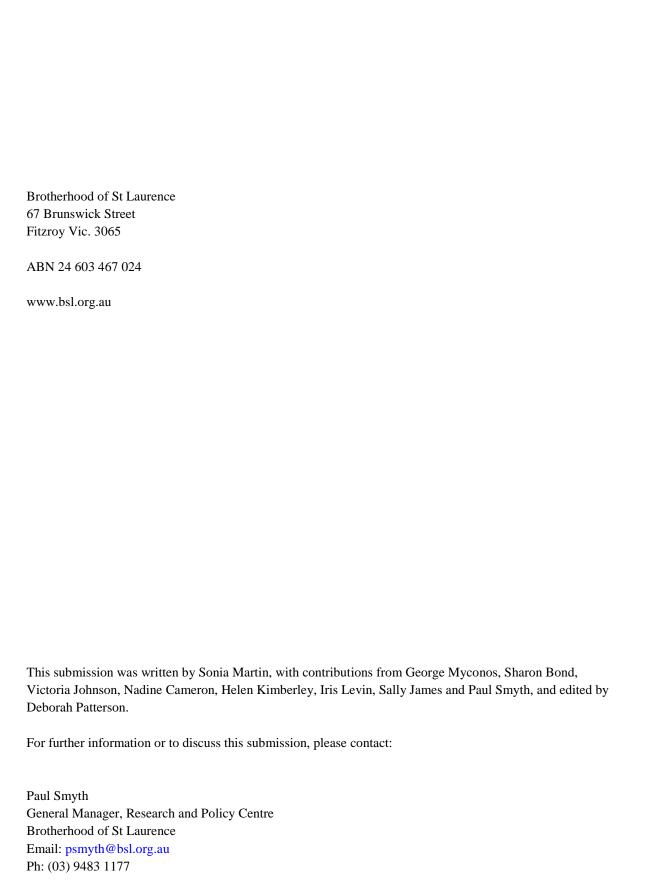# Submission to Inquiry into Liveability Options in Outer Suburban Melbourne

Outer Suburban / Interface Services and Development Committee (OSISDC)

Brotherhood of St Laurence

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Summary

- In considering liveability options for outer suburban areas, the Brotherhood of St Laurence has grave concerns about an increasingly two-tiered housing system and widening inequality. The current situation is seriously affecting the welfare and wellbeing of socioeconomically disadvantaged households, and it is having increasingly negative implications for households on average incomes. It would not be an understatement to say that urban development and housing affordability have reached crisis point in Australia.

- The Brotherhood maintains that planned social infrastructure is the foundation of economically and socially inclusive development. Critical to this endeavour is a social investment plan that recognises appropriate urban change as an entitlement of citizens across the life course and ensures that all have what they need to lead flourishing lives.

- We support the Victorian Government's shift in focus away from urban expansion, which risks compromising sustainable prosperity and liveability.

- We applaud the government's stated commitment to improving housing affordability. Addressing this challenging issue requires bold leadership from state and federal governments. We strongly urge collaboration with the Commonwealth Government to address the gross inequities in current taxation and housing policies, and associated inflationary pressures on the Victorian housing market, to better meet local housing need.

- While we support in principle the government's intentions to reduce unnecessary delays in the planning and approval process, this should not come at the expense of community consultation and due consideration of infrastructure needs, including social and community services. We are very concerned that pressure from property developers means approvals are being fast-tracked while communities are not adequately consulted and state planning for infrastructure and services lags.

- In order to meet the community service needs of children, young people, families and older people in urban growth areas, we argue there needs to be appropriate physical infrastructure within those localities. As a priority, we request the state government to set aside land and a community sector capital fund to support the establishment of locally based infrastructure and integrated youth services.

- The importance of linking economic and social policy initiatives within locations cannot be overstated. The Brotherhood supports the Social Inclusion Board's recommendation that location-based initiatives commence only after a comprehensive mapping of the economic capacity of locations has been conducted and gaps have been addressed. Local employers and education providers should be involved in these early governance stages of location-based initiatives.

- We acknowledge the governance challenges that our parliamentary system creates. We support a model of collaborative governance across all tiers of government that allows for meaningful determination at the local level and builds capacity to work together. Important elements of the approach are transparency and inclusive community consultation that does not rely on community leaders or 'local elites' in important decision making, but rather is based on broad engagement of the whole community.

- We argue that social planning and urban planning should be joined activities. Due consideration needs to be given to employment opportunities, infrastructure, transport,

social services, law and order, community and leisure facilities. The physical amenity of spaces is also important, as open parks, leafy trees, playgrounds, attractive walkways and waterways enrich urban places, enhance residents' enjoyment and engender feelings of connection and belonging.

