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fitzroy residents' association

Established in 1969 to promote, protect and enhance residential amenity

ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19

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CHAIR'S REPORT

In this our 50th year it is time to reflect on our past and anticipate the future. The FRA has been fortunate over the years to have had a membership base to ensure its relevance and the benefit of committee made up of residents who are prepared to devote time to ensure that the wheels of the association are oiled and heading in the right direction. There are questions that a number of residents have inquired of me over the past three years and they may assist some of you who have thought of them but never asked, so here goes!

What drove the FRA's formation 50 years ago and how has the mission evolved since then?

The FRA was formed in 1969 following a public meeting on 1 August where residents discussed the need for an association to respond to a Fitzroy City Council that was more about minimizing rates, borrowings and expenditures on social and community services. Residents were also concerned at the planned large-scale demolition of Fitzroy and North Fitzroy by the Housing Commission.

On 7 November 1969 the constitution of the FRA was formally adopted and thus began 50 years of a commitment to promote, protect and enhance residential amenity and make Fitzroy liveable and sustainable. The newly formed FRA Committee, chaired by Brian Howe AO, recognised the need to build participatory structures so as to be an effective voice on the issues and needs of the day. This is certainly an agenda that the FRA today seeks to achieve: to ensure a high level of resident participation in public and community affairs.

Today the FRA has focused on residential amenity, including the protection of our streetscapes including our laneways, the viability of our activity centres, the retention of our heritage buildings, the provision of affordable and social housing, the greening of our suburb, the provision of open space and the timely and strategic management of graffiti. These are matters that go to the very heart of ensuring an environment that is liveable and sustainable for a diverse and caring residential population.

What have been some of the standout campaigns and activities of the FRA over the past 50 years?

In its first year, the FRA:

- conducted a land use survey of the municipality;
- assisted in the formation of the North Fitzroy Residents Action Committee to campaign against the demolition of Brooks Crescent;
- campaigned against a ground-level car park and for open space on the Atherton Gardens;
- investigated the proposed amalgamation of Fitzroy with the City of Melbourne and other municipalities;
- set up a group to study the implications on Fitzroy of the Melbourne Transport Plan;
- published six issues of a news bulletin.

Over the past 50 years there have been a number of high-profile campaigns that the FRA has initiated or supported to ensure that Fitzroy remained liveable and sustainable. Included were the Stop the F19 Freeway Campaign 1977, Save the Fitzroy Pool 1994, and the Artist development (also known as the Cheesegrater) Campaign 2002-6.

In 1973 the FRA supported the appointment of the City's Social Planner the first for local government in keeping with the long-standing commitment to support and improve community welfare services and build structures for citizen participation.

In recent years the FRA has provided input on a range of Council social, environmental and planning strategies including, the Night Time Economy Strategy, Urban Forest Strategy, Open Space Strategy, 'Building for Diversity' Social and Affordable Housing, and the Graffiti Management Framework. We have responded to annual Council budgets and Council plans and to planning permit applications and addressed heritage issues that impact on our suburb.

The FRA has engaged with other resident groups in Yarra, and has been a participant in the Fitzroy Learning Network's Bridges2Harmony Festival.

Why is it important for the FRA to share its ideas, activities and priorities with other local organisations and the Council?

The strength of our first level of democratic government, local government, is to build community participation, place making and local decision making. The role of the FRA, as indeed for other community organisations, is to engage with Council on their priority needs and interests and so better inform councillors and provide opportunities for discussion and debate on how to achieve priority outcomes to benefit the City and its residents.

How can residents get involved in FRA activities?

The FRA is an open membership association to all residents and friends of Fitzroy who wish to be part of the participatory and decision-making processes of Council. We invite people to join through the payment of an annual membership fee that provides access to our monthly newsletter, website, Facebook, plus meetings and forums that discuss and debate our on-going interests and issues.

The activities to be undertaken by the Committee to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Association will enable us to recognise the achievements of the FRA founding members, and the work that has continued through the support of FRA members and residents.

Martin Brennan, FRA Chair

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

PLANNING AND HERITAGE

The rapid and large-scale development in the City of Yarra, including Fitzroy, continues to put pressure on residential amenity, open space and public facilities and serious concerns are often expressed by community members about the impact of development and the limitations of the planning system to control it.

There were a number of large developments proposed in Fitzroy during the year which sparked residents' concern. The following are a sample where FRA was involved to some degree.

St Vincent's Private Hospital expansion: Following the lengthy VCAT proceedings which concluded in April 2018 and resulted in approval of the proposed 11 storey expansion of the hospital, permit applications were made to Heritage Victoria to undertake development of the two affected heritage buildings for the construction of the St Vincent's Private Hospital building. These are the former Eastern Hill Hotel, 77 Victoria Parade and Dodgshun House, 9 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy. In April 2019 Heritage Victoria granted heritage permits for these two properties.

