

VPTA Policy Position Statement – More Public Housing is Imperative.

Topic: Site Redevelopments, Sale to Private Developers, Stock Transfers, Green space and related considerations.

1. The current system does not address the demand for public housing now and for the future.

VPTA wants affordable public housing to be available to all those who need it. We recognise that more needs to be done and new innovative ways found to increase the supply of public housing stock, in order to address the problem of homelessness in Victoria, and, to reduce the waiting list in a sustained and meaningful way.

- The VPTA gives it's qualified in principle support to initiatives that help solve the problem by increasing the public housing stock.
- We acknowledge that there are a number of strategies that will likely be implemented by Government, relevant authorities and organisations under the Housing Framework, aimed at providing viable long term viable solutions to people in need of public housing.
- The VPTA is independent from any political party and understands that there may be differences in the approaches taken by the individual parties whether in Government or in Opposition.
- The VPTA believes all parties need to do more and must work collaboratively together to devise and implement long term strategies to deliver a sustainable public housing system and address the current public housing shortfall.
- In representing the interests of our members, we believe our role is to strive for the best possible outcomes for public housing tenants and those on the waiting list, by identifying issues and by having constructive input and influence into the solutions proposed.

2. Any public housing land sales, site redevelopment, land transfers to private developers & Public Private Partnerships (PPP) needs to be strict controlled and independently monitored.

- Any property sold must be at fair market value.
- Where a property or land owned by the Victorian Government being used for, or earmarked for public housing use or development is to be sold, the minimum asking price must be based on at least 2 independent valuations and the sale process must be transparent and open to public scrutiny.
- Any discount, Government subsidy or incentive that may be offered in relation to a specific sale must reflect the contribution Government would otherwise have been required to make to bring the property to a marketable condition.
- The sale process for any publically owned property that is no longer to be used for public housing must be independently audited.
- All monies raised by the sale of public housing properties must be reinvested back into public housing
- An approved independent authority should be established to oversight and audit the sale process and the financial return to ensure this is at a fair market rate and that the money raised is set aside by Government specifically for new public housing developments.
- There should be extensive public consultation regarding any property proposed to be sold, transferred or redeveloped.
- Any property earmarked for development should have environmental impact statements and appropriate community consultation as a precursor to any tender process commencing.

3. Design and Acquisition

- A master plan for site redevelopment should be produced for all sites with potential for, or being targeted or scheduled for private sale and redevelopment within the next 10 years.
- An initial land use feasibility study should be conducted on all site identified for redevelopment, for preliminary approval by Local Govt. Authorities.
- The design of any new building or site redevelopment proposal must comply with local planning provisions and make best use of the site.
- Site Plans need to show which part of the site is proposed to be redeveloped, in which stages and over what period for partial and full site redevelopments.
- An in principle checklist should be developed for all proposed redevelopment hi rise sites outlining the aim of the redevelopment and what it must achieve overall. This is to be part of the design brief.
- The Design Brief and tender documentation should be developed in conjunction with Local Govt. Authorities and relevant State Govt. Planning Authorities.
- Any site concept plans must be made available for community consultation and public scrutiny, prior to final tendering documentation being released.
- The design should make provision for adequate green space amenity for both passive and active recreational purposes including:-
 - playgrounds;
 - treed and open space areas;
 - walkway access suitable for elderly and disabled residents with mobility problems;
 - being safe for children
 - being accessible to all residents.
- The design should be for buildings which are attractive, age well and with a service life in excess of 50 years.
- The design should represent the latest best practice in contemporary building and should be low maintenance, with the lowest possible energy footprint.
- Building design should feature state of the art best practice thinking in energy efficient building. It must be environmentally sustainable and feature the latest passive solar design, water recycling and rainwater capture technologies and energy saving features including solar energy.
- Any parkland, recreational areas in the immediate surrounding areas should be taken into consideration when looking at green space needs for a specific site. Where parkland and other leisure and recreational facilities are nearby (within easy walking distance) these may reduce the requirement for green space to be provided on the particular site.
- The impact on other residents in the area, adjoining street scapes, traffic flows, parking, access to services, shopping and public transport and the like needs to be factored in understanding the broader impacts of site redevelopment and the impacts on services, infrastructure and the broader local Community.
- An environmental impact statement is to accompany any development proposal.
- Provision needs to be made for community meetings on site including air-conditioned meeting rooms and space for local resident community events and forums.
- Any redeveloped site should as far as practicable foster a fully integrated mix of public and private housing residents.
- Gated or segregated communities should be avoided.

4. Tenant Considerations

- Incentives should be made available to encourage any tenants to relocate permanently. These may include and would not be limited to:-
 - ✓ fair relocation subsidies that address the real cost of relocation,
 - ✓ buy out amounts for tenants prepared to move permanently out of public housing
 - ✓ sponsored training and skills acquisition programs focused on being job ready

- ✓ low interest/ no interest loans for tenants wishing to purchase public housing they live in or on the private market
 - ✓ cash payments for high value properties with long term tenants as residents to enable purchase of small less expensive premises
 - ✓ incentives to downsize
 - ✓ travel incentives based on distance moved
 - ✓ access to new premises in advance to assess layout and space availability in order to consider new furnishing requirements
 - ✓ assistance with downsizing including the sale and removal of any unwanted furniture.
- A temporary relocation and permanent relocation policy needs to be developed by DHS in conjunction with Tenant Group representatives and PEAK bodies including the VPTA, to deliver the best possible outcomes for tenants by making clear all the options available to tenants well in advance of any relocation occurring.
 - Any individual properties to be listed for private sale should be first offered to the existing tenants at reduced asking price, as recognition of the long term contribution of the tenant.
 - Low or no interest loans could be made available to compensate tenants moving from higher value long term inner city residences to enable relocating tenants the option of purchasing in a relocated area.
 - Any tenant required to relocate should be given priority for new public housing that is available in the immediate area or in their preferred area of choice within reason.
 - There should be no reduction of Public Housing tenants on a redeveloped site unless the tenant is adequately compensated and /or appropriately relocated.
 - Vacant properties to be offered to up to 6 tenants at a time to ensure fastest possible take up and occupancy.

5. Incentives for Developers

- Both the Federal Government and the Victorian Government should consider opportunities to introduce new tax concessions, rebates and subsidies to financiers and developers who invest in new building specifically for public housing. This would be in addition to those being offered under existing Federal Government Taxation and negative gearing provisions and other State and Federal incentives currently on offer.

6. Administration

- The cost of administering the Public Housing System, the cost of new developments and maintenance on existing properties, and revenues (rental incomes) must be shown separately in budgets and in accounts.
- The requirement for any additional allocations and subsidies to meet any shortfall in revenues must be identified annually.
- Property valuations must be kept up to date and reported annually