- Our submission also draws attention to significant transport issues, including the need to plan adequate public transport in existing and future outer suburban areas. We encourage the government to ensure public transport infrastructure is established prior to growth areas being opened up to facilitate mobility, limit dependence on private vehicles and to enhance social inclusion. Other transport options should also be encouraged through well-maintained footpaths, controlled pedestrian crossings and bicycle paths.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence and outer suburban services and development

The Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry into liveability options for outer suburban Melbourne. The Brotherhood of St Laurence is an independent non-government organisation with strong community links that has been working to reduce poverty in Australia since the 1930s. Based in Melbourne, but with a national profile, the Brotherhood continues to fight for an Australia free of poverty. We undertake research, service development and delivery, and advocacy, with the objective of addressing unmet needs and translating the understandings gained into new policies, new programs and practices for implementation by government and others. The Brotherhood has many years' experience contributing to economic and community development in the outer suburbs and interface regions, as well as in inner-city Melbourne.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence recognises the critical intersections between housing, employment, education, health, welfare, and access to services and facilities. We also recognise the complex challenges the state government faces in addressing the interconnected issues of population growth and housing affordability.

The Brotherhood maintains that planned social infrastructure is the foundation of economically and socially inclusive development and is not a residual, post hoc response to economic and social system failures. Critical to this endeavour is a social investment plan that recognises appropriate urban change as an entitlement of citizens across the life course and ensures that all have what they need to lead flourishing lives. Supportive governance structures are essential. We support a model of collaborative governance across all tiers of government that allows for meaningful determination at the local level and builds capacity to work together.

We have focused this response to the Terms of Reference on population, private housing, and health and services delivery issues and have limited our comments on infrastructure issues. Due to the limited local data on median house prices and population growth in outer urban areas specifically, we have not addressed Term of Reference 3 separately, but have included some data in other sections of our submission.

Trends in housing and population growth (TOR 2)

Population growth and housing affordability are key policy challenges facing governments across the country. A recent government report estimates that by 2050 Australia's population will rise to 35.9 million people and that this will have significant implications for cities and urban environments (Treasury 2010). In Victoria, ABS estimates reported by *The Age* indicate that in the year to June 2010, Melbourne, and particularly its fringes, grew by 79,000 people or more than 1500 per week; and since 2001, Melbourne has gained 605,000 new residents. No other city in Australia has recorded growth of this size, which has strained infrastructure, added to road congestion and to overcrowding on public transport, and placed increased pressure on public health facilities including hospitals (Colebatch 2010).

Meeting the associated housing requirements is an increasingly significant policy challenge. Housing affordability is poor: Australian households in 2006 required 7.5 times their annual disposable income to buy a typical house, up 53 per cent from 1996 when households required 4.9

times their annual income (Tanton, Nepal & Harding 2008, p. 34). Internationally, Australia has the third-highest house prices relative to incomes among OECD countries and the price of housing relative to incomes is 50 per cent higher than in other countries as a group (OECD 2005).

Private rental properties in Victoria are in short supply, with vacancies at 1.6 per cent in November 2010 (REIV 2010), and there is evidence that private rental properties are becoming increasingly unaffordable for low-income households. Recent data released by the Tenants Union of Victoria for the December quarter 2010 shows that properties let at median rent are not affordable for low-income households, particularly single job seekers and single pensioners. Many households are paying more than double the rent level accepted as the indicator of housing stress (30 per cent or more of household income) (Tenants Union of Victoria 2010). In this context, it is difficult if not impossible for low-income households to secure decent housing; and governments face considerable challenges accommodating them.

For low-income households, the impact of a shortage of private rental housing is compounded by limited alternatives including public housing, which attracts lengthy waiting lists. In Victoria, there were 39,012 people on the waiting list in December 2010, including 9333 waiting for 'early housing' (Department of Human Services 2010). Early housing prioritises people who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness, people with a disability who have significant support needs, and people with other special housing needs. Waiting times vary, but some low-income households have waited in excess of eight years, while others have simply become discouraged and 'dropped off the list' (Murphy et al. in press), suggesting that current wait list figures understate actual demand for public housing.

Urban planning responses

The policy response to these challenges has been to promote unprecedented housing growth at the metropolitan fringe, expansion of urban boundaries and urban regeneration in inner-metropolitan areas. In inner metropolitan areas, there have been increasing pressures for urban regeneration and high-density living, and more recently in Victoria the development of 'activity centres'. Balancing the two—expansion and urban renewal—represents the main challenge for government.

