

Royal Park Protection Group Inc

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**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ROYAL PARK PROTECTION GROUP (RPPG)
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This report constitutes an overview of events of the past year in relation to Royal Park.

Tonight we are holding our seventh Annual General Meeting. Our battles have grown more dangerous and difficult each year since our establishment in 1996. Our fight is in common with other community, environment and resident groups to defend our parkland and to resist the invasion of high rise, high density developments. Our mandate written into our objectives in our constitution is *“to oppose alienation of parkland by government, commercial, sporting and other bodies to ensure public access consistent with the terms of the establishment of the Royal Park.”* Our adversaries in this unequal David and Goliath fight are the State Government, the “Big End of Town”, corporate and elite sport, overseas property developers and the construction industry. A valued ally was the Melbourne City Council with then Councillor Kevin Chamberlin playing a leading role in opposing the location of the Games Village on the site.

Over the last year our energies were directed at questioning the location of the so-called 2006 Commonwealth Games Village (in reality a private real estate development by Australand and the Citta Property Group) on the former Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital site. We continued to condemn the Bracks Government for the blatant alienation of public open space and parkland plus heritage buildings for private profit and for the certain future adverse environmental impact on Royal Park and surrounding suburbs with the creation of this “new suburb” with up to 4,000 residents (most will have cars).

Our energies also continued to be directed at saving and protecting the Royal Park Hospital Heritage Precinct from damage and demolition. We attempted this – together with the National Trust - by mounting successive appeals to the Heritage Council. On 17 June 2004, despite opposition by the State Government and developers, the Heritage Council announced the inclusion of the former Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital on the State Heritage Register as being of great architectural, social and scientific significance to Victoria. It was a pyrrhic victory as the developers have effectively managed to circumvent the directives of the Heritage Council. We hope that through continued lobbying and actions we might persuade the Minister Madden to retain the former pathology buildings on the site as an historic interpretive centre with public access as a memorial to Dr John Cade, former hospital supervisor and pioneer of the treatment of bipolar disorder with lithium.

The year opened with a blockade of the Royal Park Hospital site when construction started. This was a symbolic gesture. We stopped work for a day with a picket on the site but did not have the resources to continue. RPPG was betrayed by the Electrical Trades Union who called off their green bans on the site the day work started. Dean Mighell who had cast himself as a new Jack Munday - as the green saviour of Melbourne’s parks and heritage – failed us badly. (The green bans had held for over a year.) Protests have continued at the gates of the site, including those in October when the “Display Village” of “The Parkville Gardens ” opened for inspection. Houses of this vast property development are now on sale now off the plan for \$1 million plus.

By a nice irony Games Minister Madden the Minister appointed RPPFG as a member of the Commonwealth Games Community Liaison Committee for the Games Village. This is a complete misnomer as there are only 5 community representatives out of 24 who are mainly drawn from private enterprise and government departments. This is a token consultation mechanism.

RPPG continues to attend the State Netball and Hockey Centre Advisory Committee in the hope of

persuading the Government to fix the SNHC hockey lights, which continue to be a blight on the Park, the Zoo and surrounding suburbs. On a more positive note, a result of RPPG's suggestion the SNHC has now installed a water catchment and recycling plant. The Centre uses a massive volume of water each day on their wet surface hockey fields. In addition due to RPPG's suggestion the SNHC management is now proceeding with planting the precinct with native vegetation to try to blend with Royal Park plantings outside the perimeter fence.

The first objective in the RPPG constitution is *"to protect, regenerate and conserve the Royal Park as a unique, indigenous, central city park for present and future generations, consistent with principles of the 1987 Royal Park Master Plan"*. While we have been preoccupied with saving Royal Park from the obvious threats of the Games Village and the proposed Eastern Freeway extension through the Park, other more insidious threats have materialised from time to time in the form of Melbourne City Council bureaucrats signing off permits for capital works - more parking, toilets, footpaths, bikepaths, playgrounds, barbeques, seats set on concrete slabs and lights and other work creation projects for contractors. The very facilities supposedly to assist "passive recreation" are now slowly killing Royal Park. We have fought off proposals for a removal of a slice of parkland for a bus-parking bay outside Anzac Hall and for installation of a public toilet block, which would have necessitated felling part of an avenue of eucalypts on Park Street. In addition we thwarted an attempt to axe an entire line of 25 mature sugar gums and have halted the realignment of the golf course with more trees due for the chop. There has been fortunately, success with some of the revegetation and replanting projects. RPPG is represented on the Royal Park Master Plan Implementation Advisory Committee plus its sub Committee, the Vegetation Management Group, both which operated well under the previous Council. Their future is far from assured under the new Council.

In November last year seeing the tide of development sweeping over Royal Park and Melbourne, RPPG established the Protectors of Public Lands Victoria having been inspired by the example set by PPL in New South Wales. Kenneth Davidson a leading Age writer and critic of location of the Games Village in Royal Park Games launched the organization. His article in today's Age "The real cost of our Games" is a savage indictment of the State Government. We consider that the PPL VIC has been useful in coordinating the protests over Melbourne 2030. Communities who have been impacted by Melbourne 2030 are here tonight and I hope will speak on open mike.

Our thanks go to Kevin Chamberlin who has for many years been a great mentor of RPPG and has led the fight to halt the alienation of parkland especially Royal Park. We have been devastated that he is no longer on Melbourne Council to speak for the local communities. Thanks also go to Tom Pikusa our barrister who led us in our appeal to the Heritage Council and who is now continuing to look at the legalities of the location of the Games Village in Royal Park. Thanks to our RPPG Committee and welcome to our new committee members. The State Opposition continues to give us support by raising issues in Parliament particularly about the Games Village.

RPPG wishes all the groups represented here tonight well with their campaigns. We should heed the words of Patrick White who said at a rally to save Centennial Park *"protect your parks from the pressure of political concrete"*

Julianne Bell Convenor RPPG