



Wyndham City Council
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Saturday 9th September 2023

Re: Submission to the Wyndham Housing and Neighbourhood Character Strategy 2023

The Werribee River Association (WRA) hereby submits its input into the draft strategy.

Our purposes are:

- Protecting water quality in the Werribee River, other local waterways and wetlands flowing to the coastline and into Port Phillip Bay
- Promoting the re-establishment of natural habitat for wildlife in the Werribee River catchment
- Providing attractive natural places for people to access and enjoy
- Providing educational programs about environmentally sustainable practices, educating a growing and diverse population living in the west of Melbourne

The history of this award-winning organisation is rooted in advocacy and volunteerism for the environment and human health. The organisation now has five part-time staff, four hundred+ volunteers, and is a community-led vibrant environmental and human health agency in the Werribee catchment in the west of Melbourne.

WRA has been actively involved in planning matters for many years and has led or participated in local and state-wide initiatives to change legislation and activity, through its willingness to align with others to achieve change for the benefit of the community, and the leadership of its experienced and well recognised Werribee Riverkeeper John Forrester.

WRA hopes the new the Wyndham Housing and Neighbourhood Character Strategy 2023 does ensure we have strong policies in place for managing Wyndham's housing needs, particularly in the face of our growing population and changing climate conditions.

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WRA endorses the vision as written on p.36:

Wyndham will contain a variety of dwelling types, designs and lot sizes, to provide for the diverse needs of current and future residents. New housing will be well designed and contribute to the area's preferred neighbourhood character. Medium and higher-density housing will be located within a comfortable walk from public transport and activity centres. Residential areas will be leafy and green, with landscaping in the public and private realm.

Principles

WRA endorses the four principles as outlined in the draft strategy on p.37.

They are:

1. Locating new homes in key centres, close to services and infrastructure
2. Housing choice for all
3. Enhancing our neighbourhood and landscape character
4. Protecting our natural environment

However, WRA notes that No.4 needs to be taken seriously. In fact, there is legislation and General Environmental Duties which already embed this as an obligation. There needs to be more ambition and leadership within the implementation of the strategy. Without this, then the community will face greater impacts in terms of financial cost from the need to cool homes, discomfort in living conditions in their houses and when outdoors, and there will be loss for future generations when habitat and wildlife are reduced due to effects of heat and drying due to climate change.

We draw attention to the Victorian Planning Authority Strategic Plan 2021-2024, and their various guidelines, where there is much made of sustainability and, adapting to climate change, biodiversity, local open spaces, green infrastructure and more, including notes on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.¹



Photo: *Plane Trees in Presidents Park Wyndham Vale, planted approximately 1993, offering no shade and struggling in a dry location.*

The strategy needs to recognise the waterway areas in Wyndham, in the same way that coastal areas are recognised now. For example, Victoria has experienced a drop in rainfall already under climate change, and by 2040 the rivers of the Central and Gippsland regions are predicted to see decreases in run off of up to 33% under medium to high climate change scenarios.² That will cause further drying out of business-as-usual-mown grass areas leading to excessive evaporation causing further loss of inappropriately planted canopy and shrubs, and threatening riparian strips which have no buffer zones. Research by Melbourne Water says that vegetation in areas in the west of Melbourne have a high to very-high risk of survival under scenarios of climate change.³

The large open green mown spaces persisting in waterway areas along Skeleton Creek and Werribee River in Werribee, is threatening the long-term health of each waterway and its vegetation. There is an urgent need for buffer plantings in those two waterway environs and in future works in all other waterway areas as the city moves into the future.⁴

A report on the current planting style employed on those mown grass areas, narrow beds and very dense plantings offering no major pluses for the community, or ensuring better community outcomes such as shade and windbreaks, plus allowing negative edge effects on the riparian areas, was presented to Wyndham City in February 2023, and is discussed on pages 16-18 of a report entitled *Platypus Watch – Putting Perridak Back on Track*⁵ by WRA, which can be found [here](#)

Better use of existing stormwater outlets, which often have quite a fall in to the waterways, can have modified 'soft' treatments applied benefiting vegetation for shade, buffer reasons and thereby offering better human health outcomes as well as environmental benefits.

The principle of protecting our natural environment above or at least as importantly as all others, will ensure we have a more economical, and more sustainable, healthy and comfortable future for the community.

Neighbourhood Character

WRA wishes to submit comment on two objectives from 2018 as listed on p.37:

- *Protection of heritage and neighbourhood character values.*
- *Protection of significant environmental and ecological landscapes.*

The natural heritage that the two waterways contribute to their neighbourhoods is reflected in the increased property prices relative to areas away from the waterways. Therefore, the neighbourhood character value is of importance to residents. Couple that with the significance of the environmental and ecological landscapes, then these two objectives are of great importance and should be retained.

Real Estate agents use the river to attract better prices for property they place on the market. For example, O'Brien's Real Estate September 2023 has this property for sale:

Photo: *On offer is this stunning Henley built home,... Located in one of Werribee's most prestigious and sought-after areas, with streets lined with lovely trees and only a minute walk to the beautiful Werribee River, walking trails and parklands.*



Other sentences chosen from current real estate sites:

Stockland - The River Flowing by and Abundant Green Spaces.

Riverwalk Estate - Come home to a welcoming village lifestyle set against the scenic Werribee River, enriched by abundant green parklands and waterways, just minutes from the future Federation Trail

Property owners would want these values and landscapes protected, and as they run for many kilometres in length, on both waterways, a strong case exists for waterways to have a separate neighbourhood character, which could be entitled 'Waterway Garden'.