In Victoria there has been considerable focus on 'urban growth corridors', following the extension of the urban growth boundary in June 2010. The then Labor government added 43,600 hectares in the growth corridors of Cardinia and Casey in the south-east, Whittlesea, Mitchell and Hume in the north, and Melton and Wyndham in the west (*The Age*, 12 February 2011). While this has represented a boon for landholders and property developers in particular, there are significant challenges for communities and residents in these areas. Local councils and the state government face challenges including the provision of basic infrastructure such as water, sewerage, power, roads, transport, community facilities and schools. Without sufficient planning, existing infrastructure is likely to be inadequate for rising demand. The suitability of some of the locations is questionable, as prime agricultural land is being lost to some developments and other sites are prone to flooding. Remote, unattractive and poorly serviced areas are at high risk of becoming sites of entrenched disadvantaged.

Profound changes also confront many communities as the demography and density of urban areas changes. Limited attention is being given to the impact on existing communities and how they might change and adapt, and to how new communities might form. For instance, little is known about how inequalities are experienced within localities and about the impact of rapid urban growth on intra-area dynamics. Poor social and economic dynamics within communities intensify risks of civil, family and possibly criminal law issues, particularly in areas of entrenched disadvantage.

Planning needs to make provisions for adequate social and community services, as well as accessible law and order services.

Access to employment and services is linked with access to transport. Australians have long relied on private vehicles to move from one locale to another and employment patterns have long been influenced by people's capacity to travel to and from work across urban areas. Demand management approaches to traffic congestion, including a congestion tax or carbon pricing, will pose obvious threats to the social and economic fabric of car-dependent outer suburbs (Spiller 2011).

In Victoria, the present Liberal–National government has committed to rolling back Labor's policy of higher-density development along transport corridors and instead will target 'activity centres' for development. While there are sound reasons for increasing residential density around established areas, the government is already facing a backlash from some communities. For example, the City of Boroondara, in Melbourne's established leafy eastern suburbs, received feedback from over 4000 community members on the issue and more than 150 people including many angry residents attended a recent public forum (Carmona 2011). This is not to suggest that efforts to increase residential density should be abandoned but rather to highlight some of the immense governance challenges that governments face.

Recent state planning policies as they relate to private housing (TOR 1)

Much of the current policy on meeting housing demand has been focused on increasing housing stock in outer-suburban areas and urban renewal in established inner suburbs. Yet these are not the only ways to approach demand and supply issues. It is important to unravel the picture of private home ownership, to critically examine the influence of policy upon concentrations of ownership, and to assess the ways existing housing stock is being used and new housing stock is being developed.

Housing affordability

We welcome the government's concern about housing affordability. Recent research by Marcus Spiller (2011) shows that even in the short period between 1994 and 2000, the radius from the Melbourne CBD of most suburbs affordable to a household on average earnings drifted out from 10 kilometres to 24 kilometres. By 2009, the radius had shifted further out to almost 40 kilometres, and no suburbs within 10 kilometres of the CBD could be accessed by average-income households. Housing affordability has become a serious social and economic issue, with significant implications for social equity and inclusion.

It is doubtful that increasing housing stock on the periphery alone will address housing affordability, but it is likely, as Spiller observes, that such 'far-flung suburban communities with the superficial trappings of prosperity' will be 'at risk of debilitating exclusion'(2011, pp. 80–1). The previous, postwar pattern of inclusive suburban growth is being reversed by divergence in access to opportunities between growth area communities and inner and middle suburban communities; and there is a real threat that this trend will be locked in by property market forces. The Brotherhood supports Spiller's argument that this has serious consequences for social mobility and equity:

> …the stocks of affordable housing being generated in growth area communities no longer provide the 'platform for opportunity' that they once did. Unless households can gain access to equity from other sources, their purchase of dwellings in growth areas is likely to confine them to these districts. In-board social mobility is now very difficult (p.85).

Spiller further warns:

> Regrettably, trying to solve the affordability problem by cutting up more land on the urban fringe may be like trying to fix a flagging economy by printing more money. Ultimately, this approach may devalue the whole metropolis and compromise its capacity for sustainable prosperity (p.87).

Various policies have an inflationary impact on housing, such as the First Home Owners Grant, negative gearing, capital gains tax exemptions and foreign investment laws. While these are federal responsibilities, they are central to the current state of housing in Victoria. These policies, and their inflationary impacts, are inequitable and contribute to an increasingly two-tiered housing system, effectively locking some out of home ownership and into insecure and transitory accommodation, while others are enabled to amass increasing wealth.

In a report by Judith Yates (commissioned by the Brotherhood) that examined who benefits most from the current tax arrangements for housing in Australia, the differences between high and low-income beneficiaries were shown to be stark. Among the findings, the government forgoes more revenue in tax breaks to wealthy property investors than through rent assistance to disadvantaged Australians. Summarising this aspect of Yates' work, Scutella (2009) states:

> Wealthy, negatively geared property investors in the top income quintile are getting on average $4500 from tax benefits in relation to their investment properties. However, people from the poorest households who receive the top rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance gain an average subsidy of just $2420 per year (p.1).

