

CITY OF MELBOURNE HERITAGE POLICY REVIEW C258

Submission

by Melbourne South Yarra Residents Group Inc

We have been assured that the purpose of this review is to improve and update the current out-of-date policy and procedures, improve the protection provided to the remaining heritage buildings and areas in Melbourne and that under no circumstances will the current level of protection be reduced.

We do not believe the draft policy prepared by Council accords with that assurance and our principle objections and concerns are as follows.

Policy Objectives

1. The policy objectives in 22.05-2 are of fundamental importance and the statements contained must be clear, unequivocal and avoid legal and interpretive arguments. It should not use terms such as “respectful”, “contextual” and the objectives must include simple and clear statements specifying the fundamental requirements for any development in a heritage precinct.
2. The objectives must deal clearly with those issues and developments that most commonly offend heritage precincts.

Accordingly, the primary objective must state in clear and simple terms that:

Any development in a heritage place or precinct must, in terms of its height, scale, set-back and design, be compatible with the heritage place and heritage precinct.

3. If a statement in terms such as these was included in the policy objectives it would remove much of the argument and community anger with those developments which have been permitted in contravention of these straight-forward requirements. We urge such a statement to be included in the policy objectives in these new policy objectives.

Building Gradings

4. The replacement of the current letter grading system with “Significant” and “Contributory” downgrades the current levels of heritage importance given to C and D Grade buildings where all of them are treated as locally significant in their own right.
5. The proposed definition of “Contributory” should be amended by replacing the first sentence with the following:
“A contributory heritage place is an important heritage place in its own right and for its contribution to a precinct.”

6. The inclusion of a category “non-contributory” is unnecessary and potentially harmful.
 - (a) Unnecessary because the process is to identify buildings that are important from a heritage point of view and not those that are unimportant.
 - (b) Harmful because a view formed today that a building is “non-contributory” may be wrong or its heritage place only becomes apparent in the future and to grade it as non-contributory makes such a correction less likely.

Building Inventory

7. The inventory in its present form is still full of errors in terms of the identification of buildings and manner of translation from the present to the new grading system. It must be subject to a peer review before being incorporated into the planning scheme.

Heritage Precincts or Neighbourhoods

8. In addition to identifying and grading heritage buildings it is essential that heritage precincts be identified because what happens with a particular building within a heritage precinct is not only important in terms of that building but its impact on the heritage precinct in which it is located.

What is a Heritage Precinct?

9. Definition

The only definition in the policy is inadequate and incomplete. A heritage precinct is not restricted to those identified “in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay, and mapped in the Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay Maps”, which are commonly out of date or incomplete.

This definition should be amended to read as follows.

“A Heritage Precinct is an area which has been identified as having heritage significance which has either been identified as such in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay, and mapped in the Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay Maps or elsewhere.”

10. Statement of Significance

Unfortunately the Statement of Significance for South Yarra (HO6), which while lengthy covers a large diverse area and makes it almost impossible to identify those important parts within HO6. Regrettably our request that the Statement of Significance include defined sub-precincts or that those sub-precincts be given a separate overlay was not accepted. This must be amended if the Statement of significance is to be of any real value.

11. Streetscape Classification

- (a) The next place to go when attempting to determine whether a part of South Yarra should be regarded as a Heritage Precinct is its Streetscape Classification. Unfortunately it is now proposed that the only streetscapes to be classified are significant streetscapes, which are defined as follows.

“Significant Streetscapes are collections of buildings outstanding either because they are a particularly well-preserved group from a similar period or style or because they are highly significant buildings in their own right”

- (b) At the present time there are three gradings of streetscapes, which we consider important and the fact that they have been badly used in the past is not the point. The current classes are as follows.
- Outstanding because they are a particularly well preserved from a similar period or style.
 - Significant because they still retain the predominant character and scale of a similar period or style.
 - A group that may contain significant buildings “from diverse periods or style”.
- (c) An important characteristic of many South Yarra Streets is the diversity of the heritage buildings which currently would fall within streetscapes 2. or 3. For example.
- Leopold Street – with fifty contributory buildings but no streetscape classification.
- Park Street – twenty-three contributory buildings and twenty-six significant buildings with only parts of the street classified as contributory streetscapes.
- Mason Street – twenty-seven contributory buildings all on the east side but no streetscape classification.
- Millswyn Street – twenty-seven contributory buildings three of which are significant and one building classified as a significant streetscape.
- Hope Street – forty-five contributory buildings but no streetscape classification.
- (d) The justification given for making such a significant change by deleting Streetscapes 2 and 3 is as follows.
- The current system “does not necessarily assist in a better outcome or understanding of the particular importance of part of a precinct”.
Yes it does. It identifies important groups of buildings that have heritage value and if properly implemented provide an important means of identifying sub-precincts.
The Red Dot decision in the **Gunn Case** states clearly that the streetscape plays an important part in determining what might or might not be done to protect heritage buildings in that street.
 - “Streetscape gradings combined with property gradings can lead to a formulaic approach to the management of heritage places.” That is plainly incorrect. Building gradings deal with a building and streetscapes deal with a group of buildings and both are important.
 - “The removal of lower streetscape gradings, including level 3, will assist the lower graded properties (C and D) in not having perception of their significance diminished.

To the contrary, without a streetscape grading there is less evidence of the importance of the group of buildings.

- The proposed new policy “largely maintains the current policy approach”.

That is clearly not the case. The current policy recognizes the different heritage characteristics of different streets and groups of buildings and the amendment does not.

- Taking the proposed step will bring Melbourne “into line with more contemporary systems”.

That is absolutely no justification for change when it weakens the heritage protection.

- (e) All or part of the South Yarra streets referred to above would be entitled to be classified as either Streetscape 2 or 3 which would be of great assistance in identifying them as important heritage precincts.

The three grades of streetscape must be retained to assist in identifying important heritage streets and precincts..

Conclusion

At least the following changes must be made if the current level of heritage protection is to be retained and improved.

1. Include in Policy Objectives a clear and simple statement of the fundamental requirements.
2. Retain all three Streetscape classifications.
3. Have the building inventory checked and completed by way of a peer review.
4. Amend the definition of “contributory” and remove the “non-contributory” grading.

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