Housing Change Areas

WRA understands and supports the need for the three broad areas of change in the strategy: substantial, incremental and limited change.

WRA notes the dot point on p.11 in the section 'What is a housing strategy?':

Identify the best locations to accommodate new housing and residential change, taking into consideration Wyndham's natural environment and other land use constraints.

WRA assumes that 'limited change area' status at Werribee South is because it is a significant landscape, would necessitate some environmental controls and certainly needs a built form control.

In reference to that, the limited change area will need to take into account the desire by the community to have adequate blue-green open space. Werribee South beachfront is a narrow-restricted space and a recent building approval to allow a house close to the existing road between O'Connor's Rd and the Marina, may have encouraged further thoughts of development along that strip, reducing available parking and recreational space for a growing population. A further number of houses here which might dominate the narrow beach frontage with height and bulk, is not desirable. Then, with limited parking and pedestrian space the coming coastal bay trail will put further pressure on the housing and amenity.

Due to rising sea levels as high as 24 cm by 2050⁶, changes are likely along the coastline. The lower public non-boating carpark area has water on it now from storm surges and high spring tides, and it is highly likely that the fragile sand-based beach frontage space there and further along the beach to the east between O'Connor's Rd and the Marina will be eroded, further reducing space for the public.

WRA has submitted comment on these matters for this area on two earlier occasions. We raised the same issues in 2011 when we took part in the first Wyndham coastal strategy initiative, followed by the second in 2019.

Sustainability

'*Waterways of the West*',⁷ the initiative created by WRA and community partners across the west of Melbourne, including the Barwon catchment over a four year-period from 2017-2020, and legislated in 2021, has very relevant actions which have been committed to by the State Government.

The Action Plan's directions commit to achieving broad reforms to secure the future of the Waterways of the West:

- Direction 1 *Recognise the Waterways of the West as living and integrated natural entities and the Traditional Owners as the 'voice of these living entities'*
- Direction 2 *Embed Traditional Owners' values in planning and decision-making for waterways*
- Direction 3 *Stronger planning policy and controls for waterways*
- Direction 4 *Improve waterway amenity to meet community expectations*
- Direction 5 *Better protection of the region's wetland values*
- Direction 6 *Identify opportunities to meet environmental and cultural water needs*
- Direction 7 *Protect the Waterways of the West from pollution*

The Action Plan, released in late 2021, drives enduring protection for waterways and their parklands by addressing impacts of development and pressures of urbanisation on the distinct waterway landscapes west of Melbourne.⁸

Relevant actions delivered to date:

Action 3.1 – Stronger planning policy and guidance. The Government has finalised Amendment VC201 to the region's planning scheme to enhance the protection of the Werribee (Wirribi Yaluk) and Maribyrnong (Mirrangbamurn) Rivers and Moonee Ponds (Moonee Moonee) Creek.

Action 3.2 – Interim landscape and environmental controls for key waterways. Significant Landscape Overlay schedules have been introduced to protect landscape value and amenity within the urban growth boundary for the Maribyrnong (Mirrangbamurn) River, Werribee (Wirribi Yaluk) River and Moonee Ponds (Moonee Moonee) Creek.

Reducing the impacts of the urban heat island effect is critical to the sustainability and liveability of Wyndham and a key factor in adapting to the impacts of climate change.⁹

Following our comments on the fourth principle of the strategy, *protecting our natural environment*, it is important for the long-term benefit of the community and environment that water sensitive urban design (WSUD) be implemented to a high standard. In fact, Werribee has one of two surviving platypus populations in the Werribee River. Therefore, a unique opportunity exists for WSUD to be locally branded as *platypus sensitive urban design (PSUD)* by improving stormwater and rain retention in housing areas.

Photo: WRA with EPA officers inspected small businesses stormwater systems in Werribee Wed 3 May 2023. On those visits that day WRA presented each small business owner with a copy of a written piece describing the platypus survey then recently carried out, when platypus were captured only 400 metres away in the Werribee river, right where the businesses stormwater enters the river.



By adopting a platypus sensitive standard of urban design, the developer, the tradesman, the small business owner and community would be given a desired end or meaning for the need for WSUD, and may make the acronym and meaning more relevant.

Conclusion

The opportunity to underline all the good work of the VPA, Waterways of the West and more which the *Draft Wyndham Housing and Neighbourhood Character Strategy* is one which should be taken.

Hopefully the comments from WRA and the discussion will assist in bringing about some much-needed recognition for waterways in the strategy, and a better future for the community.

References:

1. *Victorian Planning Authority Strategic Plan 2021-2024* State of Victoria VPA 2021
2. *Guidelines on Assessing the Impact of Climate Change on Water Availability in Victoria*, 2016 DELWP, 18.
3. Sacha Jelinek *Research Forum* Melbourne Water Wednesday 6 Sep 2023
4. Australian Government *Managing riparian widths ...Fact Sheet 13* Land & Water Australia 2005
5. Forrester, J *Platypus Watch – Putting Perridak Back on Track* WRA 2023, 16-18
6. *Victoria's Climate Change Strategy 2021* DELWP, 9
7. *Waterways of the West Action Plan* State of Victoria DELWP Planning 2021, 17-25
8. *Waterways of the West Action Plan Annual Report* DEECA March 2023, 6
9. *Wyndham Housing and Neighbourhood Character Strategy* Wyndham City 2023, 71