where planning information including strategies, studies and major projects can be displayed and explained;
2. Where evidence in the form of real world data and research and analysis can be collected and presented in ways that make it accessible to the community;
3. A forum to encourage community discussion on key planning issues;
4. A mobile component that would take travelling displays and forums to the regions, ensuring planning is not seen as a Melbourne-centric activity.

A key factor that has changed since the writing of the former Plan Melbourne is the emergence of Big Data. This means that increasingly, real world evidence is available to support research and analysis. It could be argued that Universities and Research Centres are already taking advantage of such data, however IMPA suggests that given the pace of change in the urban environment, it is vital that this research is quickly analysed and made available to decision makers and the community in general.

This proposal is presented in more detail in our attached policy paper.
The need to consider Emerging Technologies

Related to the idea of Big Data, IMPA suggests that urban planning must begin to take into account the impact of a range of new technologies that could have as yet unexpected impacts or opportunities for the city.

This begins with automated data feedback, such as smart traffic lights linked to real time data from infrastructure such as power and water, offering the potential to vastly improve urban efficiency through management.

For example, the impact of social media related technologies such as UberX, AirBnB, and the emerging community share sites are only just beginning to be felt. We can add to this new technologies such as autonomous vehicles that have the potential to blur the distinction between public and private transport and to open up new possibilities for freight transport; and 3D printing that shows potential to revolutionise manufacturing.

All these technologies are only in their infancy; any urban plan for 2050 should consider the potential impacts of emerging technologies. IMPA suggests rather than attempt to predict what sort of technologies will be dominant in the next ten, twenty and thirty years, it will be more effective to commit to harnessing these opportunities to deliver a more livable and sustainable lifestyle for all Victorians.

IMPA suggests this is another key reason to invest in an integrated urban research centre, in the form of a “Planning Hub” as described previously and detailed further in the attached document. This would ensure that the refreshed “Plan Melbourne” will be a “learning document”, able to adapt as the world inevitably changes.
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On behalf of the IMPA Executive Committee
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presents:

the Melbourne Planning Hub
an idea in four parts

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Conclusion

The establishment of a Victorian Planning Hub would be a major achievement for this government, providing a lasting legacy and a practical mechanism to reduce the conflict and misunderstanding surrounding many difficult planning issues. It would make Victoria a leader in the emerging field of big data analysis and assist to attract international planning and design students to our universities.

IMPA is committed to being non-political and to avoid taking positions on particular issues, instead focusing on the quality of our planning process. IMPA’s diverse membership includes expertise in planning, construction, effective community participation and emerging digital technologies. We are keen to participate in developing a detailed proposal for the Planning Hub and to play an active role in running forums and workshops.

We suggest that the Planning Hub could be established as a semi-independent arm of the state government, encouraging the participation of key stakeholders such as local government and other interested parties. IMPA, as a non-political organisation, can provide the opportunity to develop a true, evidence-based planning process, one that encourages effective participation rather than conflict.

The way forward

IMPA is fully committed to the establishment of a planning hub in Melbourne and we would welcome participation by the State Government, which could include making expertise available from the Department (such as use of the 3D City model) and active participation in the forum.

IMPA has also collated a significant amount of material to support this summary, including information about international examples and recent trends in evidence-based planning.

In 2016, we propose to develop this material into a comprehensive brief for the Hub, which would scope out options for the development, management and running of an effective centre.

We invite all interested parties, from government, industry and the community, to work with us, to develop a concept that will inspire robust discussion and will truly recognise the diverse needs of all stakeholders.

The details

Digital visualisations based on GIS (Geographic Information Systems) relational data bases and BIM (Building Information Modelling) are now well developed with expertise and content already available in the State Planning Department, the Universities and many Councils. These systems are presently mainly used to demonstrate the visual impacts of planning proposals, however they are equally capable of visualising any data source and can often overlap the two to make complex issues readily accessible for all.

Digital “models” are now readily converted into physical display models through 3D printing, making the production and maintenance of large display models affordable.

Rich data sources are increasingly being generated within our “connected world”. For example, data is now being collected and made freely available by the City of Melbourne as raw material for further analysis. It has been argued that the future success of cities and their economies will be highly dependent on how well they can tap into the “Big Data” revolution that is presently only in its infancy.

The Planning Museum - Shanghai

Overseas Planning Hubs have included a mobile component where a “pop-up” forum can be brought to regional centres and towns. IMPA strongly believes that given the geographic spread of Victoria’s urban centres, this should be a key component of a Victorian Planning Hub. Although IMPA has been founded to focus on the complex planning issues of the middle to inner Melbourne, we believe many of these issues will be equally applicable to the growth corridors of outer metropolitan centres and to our important regional cities and towns. Our commitment is to see that the lessons learnt in the inner city are made available across the state.

Introduction

A core policy of IMPA is support for a more transparent and evidence based planning process and a commitment to community participation in that process.

IMPA welcomes the current Victorian government’s stated support for a more open and transparent planning system.

We propose that the government, together with key sector contributors, can best demonstrate this support by establishing the Victorian Planning Hub, to create a place for discourse and accelerate the application of international research evidence into planning policy and practice.

IMPA has reviewed previous Victorian and international proposals for planning centres and university based academic hubs. However, our proposal is for a more exciting and advanced institution that would have four key elements:

1. A physical place where planning information including strategies, studies and major projects can be displayed and explained;
2. A virtual place where evidence in the form of real world data, research and analysis can be collected and presented in ways that make it accessible to all.
3. An opportunity to encourage broad discussion on key planning issues on an ongoing basis as Melbourne continues to grow.
4. A mobile component that would take travelling displays and forums to the regions, ensuring planning is not seen as a Melbourne-centric activity.

IMPA’s discussions with its constituent membership indicate that the community is distrustful of traditional “consultation” and is ready to engage in meaningful participation regarding difficult planning problems and potential solutions. The ability to present evidence in a range of forms, accessible to the wider community, now makes this approach practical and economic.

IMPA has also run public forums on difficult planning issues, where different points of view were discussed by representatives from the development sector, community groups and professional bodies, in the light of real world evidence, leading to fruitful discussions rather than conflict.

Examples of planning hubs elsewhere in the world have demonstrated that such centres can quickly become major attractions for visitors, and important sources of educational material for schools, universities and scholars. As well as hosting topics on current and future planning issues, they are ideal places to display information about our past, and how the city or town has developed over the decades.

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