

President's Report for 1999

Kim Neubecker's President's Address for 1999 – from AIDA's April 2000 Newsletter

Welcome AIDA members, our mayor Julie Hansen, our local councillor Kingsley Love, councillors Lindsay Schroeter and Ken McCallum, and our Shire Project Development Engineer, Richard Bain.

Firstly I am going to take advantage of my position as President to confess that I heard myself described last year – by someone I have never met – as a leftist pinko greenie – or words to that effect. It's a small town. Just to give that person satisfaction – and, being a small town, it may get back to them – I would like to say Rob McClelland has gone!

I did read in a political column describing the rise and fall of the last State Government that no-one quite realised that Jeff Kennett's agenda was to abolish government, so, with this in mind, I would like to express the gratitude I feel to have had in that time a mayor who has been so farsighted and committed to the people of the Shire. Hers has been a difficult job, as the whole coastal region of the Shire is in the midst of a boom from which there are predictions of ongoing record-breaking growth. We are in the last days of being described as a quiet hamlet. If anyone doubts this, let them take a look at the new residential developments in Torquay – areas such as the Wombah Park and Great Ocean Views Estates – and be mindful that these residential areas fall within the same Shire as us. Broadly speaking, we therefore share the same planning policies – policies that AIDA has been lobbying to be developed with full consideration given to the unique character of our region. In essence, this is the role of overlay controls, which give legitimacy to areas of special significance, and have the potential to exempt, in part, these areas from the broad planning code applying to the whole Shire.

Of relevance to this was the proposal late last year to build seven units in Hartley St. The units were to be built on individual freehold titles of land parcels with areas of approximately 400 square metres. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of nearby residents – some twenty-six, whose amenity would be directly affected – objected to the proposal, and sought AIDA's help. As AIDA saw this as an important opportunity to test the proposed new planning laws, we offered assistance, and submitted our own objection. Many of you may not be familiar with the planning processes of the Shire. To be brief, any proposal that is

not easily accommodated by the current planning guidelines must be taken to the Town Planning Committee. This Committee is composed of volunteers, and was set up, I believe, by the last CEO of the Shire, Peter Anderson.

The Committee members are community residents who are viewed as having relevant professional experience, and should thus be able to make informed judgements on what are often complex and difficult planning issues. For example, one committee member is a local architect, and my colleague Jane Grant has also been approached to serve. As you can imagine, the job involves some working knowledge of the Shire's planning policies – a big ask to start with. But, more importantly, it also requires time in bucket-loads to read and digest all the numerous submissions for and against development proposals, and the time for meetings to hear objectors and make formal decisions. I stress again that membership of the committee is voluntary.

Going back again to the Hartley St. proposal – the developer asked for seven units, in what was clearly an ambit claim. In other words, based on the old haggling system, the vendor starts with a high figure, the buyer with a low figure, and they meet somewhere in the middle. But, in this case, the developer was granted permission to build the full seven units. This, in terms of our potential overlay controls, left no room for reasonable retention of existing vegetative and made no allowance for the existing character of the area. It was, I believe, a bad decision made in haste by an overworked committee. The residents, together with AIDA, are now faced with the prospect of raising thousands of dollars to employ a town planner to appeal the decision at VCAT. Even though the developer has offered to negotiate an amended proposal – after all the appeal process is also going to cost him a lot of money – if this were to occur, the planning decision would still stand, to be used as a precedent by future proponents.

In a developing Shire such as ours, it does not take much imagination to envisage the workload of such a committee, and AIDA has come to the conclusion that this voluntary group has run its course. To this end we resolved last month to write to the Shire appealing to them to look at other possibilities for the future of town planning.

Many of you will be aware of AIDA's plans to refurbish the Allen Noble Sanctuary. We are in the process of employing a hydrologist and a landscape architect to determine the best way to proceed. In brief our plan is to install proper drainage to contain and slow down stormwater that is currently carrying large amounts of gravel into the Sanctuary. We also hope to carry out partial dredging to remove silt and reed buildup, to create some clear water for birds to land on, to remove excessive reed growth, and to replant with appropriate vegetation bearing in

mind both the indigenous and heritage values of the area. We have funding in hand for the work, but our plans have been complicated by the State Government funding that has come through for the proposed road sealing up to the lighthouse. This has necessitated further planning and consultation because of the access roads that abut the Sanctuary. The residents with properties along these roads now have to decide what approach to take to these plans. While the community needs to accept the necessity for finding a solution to higher traffic volumes, especially with continuing residential growth, and the ongoing promotion of the Great Ocean Road both here and overseas we still have the right to the quiet amenity of our residential streets, and the protection of our natural environment.