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We Live Here

06 Jun 2017

Southbank residents dealt a joker

A proposal by casino operator Crown to build Australia's tallest building, Queensbridge Towers is set to bypass all normal planning processes and Southbank residents and owners are outraged.

The government has declared this a "project of state significance", allowing it to push through an approval (C310) without the usual scrutiny.

The new complex will result in a floor area ratio of 57:1, more than four times that allowed in New York City (12:1) or Singapore (14:1), and three times greater than the government's own Planning Scheme regulation for Melbourne (18:1) introduced in 2016.

This development will have a major impact on the City of Melbourne, including:

- Shadowing of the Shrine of Remembrance;
- Significantly increasing traffic volumes in streets south of the Yarra;
- The likely creation of wind tunnel effects; and
- Overcrowding for residents and businesses in surrounding buildings.

For five years residents have openly supported development of the site as being in the public interest provided it was respectful of the Melbourne Planning Scheme statutes, especially regarding separation between towers to protect privacy and to afford access to daylight and sunlight to all residents.

These concerns seem to have largely fallen on deaf ears. Indeed, in approving this application the Minister for Planning has disregarded his own recently introduced Planning Scheme Amendment (C270) and the significant misgivings of statutory referral authorities to an earlier proposal, which have been sidestepped in this latest process.

We Live Here says: "The blatant circumvention and corruption of the planning process has been a cynical exercise. It shows a complete arrogance by the government to openness and transparency."

"It is an example of kowtowing to the big end of town at its worst. It is outrageous that legitimate concerns by a wide range of state and local government authorities can be ignored."

"We are angered that a hotel and apartment complex can be classed as being of 'state significance' – what is so significant about this apartment tower over any other apartment tower that has followed the due planning process, apart from its sheer size?"

The value of the uplift allowed by the new amendment (C310), and as calculated under the C270 amendment, is estimated to be \$125 million. Yet the value of the contribution to the Public Realm Improvement Plan is \$65 million - a whopping \$60 million "free kick" for the developer and a corresponding loss to the public coffers.

"This is a reckless and scandalous concession which must be exposed for what it is, a sweetheart deal, unprecedented in its scale," say the residents. This application must be brought back under the umbrella of the planning process – and it can be.

The Legislative Council has the non-government numbers in the chamber to reject the amendment and thus compel the government to send the application to a planning tribunal.

It will not signify the end of the development, but ensure the processes in place for checks and balances are observed in a transparent manner and that the referral authorities such as VicRoads, City of Melbourne, PTV and others are consulted and their opinions sought on the serious implications that this proposal will have on the immediate area.

This will lead to a planning outcome that delivers a sensible win to the residents, government and developer alike – by simply following and adhering to the guidelines that the government has set itself.

We Live Here urges you to support Southbank residents by contacting your local MP to block this ill-conceived amendment.

You can also voice your concerns by signing the Southbank residents' petition which can be accessed at www.change.org

The petition calls for the government and opposition to ensure this proposal goes through the

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proper planning process.

Update on the Parliamentary Inquiry

The public hearings for the Owners Corporation Amendment (Short-stay Accommodation) Bill 2016 inquiry concluded on April 13 and the parliamentary committee was due to deliver its report to parliament on May 11.

However by a resolution of the house the reporting date has been extended to June 8. A full report will be included in next month's column. For further information go to www.parliament.vic.gov.au/epc/inquiry/446

We welcome your feed-back, your contributions to this column, and your donations.

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