



"des clark"

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To <veac@dse.vic.gov.au>

cc

bcc

Subject Yarra Park -VEAC Review

Sub:

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No:

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VEAC Review of Crown Lands.

What follows is correspondence I have just sent to the City of Melbourne regarding Yarra Park. I would like it to be considered as a submission to the VEAC review of Crown Land usage.

I realise this is late but still wish to add my voice on this specific issue.

At the end of the day the State government is responsible for the appalling condition of this parkland and for permitting its excision for other uses without regard to broader community and environmental concerns.

It is a disgraceful situation that must be addressed.

Thank you for your attention.

Des Clark.

My Lord Mayor, Dr Alexander and other recipients,

I am writing to you about Yarra Park, the need to do this highlights one of the problems I have been able to identify, that is, to my observation, conflict with stated Council policy.

I am taking the time to make my comments in the context of seeking to be helpful rather than attacking operational flaws. I shall also try to keep my comments to the issue of Yarra Park and environs.

At this point in time Yarra Park is becoming an even more degraded wasteland and the intensification of car parking and other negative activity within the park is rapidly destroying any character it has and is leaving it open for more bids for the construction of more structures by the usual suspects.

The Policy Context

In broad terms Council policy is to maintain and enhance the Parks and Gardens of the City which are one of its greatest assets.

Policy on Yarra Park is to progressively eliminate the parking of cars within the park and to make it a suitable entry point to the Sports Precinct and a pleasant park for community and visitors.

Whilst vehicles continue to be parked in the Park, council seeks to protect the surrounding areas from the unwanted intrusion of vehicles driven by people attending the sport venues. Appropriate protection measures (barriers, bollards etc) are put into place in the surrounding streets when events are taking place.

Council makes available areas for visitors and residents to exercise their dogs off leash.

Council provides playgrounds for the use of children and their parents.

Council supports and encourages people to use bicycles and designates bicycle paths and shared pathways.

The Issues.

Maintenance and Enhancement.

Despite the best efforts of the parks and gardens people over many years it is an almost impossible challenge. Trees continue to die, the ground becomes more compacted, grass cannot regenerate and many new plantings usually wither. One can only hope these best efforts continue until other issues are resolved.

The removal of the gardener's cottage in Yarra Park and handing the land to MCC for turf wicket storage by a private operator is an excellent example of policy failure along with sealing over a large area of the park for parking at the Richmond Football Ground. The turf wicket area appears to have expanded recently.

Car Parking

Council has successfully negotiated an overall reduction in the number of cars parked on the parkland, I understand further reductions or a complete ban on parking are to be negotiated soon. Despite this policy the number of occasions the Park is used for car parking has increased dramatically. The Park was being used for Tennis Centre parking a week ahead of the Australian Open (apparently for staff parking), along with recent cricket this means the park will have been in daily use for parking for about five weeks, this is simply unsustainable.

Despite the policy position there is an overall increase in parking use in Yarra Park.

The Council has established a unit called 'Events Melbourne' or 'Melbourne Events'. It would appear this unit is there to facilitate and encourage events in the City, an admirable objective. Unfortunately it would appear one of the first things they do is make the park available for car parking, this is simply unacceptable. The 2008 Melbourne Marathon is a good example of policy failure. The event had nothing to do with Yarra Park yet the park was made available for parking. There was not any notification to the community, street bollards were not put in place and traffic chaos existed throughout the East Melbourne area. It would appear that the 'Events' people have not made themselves aware of the usual procedures for football and cricket.

Apart from the fact that the park should not have been made available for the marathon there would appear to be a failure of management in overall planning and coordination of these activities. The City of Sydney facilitates the Sydney Marathon and other running events, it does not make any parking available, yet the competitors and organizers manage very well, using city car parks and public transport.

On the 19/1 the first official day of the Australian Open, bollards and street advisory signs were not put out and you had 41,000 day attendees leaving the precinct and up to 20,000 evening attendees arriving for the evening session with significant overlap. When I asked one of the car parking contractor's staff if the bollards were being put out, the response was, "nothing to do with us, it is not an MCG event", the ensuing conflicts of traffic movements would have been chaotic if the bollards etc had not been put out.