The same report also found that owner-occupiers benefit enormously from the favourable tax treatment of their homes. Yates estimated the value of this assistance to be $45 billion per year, of which $30 billion is due to the capital gains tax exemption on owner-occupier homes (Yates 2009, p. 1). The issue of taxing private homes is somewhat vexatious, but the analysis does draw attention to the ways in which existing policy contributes to and maintains an increasingly inequitable, two-tiered housing system.

To address the issue of housing affordability, we would strongly urge the state government to work closely with the Commonwealth Government to tackle the gross inequities in current taxation and associated housing policies.

Difficulties for low-income households

A recent study of 150 Australians in receipt of welfare benefits is illustrative of the housing challenges faced by low-income households and the significant implications for all aspects of their lives. Constrained by economic resources, study participants reported concerns relating to remoteness and an associated lack of services, poor job opportunities and facilities, poor access to public transport, the prohibitive costs of owning and running a car and, for some, concerns about safety and neighbourhood unrest (Murphy et al., in press).

One woman in receipt of Newstart Allowance relayed her story of being 'pushed' further out from the CBD and moving to regional Victoria where private rental accommodation was cheaper, even though she was aware that moving further away from employment opportunities might have negative implications for the Centrelink benefit she was receiving. At the time of interview in 2008 she was paying $135 per week, which was just over half of her benefit payment, for a property in

Melbourne. The owners wanted to increase the rent to $210 per week because they considered it to be under 'market value'. She continued:

> I was looking along the coast but there's not much … the housing I've seen down there is absolute garbage. If you can't afford $200 plus per week, you get what's left over. I don't want a mansion, I just want it to be clean. I want the owners to care about it and to actually repair things when they need repairing … People don't care. It's an investment. You have to fight for the most basic things (Murphy et al., in press).

Many other participants spoke of needing to move because they could no longer afford the rent and the far-reaching consequences for them, their families and their established community networks. Narelle, a single mother, stated: 'That's the difficulty for me, if I was to move … all that community network … I'm going to have to establish that elsewhere and that would take a few years'. Another single mother stated that 'Moving your children around and disconnecting your children from their school, from their friends, is devastating'. Nearly all of the participants who did not already own their own homes spoke longingly of one day having the security of home ownership. For many, their next hope was securing more stable and affordable public housing (Murphy et al. in press).

There is also evidence that demand-side pressures are emanating from beyond Victoria, with stories of developers and real estate agents actively marketing properties to overseas and interstate investors (see, for example, Johanson & Rood 2011). As this contributes to inflationary pressures and further locks local residents out of home ownership, we urge the Victorian Government to tighten regulations around such practices.

Planning and approvals

While we support in principle the government's intentions to streamline the planning and approval process, this should not come at the expense of community consultation and due consideration of infrastructure needs, employment opportunities or the provision of social and community services to support housing expansion and population growth. We are concerned that pressure from property developers means approvals are being fast-tracked while state planning for infrastructure and services continues to lag significantly behind.

We do not support the Victorian Government's proposed removal of the Growth Areas Infrastructure Charge (GAIC) on land that is zoned commercial or industrial (Victorian Liberal Nationals Coalition 2010), as developers are likely to benefit financially from their business ventures. The fact that such ventures may provide opportunities for employment is not sufficient reason to remove a charge that is fair and reasonable contribution to state infrastructure that meets the needs of communities in growth areas.

Medical/health and support services (TOR 4)

Unsurprisingly, access to medical/health and support services in outer-suburban growth areas is significantly more difficult than in inner-city areas. Spiller (2011) finds that inner-city residents have greater education, health and employment choices than do residents in outer-suburban areas. Residents in the city centre, Monash corridor and Box Hill/Doncaster all enjoy superior health services choices than those in suburban growth areas.

We emphasise here the severe problems that occur when outer-suburban services are inadequate. This is illustrated by research in just a few fields—education and training, youth homelessness, dental

health, transport, climate change and food security—in the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula (FMP) region, where the Brotherhood has a significant service delivery and research presence.

Services in the Frankston Mornington Peninsula region

The FMP region is very large (852 km^2). Of the population of approximately 270,000, 26 per cent are aged under 19, making the region relatively young by state standards (ABS 2006a, 2006b). Residents of Frankston in particular leave school at a much earlier age than those of other metropolitan areas (within the Melbourne Statistical Division), with 36.8 per cent leaving before reaching year 11 (ABS 2006a).

