

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ROYAL PARK PROTECTION GROUP (RPPG) GIVEN AT THE AGM ON 4 October 2014

The RPPG has been active again this past year engaging with many parties on issues ranging from the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) Stage 3 – "Return to Royal Park" project, discussions and forums attended re the East West Link (EWL) and representation at the Victorian Planning Panels (VPP) Review Hearings...

Issues over the past year included:

- **Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) and return of parkland.**
 - RCH Stage 2 nearing completion.
 - The Return to Royal Park project area is almost complete with opening due early in the New Year. As advised last year the design of the new area has not been in line with the Royal Park Master Plan. It was supposed to be open woodland and grassland but the City of Melbourne has dedicated it to a huge children's adventure playground including a hill.
 - Further to our meetings last year with the Minister David Davis 30/3/12, the original small carpark on the corner of Gatehouse St and Flemington Rd has been removed and there is now a small drop off area in this location.
 - It is noted again that pieces of parkland that are unusable for recreation will be counted as parkland and not part of the RCH development, i.e. not within the 4.1Ha of "hospital". The "returned Park" area is approx. 3 Ha. The Hotel as part of the RCH is now open for business.
 - The requirement that the area be surveyed to confirm the 4.1 Ha prior to handover from the builders and returned to Royal Park has not been done, (even though required under legislation). It has been advised to us that this will happen after the works are completed...one wonders what would happen if there is a shortfall!
- **E-W Link.**
 - Some further drilling occurred late 2013 for the EWL project.
 - RPPG prepared badges and posters and stickers for distribution to get our message out.
 - Marg Jungwirth and Anne Phefley have also been busy in preparing Royal Park cards (available for sale today!) and we have some postcards to give out to people to lobby the Government in support of saving our park.
 - Tony Ferguson, another RPPG committee member, made a wonderful petition on Change.Org. His family history lent a personal note to the story, his great-grandfather, Francis Meaker, was the first Royal Park bailiff/ranger. The video is entitled "Don't Sacrifice Royal Park for the East West Link Tollway..." See <http://www.change.org/p/premier-naphthine-don-t-sacrifice-royal-park-for-the-east-west-link-tollway-find-better-ways-to-meet-melbourne-transport-needs>
 - Protectors of Public Lands (PPL) obtained a grant from a philanthropic trust for David Tatnall, eminent landscape photographer, to photograph Royal Park concentrating on the magnificent open grasslands and woodland in the path of the EW Link. It was entitled "The Last Summer". The exhibition was held in March 2014 at the "45 Downstairs" Gallery in the city during the EW Review. The website which has had over 80,000 hits is www.thelastsummer.org
 - RPPG and PPL funded a barrister (Mr. Tom Pikusa) to represent us at the Victorian Planning Panels (VPP) review (April-May 2014). The work done by Tom was excellent and helped draw attention to the deficiencies in the design proposal. At Day 1 at the Directions hearing (which extended over six weeks during March and April this year) our legal counsel was directed by the Chair to undertake and present opening and closing submissions for community groups in addition to the individual submission made on behalf of our two groups. (Over 1,400 submissions were made to the VPP hearing many being community organisations.)

This meant our legal counsel produced three massive documented statements, two accompanied by power point presentations and reproductions of David Tatnall's photographs of Royal Park. Julianne Bell, RPPG Committee member and Secretary PPL VIC, attended the entire 6 week hearing to instruct our legal counsel and assist him with editing our submissions plus preparing questions for the opposition legal team and expert witnesses.

RPPG and PPL VIC were the only community groups to have legal representation at the hearing. As a consequence of what to us were enormous legal costs incurred our groups had to undertake fund raising to cover our expenses. (The Government has refused to contribute). Thanks to all our members and community groups who supported us at the hearing and gave generous financial donations. The VPP agreed with our recommendations and findings in its report on 30 May 2014 but unfortunately they were not adopted by the Minister - only scrapping the road interchange/ turn off at Elliott Avenue in Royal Park thus saving the Zoo.

- Legal Challenges to EW Link
 - Mr. Anthony Murphy a resident of Brunswick, supported by a distinguished legal team, challenged the EW Link in the Supreme Court. The case is continuing in the High Court of Australia. (This challenge is based on the failure of the State Government to produce a business case.)
 - The Cities of Yarra and Moreland have an ongoing challenge to the EW Link in the Supreme Court which will be heard on 15 December 2014. (The case is based on the claimed failure of the Minister for Planning to provide adequate information on the project). The Labor Opposition dropped a bomb shell on 11 September 2014 with the announcement that, if they win the election this November, as the incoming government they would not contest the Yarra and Moreland Councils' case.
 - The action to obtain an injunction stopping the EW Link in the High Court failed and the Napthine Government signed the contracts even though legal cases are still in court. Since then it has been revealed plans have been amended for Royal Park, including addition of a power station to provide energy for drilling the open cut roadway, inclusion of vent stacks and the expansion of the Ormond Rd intersection.
- **Heritage Listing**
 - Mr. Tom Pikusa, legal counsel for PPL VIC and RPPG, prepared a submission to Heritage Victoria supporting that Department's request for inclusion of Royal Park on the State Heritage Register. (The original nomination was made by the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects). It was to have been heard by the Heritage Council and, if successful, might have afforded some protection from the threat of the EW Link. The Minister for Planning Matthew Guy intervened, however, and "called-in" the application for heritage listing thus preventing it proceeding and in our view, facilitating construction of the route of the EW Link through Royal Park.

Community Involvement: RPPG supported City of Melbourne community plantings in Royal Park last October 2013 but none have been held this Spring.

Website: We have upgraded, and we hope improved, our website...again!

Continuing issues:

- There is still a need for coordination meetings with the City of Melbourne for the planting and maintenance of Royal Park. The Council eliminated the Royal Park Master Plan Committee and its sub Committee - the Vegetation Management Working Group. These meetings were discontinued some 4 years ago now.

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 from Patrick White at a 1972 Rally, Centennial Park, Sydney.

"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."

Paul Leitinger Convenor Royal Park Protection Group October 2014