Yet again there is a failure of management as exactly the same situation arose last year and nothing has been done to ensure effective planning across the divisions to anticipate these issues. On the second weekend of the tennis bollards and signs were not put out and my telephone calls were either ignored or not returned. The last thing I wish to be is a serial complainant, but then, if proper arrangements were in place I would not have to ring.

The car parking contractor would appear to be poorly supervised. Whilst they are only there to park cars they are poorly briefed and have no regard for the park. They should be more active in assisting exiting traffic to prevent cars driving up dead end paths and causing further damage. The parking staff drive dangerously around the park, they are too lazy to remove their safety cones from the pathways and drive around them on the grass. This practice is creating new dirt roads and damaging the park. At the entrance to the Park is an advisory sign requesting people not to park within three metres of trees. The parking attendants direct cars to well within three metres of trees constantly.

Event Notification

I was advised by a member of Council staff that the East Melbourne and Jolimont communities should be advised of special events by the organisers. The only advice we have received in the last 12 months was for a family football day in Yarra Park prior to the 08 season. Is this a policy or not?

Post Event Cleaning

The Council collects litter in the park after each event, unfortunately much of the litter blows into the surrounding streets or is dropped by departing drunks and this is not collected. We voluntarily clean our area of the street, but the south side of Wellington Parade is a permanent disgrace and Vale Street and Jolimont Terrace are similar after events along with Berry Street and Simpson Street.

Crowd Behaviour

The Police do a good job of ejecting hooligans from the MCG, these hooligans are then left to behave disgracefully in the park, damage cars and generally be unpleasant. I would suggest that a Police presence in the park would be appropriate, regardless of the car parking situation.

Dogs on/off Leash

A large number of dog owners made a submission/petition to council regarding reviewing the current dog off leash arrangements. A group met with the Chief Executive and Rob Adams. They were well received and in turn were reasonable and courteous. The petition was accepted and they in turn waited for further consultation as was apparently agreed. The week of the Council election, the On/Off leash areas, were proclaimed in the Age newspaper for the entire municipality. Does this mean the petition was accepted and ignored or does it mean an error was made? To date there has not been any communication with the petitioners supporting this decision to make no change. Interestingly partial fencing has been installed around the children's playground hopefully this might be a more positive sign.....or not.

Cyclists.

Cyclists use all of the paths in Yarra Park and:

- Ignore the no cycling advisory logos for designated paths
- Travel at high speed on all paths. (10 kph limit)
- Are abusive to pedestrians
- Are physically threatening
- Generally ignore every road law that exists on roads, footpaths and within the parks

This situation is serious in Yarra Park, Fitzroy Gardens and Treasury Gardens, in my view it is only a matter of time until there is a violent outburst by one of these cyclists. This situation is distressing particularly for elderly walkers and dog walkers other commuter pedestrians.

Environmental Policy

The Government proclaims its green credentials yet it is willing to destroy Yarra Park, a major lung in the parkland infrastructure of the city. The Tennis Centre is expanding further into Yarra Park, Old Scotch Oval will be lost and Gosh's Paddock is now under serious threat of alienation from the Park. Whilst I understand Council is relatively powerless in this great celebration of the power of sporting bodies I believe something has to be done to at least halt the current abuse of what is left of our public parkland.

And Finally

The former East Melbourne Police Station.

This building is derelict, a temporary structure which has been there for fifty three years now, can we please do something about its removal. There is no real excuse for another bureaucratic impasse beyond bloody mindedness by the railway people. Rob Adams has tried hard but to no avail, there has to be a decisive breakthrough and it may be useful if Parks Victoria were to become involved in all of this mess.

In conclusion, our parks are a finite asset and they are being eroded at a dramatic rate. The elimination of car parking from the parkland would be a major demonstration of respect for the environment and our parkland heritage.

Thank you for your attention.

DES CLARK