In the FMP region, some of the state's most affluent suburbs are alongside some of the most disadvantaged, such as Frankston North (the 18th most disadvantaged suburb), Hastings, Rosebud and Rosebud West.

Services for young people

Relative to the broader Melbourne metropolitan area, youth in the FMP are subject to greater levels of recognised risk factors: school disengagement, substance abuse, anti-social behaviour, family conflict, homelessness, and abuse (FMPLLEN 2010).

The following characteristics of service provision in the FMP region act as obstacles for youth seeking education, services and work:

- Frankston-centred services are less accessible to young people living in the Mornington Peninsula and, in particular, those from the southern Peninsula.

- The region has only one university and one TAFE, and relatively few registered training organisations, each with limited course offerings.

- Much of the FMP region is semi-rural but regarded as metropolitan. This has implications for students who apply for university places, need to move out of home to attend and are not provided with extra financial assistance.

- Public transport throughout the Mornington Peninsula, and particularly in the southern Peninsula, is not of the standard provided elsewhere in the Melbourne metropolitan region (commuter trains, for example, terminate at Frankston and the rail service is limited and under pressure).

- Regular road congestion occurs in northern parts of the region (i.e. Frankston) (FMPLLEN 2010).

Among the challenges faced by young people seeking training or employment in the FMP region is its remoteness (parts of the Mornington Peninsula are 80 kilometres from the CBD). This poses problems in gaining access to appropriate training organisations and covering travel costs. The Public Transport Supply Index developed by Currie and Senbergs (2007) indicates the Mornington Peninsula has zero to below average public transport supply combined with very high transport need, based on composite social need index scores. One student's account—provided for a report of a BSL training program (Myconos, forthcoming)—of dealing with travel to a training organisation is illustrative, and all the more noteworthy if we recall that many students are just 16–17 years old and do not drive cars.

> I paid for the course and stuff, then I went for about four weeks, and after a month travelling to and from the city every day, I was leaving at six o'clock in the morning,

> getting into South Yarra at about 7.30 to 8.00 am, then getting something to eat, then catching the Sandringham line to Windsor, and then walking. And I'd get there just on nine o'clock. And then we didn't finish until 4.30 pm, so I'd have to walk to Windsor, catch a train from Windsor to South Yarra, and then get the train back to Frankston, and then the bus back home. And after a month, it just got too much. It was costing me like $50 a week to get to and from there, and there's food and stuff as well, and it was just too much.

Poor access to housing has also been identified as a critical barrier to young people's participation in education, in an ongoing evaluation of the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula Youth Connections program by BSL. Some 22 in-depth interviews were conducted with youth workers and school staff. A key theme was that unstable housing and homelessness represented one of the major issues that led to young people disengaging from school. Family breakdown and parents' own unstable housing situations often led teenagers to leave home. With few housing options available, they reportedly couch-surfed at the homes of friends and acquaintances, while others slept on the beach. This exposed the young people to other risks such as assault, and workers said transience was often accompanied by substance abuse. Participation in education was not a priority for the students when their basic needs for shelter were not being met.

Homelessness in the FMP region is growing. In 2009, the DHS alerted youth services, community agencies and the wider community to the 1222 people recorded as homeless in the FMP region, 20 per cent of them aged 12–19 years (AIHW 2008). Frankston had the highest number of 'primary homeless' people (that is, 'rough sleepers' with temporary shelter, sleeping in squats or in bus shelter, etc.) in the DHS Southern Metropolitan region. Some 330 young people aged 15–19 years accessed youth homelessness services in 2008, and levels of youth homelessness in the region are three times higher than the overall rate of homelessness across all age groups.

Our work on dental health in the region further highlights access difficulties to health and support services. Access to affordable and quality dental health services by low-income groups is a national problem, but the issues encountered in the FMP region are exacerbated by remoteness.

In an evaluation of the Brotherhood's Dental Treatment Trial (Bond 2010a), it was found that the waiting period for local public dental services as at June 2009 exceeded the Health Department's benchmark of 22 months. Waiting periods for general care were 30 months at Frankston, 41 months at Rosebud and 38 months at Cranbourne. The waiting periods for dentures were 14, 23 and 29 months respectively. This means that people in outer Melbourne have been waiting years to have their dental problems attended to. The trial highlighted the implications for low-income groups: rotting or dying teeth and untreated cavities were the most common dental conditions, and 86 per cent said these affected their ability to go about their daily activities. Participants in the same study also highlighted poor access to bulk bill doctors in the region (Bond 2010a).

These findings are reflected in the study already mentioned of 150 Australians in receipt of income support. Many with poor dental health spoke of the impact the state of their teeth had on daily life and the ways in which they felt it reduced their employability. Expressing heightened self-consciousness and reduced self-confidence, many said they 'no longer smiled' and mumbled deliberately to hide their teeth (Murphy et al. in press).

