

## **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ROYAL PARK PROTECTION GROUP (RPPG) GIVEN AT THE AGM ON 10 November 2011**

The past year has been seen a number of issues coming to a head. The completion of Stage 1 of the RCH – Stage 2 about to begin (complete with bar!), more developments on the East-West link,

Issues over the past year included:

- RCH and return of parkland.
  - Representatives of community groups met Health Minister David Davis on 24 August 2011 to brief him on the failure of past and present Governments to consult or even inform the community on Stage 2 of the RCH development, namely, inclusion of a hotel and retail centre in the hospital complex; construction of a second carpark for 800 under the hotel extending under Royal Park; and the inclusion of a Zoo in the Hospital foyer (an aquarium and a meerkat enclosure). We raised: the need for certainty over demolition of old Hospital buildings and the return of the site to parkland, that “returned parkland” will not just be a forecourt for the hotel but part of bushland Royal Park; that the footprint of the Hospital will be only 4.1 hectares as required under legislation not, as estimated, 5.9 hectares; traffic management; and that a community reference group be established to monitor progress and keep the community informed. The Minister has yet to get back to us.
  - It is noted that pieces of parkland that are unusable for recreation will be counted as parkland and not part of the RCH development. This is why the real area excised for the hospital will grow beyond what was promised.
  - Watch out!! The Government has promised to return the “old” part of the hospital to parkland once construction is complete. The massive growth of Melbourne will bring into sharp relief the inadequacy of the original planning document prepared as the basis for the new RCH. This document allowed for the same overall population in Melbourne and hence the same number of beds in the new RCH. We all now know the reality of our population boom and there must be “people” whispering about how it would be advantageous to keep the whole of the original site for an “expanded” hospital. We must keep our vigilance up on this.
  - Also disappointing is the new fire/emergency vehicle access track carved into the park around the RCH which has just appeared and is not part of the excised land for the new RCH.
  - Briefing sessions were asked for after community session held in July showed that there was a real desire by many in the community to know what is happening. Second one was held yesterday!
- Park usage - “surveys” by the MCC to the local community was reported on at last years meeting. We have not heard of any developments from these surveys to date. RPPG maintain that the 1998 Royal Park Master Plan should still be used as the basis for management of the park instead of ad hoc ideas being promoted.
- Parkville Gardens - As members will recall, the Parkville Gardens residential development was built on the site of the Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital after 20 hectares of land and the heritage buildings were gifted to Australand, the developer. The deal was that, in exchange, the residential development was used as a Commonwealth Games Village for two weeks in 2006. A wall of 700 residential units proposed to be built along the City Link motorway wall with two 9 storey and one 11 storey tower block was not built as, according to the developer, the market for units was not favourable. Now, however, construction is proceeding for blocks of 3 to 4 storey units next to the freeway. It will surprise members to learn that the Parkville Gardens development is still categorised as a “Games Village” and is under the control of the Minister for Planning.

Improvements in the park have been:

- Replanting of the Australian Native Garden. Charles Pinnuck (Royal Park Supervisor) provided a tour of the Australian Native Gardens before the September RPPG meeting.

- Successful community plantings in Royal Park June and September.

Continuing issues:

- There is a need for briefing sessions by the City of Melbourne of planting and maintenance of Royal Park.
- Communication sessions and briefings on developments and progress with RCH.
- East West Link tied to development of West Link and the proposed Doncaster Rail Line with suspension of Hoddle Street Study. I will ask Juliann Bell to talk to this item in a moment to give you an update.

I would like to end by thanking all our RPPG members, friends and allies for assisting over the years with all the hard work involved in rallies, protests, blockades, publicity stunts attending meetings and keeping the Government and Council under constant surveillance . I would like to end with a well known quote "*Your parks are your breathing spaces. Guard them, cherish them. Parkland is valuable and greedy eyes see the money in it. So you must always be on the alert. Hang onto your breathing spaces in this developing and already over-congested city. Protect your parks from the pressure of political concrete.*" (Patrick White at a 1972 Rally, Centennial Park, Sydney.)

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