FRA supported residents involved in these proceedings.



Dodgshun House



Former Eastern Hill Hotel

Proposed development at 93-97 Webb Street: The development included 16 apartments and nine, four-storey townhouses above a basement car park. Residents in area were concerned it would have detrimental impact on many surrounding homes and businesses and would create a new development precedent in the area in terms of height, mass, dismissal of heritage significance and scale. Council refused to grant the permit, and the matter was heard at VCAT in October 2018. VCAT affirmed the Council decision and did not grant the permit.

Despite the welcome outcome, significant expense and effort was required of residents to participate in these proceedings.

Proposed development at 390-394 Brunswick Street: In June 2019, residents involved in VCAT proceedings to support Council's conditions for this proposed development (currently the site of the Fitzroy Nursery) welcomed the Tribunal's decision to uphold a condition permitting four storeys, rather than five. The proposed development comprised a multi-level, mixed-use building, including offices, dwellings and car parking in a stacker system.

In upholding the Council’s condition regarding height, the VCAT decision reads in part, “The proposal is necessarily prominent both by virtue of its exposure to Brunswick Street due to its corner location, and to a degree by its high design quality. The building will punctuate the existing untrammelled backdrop to the street, a defining feature of this section of Brunswick Street. It will disrupt the skyline that the Planning Scheme specifically seeks to protect, resulting in visual intrusion within the heritage place.”

FRA was pleased to support residents involved in these proceedings. FRA advocates for strong protection of Yarra’s historic shopping strips, including Brunswick Street. Our position is that redevelopment should be permitted on these sites to a mandatory height along with high quality design requirements.



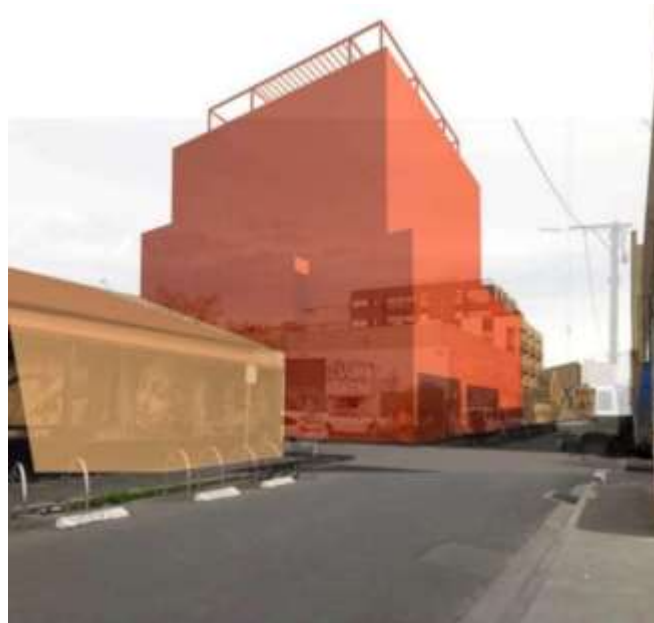
Campaign efforts by residents to raise funds and awareness for proposed developments in Webb Street and the Fitzroy Nursery site in Brunswick Street.

Arbirlot, 11 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy: The three-storey residence at 11 Brunswick Street, constructed in 1891, is included on the Victorian Heritage Register (HO149). It was the subject of a permit application which included partial demolition, alterations and additions consisting of an eight-storey residential apartment at the rear of the residence.

Residents who were concerned about the heritage significance of this property became involved in Heritage Victoria proceedings in 2017 when it refused to issue a permit for work. However, when the matter was referred to the Heritage Council for review, the Council gave the following reason to allow development in October 2018, “The loss of significant built fabric and the impact on the setting of the place are not considered justifiable when assessed against the criteria which the Executive Director [of Heritage Victoria] must consider when determining a permit application.”



11 Brunswick Street



An image prepared by a resident showing the dominant scale of the proposed residential hotel at 419 Fitzroy Street.

Proposed residential hotel, 419 Fitzroy Street: A proposed residential hotel comprising 127 bedrooms raised concerns amongst local residents due to its scale, detrimental impact on the local neighbourhood and lack of respect for the heritage scale of the area. FRA expressed its concerns because the development provides an opportunity for the owner to apply in the future for a fully functioning hotel with a full-blown range of activities including ‘the sale of liquor for consumption on or off the premise, function or conference rooms, entertainment, dancing, amusement machines and gambling’. This is allowed if a residential hotel development crosses the threshold of 20 rooms. Council decided to grant a permit at an IDAC meeting in August 2019 and the matter was subsequently decided at a VCAT compulsory conference with a few concessions leaving residents generally disappointed.

Yarra’s historic shopping strips

A major attractor of development in Yarra is strip centre amenity.