Services in the Caroline Springs growth corridor

The Brotherhood's work in the Caroline Springs growth corridor in Melton Shire is further illustrative of the need to plan for support services in outer-suburban growth areas. While the region does not have the same history as the Frankston Mornington Peninsula region, our aim is

take a leadership role in preventing social exclusion and economic dislocation in the area. Our approach is informed by the view that one of the surest forms of prevention lies in ensuring that large numbers of young people and their families are supported in building their capacities to participate in social and economic life.

The rapidly emerging 'Western Edge' of Melbourne, the fastest-growing region in Australia (KPMG 2010), includes the growth corridors of Melton and Wyndham, which require significant investment in planning to accommodate substantial urban change. Planning requires careful consideration of future economic, transport, environmental, sport and recreation, business and government service needs. Attention also needs to be given to community infrastructure and issues relevant to social and economic participation. Many of the challenges for successful planning depend upon effective collaboration across the three levels of government.

Caroline Springs is a relatively new suburb opened up by developers in 1999. The area is characterised by a high proportion of families, young people and children. By 2016 it is estimated there will be over 25,000 children aged 0–14 and some 14,000 young people in the 15–24 age group living in the Caroline Springs growth corridor (Couche 2009 unpublished, pp. 2–3). Access Economics found that in 2006 the Melton Shire—within which Caroline Springs is situated—rated seventh-highest in the state for youth disengagement (Access Economics 2008, p. 18). As the forecast youth population increases, the lack of existing social and cultural activities and services, such as a local cinema and swimming pool, is likely to contribute to increasing disengagement. Limited access to suitable public transport to travel to and from surrounding areas is likely to further constrain youth activities. Other infrastructure and service gaps in this growth corridor include a lack of affordable leasable office space for services, limited vocational education and training programs, limited access to affordable information technology, and a lack of employment and wellbeing services.

With some of these infrastructure issues and the prospective needs of young people in mind, the Brotherhood's proposed Community Youth Centre facility aims to 'respond to youth, family and community service needs in an integrated manner and to provide practical and informed service and support' to young people and their families moving into the area (BSL 2010, p. 4). Its key functions will be to:

- create and implement an effective 'one-stop' information advice and support network

- make provisions for specialist personal support and wellbeing services

- plan and establish a quality learning and skills development environment, accessible seven days per week

- establish a dedicated 'media-tech' resource centre

- include state-of-the-art event spaces and facilities

- provide leasable office space

- foster community-driven enterprise development initiatives (BSL 2010, p 4).

A significant challenge for the community sector in undertaking a community building project in growth corridors is access to affordable office space for a reasonable period of time. Well-located real estate is either prohibitively expensive or unavailable, with little opportunity for shared work spaces, IT support, and car parking often cited as issues. Operating without a physical base in the area, community service staff are currently 'flying in and out' of the Caroline Springs growth

corridor, in an attempt to provide services to the local community. The outcome has been a fragmented approach to service delivery despite efforts to counter this made by governments through their contracting arrangements. Having a site on which to physically co-locate youth services is a far superior way of ensuring an integrated response to their needs.

The development of a successful community youth centre relies on a collaborative model of governance across the three tiers of government. Local councils have been generally very supportive of having an increased community sector presence during the start-up stages of community building. However, they do not necessarily have the financial capacity to underwrite community sector involvement; and far too often the demand for community and cultural facilities is running well ahead of the financial capacity to provide such assets.

The Victorian Government's commitment to planning successful growth corridors could be enhanced by the creation of a capital grants program which would provide one-off funding to local governments and/or community organisations to secure land and construct premises from which youth services can operate an integrated service offer.

Needs of refugees and migrants

Refugee and migrant groups have specific needs that should be taken into account. For example, refugee women in the City of Hume, and particularly the Craigieburn area, were involved in a program run by the Brotherhood's Ecumenical Migration Centre in 2008–09 to provide personal and settlement mentoring. An evaluation of the program (Bond 2010b) revealed that the women encountered significant and ongoing settlement and community orientation needs. New to Australia, the women were reliant on government payments of which large proportions were consumed by rent. In one instance, a refugee had been paying $1500 per month in rent, leaving only $350 for the month to buy food and pay other bills. Community workers involved in the program reported that refugees were particularly vulnerable to exploitation by real estate agents and landlords, for example in relation to condition reports and bonds.

These women's health and that of their families had been negatively impacted by the refugee experience. Local health services, particularly in the outer parts of the municipality, were limited, with only one health nurse to complete health assessments; and if they could, many women travelled, considerable distances to access female health professionals. Further challenges included lack of information about local services and orientation to the area, and lack of English, which made the women reluctant to access services alone.

Transport

Compounding these issues is transport disadvantage. Attempts to reduce such disadvantage in outer suburban areas have had varied success. For example, the Transport Connections program has been found to have had little success to date in improving access to local transport (Victorian Auditor General 2011). Similarly, the Frankston / Mornington Peninsula Bus Service review identified the following problems: limited span of hours and days of operation and insufficient frequency of services, no east–west public transport links, and poor timetable connections between transport modes (Department of Transport 2009).

Poor public transport affects social and economic participation and inclusion. Financial hardship for people settling in outer suburbs is caused by the dual pressures of high mortgages and fuel costs associated with commuter travel by car (Dodson & Sipe 2008). Car-dominated travel also has flow-

on environmental impacts in the form of greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change (Loader 2008). Poor public transport can also hinder disaster management efforts and evacuations which may become more common with climate change.

The need for public transport planning in outer suburban areas is highlighted by these system failures and the difficulties in addressing them post hoc. We encourage the government to establish public transport infrastructure and facilities before growth areas are inhabited, in order to support mobility and community participation, and also to limit car use to contain costs for low-income households and greenhouse emissions.

We would also encourage the government to facilitate alternative modes of transport through well-planned footpath and bike path networks that cater for people with a range of abilities and mobilities— for example, mothers and prams, wheelchair-users and others with limited physical mobility caused by age and/or physical impairment. Such modes of transport should be encouraged through regular maintenance of facilities and the inclusion of appropriate road safety measures.

The physical amenity of spaces is also important, as open parks, leafy trees, playgrounds, attractive walkways and waterways enrich places, enhance residents' enjoyment and engender feelings of connection and belonging.

We suggest that the examples noted here serve to illustrate the effect of inadequate services and the impact on social liveability. Without adequate services, all outer suburbs are particularly vulnerable to a number of related social problems. Such communities are susceptible to poor employment opportunities, higher levels of homelessness, poor physical and mental health and greater risk of the impacts of climate change.

Best practice in urban renewal as it relates to established outer suburbs (TOR 5)

The complexity of formulating place-making policy does not lend itself well to an internationally recognised or standard model of 'best practice'. Other countries have their own distinct issues and spatial patterning that may or may not be similar to Australia's sprawling low-density coastal cities, and they also have their own models of governance. In much of Europe and the United States, policy makers have been concerned primarily with the impact of the global financial crisis, while in Australia much of the concern has been with responding to population pressures, especially in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth. Australia's federal system also presents distinct governance challenges to achieving urban change.

There are, nevertheless, a number of shared cross-national issues, including demographic changes (especially population growth and ageing populations) and climate change. In terms of urban renewal practices, some general observations may be drawn from the international literature, including agreement about the importance of resident participation. Good practice principles drawn from experience and research elsewhere, notably the United Kingdom, include the following:

- Giving residents the skill to participate effectively is the most crucial task when renewal professionals wish to encourage such participation.

- Taking the view of the local people needs to occur before plans have been drawn up.

- Participation structures need to allow for a range of representation.

- Allowance needs to be made for the cost of community participation, which is not an easy or cheap option and it takes time.

- Residents need to be given genuine power in the renewal process to combat disillusionment.

In 2008, the UK government published *Lifetime homes, lifetime neighbourhoods: a national strategy for housing in an ageing society*, a report that recognised the implications of an ageing population for the future design of age-friendly homes and communities. This signalled a major shift that put housing at the forefront in terms of supporting older people's aspirations and placing the needs of older people at the heart of policy making (DCLG 2008).

In Australia, urban renewal comprises either physical refurbishment of properties and neighbourhoods or community renewal, which is aimed at making social improvement, or a combination of the two. In general, urban renewal in middle and outer suburbs of Australian cities targets housing that was built in the large-scale, low-density urban expansion after the Second World War. Much of this housing was built with basic materials and construction methods (many homes were owner-built) and even when solidly constructed, it often has poor amenity by today's standards (Ruming et al. 2007).

There are a number of serious problems with urban renewal in low-value suburbs in Australian cities. According to Professor Bill Randolph of the University of New South Wales, the solutions for higher density urban renewal in low-value suburbs will require much higher levels of interventions and active planning, and working with both the market and the local community, to deliver positive change. He proposes a range of components in order to effectively launch renewal in these areas, among them to develop integrated local renewal strategies, to explore the potential for local renewal master plans and to develop non-for-profit urban renewal trusts (see Randolph 2008).