FRA has supported resident groups in postcode 3068 who rallied strongly to protect Queens Parade, the subject of a built form review (Amendment C231). Queens Parade has highly intact heritage and a functioning shopping village. FRA has maintained that this distinctiveness needs to be protected to ensure it continues to motivate locals to support their local traders and to attract visitors to the area.

Council initially proposed a six-storey height for this historic neighbourhood shopping strip, with six metre set-backs. After engagement with the community, this was reduced to four-storeys. Many residents and groups argued for a three-storey limit with set-backs of 10-12 metre for the historic shopping precinct, and called for mandatory controls to provide some certainty in planning.

There was a twelve-day hearing in August 2019 before the Planning Panels Victoria, with a decision pending.

FRA has been preparing for the announcement of a Built Form Review for Brunswick Street, a major activity centre. We will strongly advocate that the outstanding historic fabric of Brunswick Street be protected, and argue for certainty in planning controls to avoid preferred options which are exploited by developers.

NEIGHBOURHOOD AMENITY

Night-time economy in need of oversight

FRA has maintained a strong focus on issues relating to neighbourhood amenity, in particular the effect of the night-time economy on residents. In this period, there has been a number of licensed premises seeking changed conditions and this has highlighted once again the day-to-day reality for residents who have experienced anti-social behaviour, noise and safety concerns.

FRA has been advocating for a review of the NTE strategy, introduced by Council in 2012, to ensure it is updated and reviewed annually to meet the needs and address issues in a changing economic and social environment.

The increasing development pressures, both residential and commercial in Fitzroy, are needing an accommodation with residential living and neighbourhood amenity, not solely skewed to advantage the economic bottom line and thus create problems now and into the future.

Graffiti management

FRA has continued its involvement in the community graffiti trials, having a designated area to monitor in Brunswick Street (Area 2). As well, FRA consulted with its members to gain input for its submission to Council on its draft Graffiti Management Policy and Framework, a draft of which was considered by Council in July 2019. It is now understood a revised draft will be submitted to Council in February 2020.

RESIDENT CONTACT AND ENGAGEMENT

FRA has continued to distribute its monthly newsletter and maintain a Facebook page to update residents on various items of interest or concern.

FRA responds to resident concerns via email and face to face engagement. It has also engaged with traders in Brunswick Street in its graffiti community trial area.

The committee has also arranged for a market stall during the year at a local market to engage with residents.

SUBMISSIONS

FRA was pleased to be able to participate in a number of consultations which included the following submissions:

- Submission supporting the Development Contributions Plan. Council adopted Amendment C238 at its Council Meeting on 30 April 2019. The amendment will need to be submitted to the Minister for Planning for approval.
- Submission on Planning Amendment C231 relating to Queens Parade, North Fitzroy.
- 2019-20 budget submission to Council seeking additional resources to monitor and address issues arising from the operation of licensed premises in Fitzroy, and increased resources to firmly establish Yarra's pre-eminence as a Creative City, creating a balance for the negative impact of the Night-time Economy in Yarra.
- Submission to Council on proposed its Graffiti Management Framework: Policy & Strategy 2019-2022

COMMITTEE 2018-19

The committee met formally on four occasions in compliance with its rules of association, and has meet frequently for informal discussions.

Committee Membership

Martin Brennan, Chair

Margaret Portelli, Secretary

Sue Wheatley, Treasurer

Michael Keats, Committee member

Bradley Reynolds, Committee member

Erin Tidswell, Committee member

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FRA acknowledges the support of members and residents who have assisted it in its activities in this reporting year, including

- The Union Club Hotel, 164 Gore Street, has continued to provide a venue for FRA meetings;
- Michael Glynstsis, Aegean Restaurant and Function Centre, 19 Brunswick Street, continues to be a hospitable and accommodating host for residents' meetings and events;
- The Australian Catholic University in providing use of its facilities for FRA's Annual General Meeting;
- Bendigo Bank for support through its "Breather Grant"

FRA is also pleased to acknowledge support for our 50th anniversary celebrations from:

- The City of Yarra
- Nelson Alexander Real Estate, Fitzroy
- Fitzroy Learning Network
- Aegean Restaurant and Function Centre.



FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR YEAR ENDING 30 JUNE 2019

Opening Balance 1 July 2018		\$ 4,175.38
Income		1,542.82
Membership fees	1,110.00	
Donations	30.00	
Interest	63.62	
Grant (Bendigo Bank)	214.20	
Branded cup sales	125.00	
Expenses		498.40
AGM/end-of-year expenses	60.00	
Printing	170.00	
VCAT and FOI fees	80.60	
Receipted operating expenses	187.80	
Closing balance 30 June 2019		5,219.80
Unpresented cheque		60.40
Bank balance 30 June 2019		\$ 5,280.20

Reconciled to bank statements

I certify that I am a committee member and I attended the Annual General Meeting, and the accounts of the incorporated association contain the particulars required by the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012

Signed: Sue Wheatley, Treasurer

Date: 16 October 2019