Governance and locational disadvantage

Australia's federal system of government makes the task of addressing urban development very difficult. So much so that Brian Howe (2011, p. 10) argues that 'the fundamental challenge to achieving urban change is the issue of governance, especially with the complicated division of powers [inherent in the system]'. Particularly problematic is the coordination of urban infrastructure and social development, where responsibility is that divided between the Commonwealth, state and territory, and local governments.

At the federal level, the Social Inclusion Board has identified place-based approaches to addressing disadvantage as one key element of the social inclusion agenda and has developed advice on governance models to address locational disadvantage. A report released by the board earlier this year notes the concentration and entrenched disadvantage in particular places as a complex problem that requires a 'locally tailored and whole of community approach' (Australian Social Inclusion Board 2011). The board recommends that location-based initiatives, defined in the report as limited to relatively small locations of 5000 inhabitants or less, are based on five key elements:

1. A clear connection between economic and social strategies

2. A framework for providing integration of effort across governments

3. A level of devolution that allows significant and meaningful local involvement in determining the issues and solutions

4. Capacity development at both local level and in government, without which greater community engagement or devolution of responsibility would be impossible

5. Funding, measurement and accountability mechanisms that are designed to support the long term, whole of government and community aims for the initiative rather than attempting to build an initiative around unsuitable measurement and accountability (Australian Social Inclusion Board 2011, p. 31).

The importance of linking economic and social policy initiatives within locations cannot be overstated. The interlinked dynamics of employment, education and training opportunities, access to social and cultural activities, access to transport, and to health and community services, are fundamental to community wellbeing. The Brotherhood supports the Board's recommendation that location-based initiatives commence only after comprehensive mapping of the economic capacity of the area and surrounds has been conducted, and gaps in employment opportunities and social services have been identified and measures established to address them.

The Board states that location-based development strategies require a degree of devolution that allows for meaningful determination at the local level of issues to be addressed and strategies for addressing them. It also acknowledges the importance of governments continuing to work in partnership with communities or 'managing the risk' associated with implementing identified programs and solutions. We argue that working in partnership is the preferable approach and that this requires the government to develop a framework for organised collaboration across all tiers of government, and assist community members, public servants, local employers and education providers to develop their capacity to work together.

We support the greater participation of community members in local governance structures for a number of reasons: not only do residents of a given area often—collectively—have the best knowledge of local problems and strengths, but also the opportunity for political engagement should be a fundamental right of citizens. Political engagement is bound up with, or can lead to, other forms of social inclusion: the capacities to participate in valuable activity, access necessary goods and services and achieve social integration.

The Social Inclusion Board refers to the need, within 'community governance mechanisms' which may include a 'formal council, board or similar', for representation of the 'community in all its diversity, including representatives of residents'. Elsewhere, however, there is emphasis on identifying community leaders. While community leaders or 'champions' can be important to maintain momentum for specific community projects, we caution against government or networks' reliance on local elites rather than broad engagement of the community in making important community decisions. Communities experience a strong sense of disempowerment where consultation processes prove tokenistic and where power is distributed very unequally among the government and/or private sector and third sector representatives. Brodie and colleagues (2009) argue that reliance on a handful of community leaders to contribute to decision making will not ensure that the full range of community needs and strengths are considered. Skidmore, Bounds and Lownsbrough (2006) argue that community members who do not have time or the interest or confidence to be involved in formal decision-making forums can be assisted to make a contribution by tapping into the informal spaces of community life they routinely inhabit. That is, community members' opinions can be sought by members of governance entities more informally at childcare groups and sports clubs, for example. There is also a special argument for involving non-

government organisations which provide services to the most marginalised individuals in assisting these populations to contribute their opinions.

Many of these governance issues were raised in a workshop hosted by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development in 2008, at a pivotal time in the development of the federal Labor government's social inclusion agenda. Participants examined place-based policies in Australia aimed at promoting social inclusion. A strong theme was the challenge of governing urban change. Smyth referred to the British research of Griggs et al. (2008), who describe the critical intersections between people and place:

> … for the most part, person- and place-based policies have been developed separately and sometimes in isolation from each other. This reflects the responsibilities of government departments influenced by their different approaches and traditions. The reality, of course, is that all people live in places, contribute to places and are affected by the poverty or otherwise of their inhabitants. Hence it is reasonable to suspect that policies that dissociate people from places and vice versa may perform poorly (p.1).

Drawing parallels between Australia and the United Kingdom, Smyth (2008b) argued that Australian policies have tended to focus on developing local social capital or connectedness, and that these activities have to be integrated with those mainstream social services central to social inclusion. Another workshop participant, Bill Randolph, noted that for some years urban development has largely been left to market forces (Smyth 2008a). From the workshop, ten key requirements for policy that reduces place-based disadvantage emerged:

1. Clarity of purpose for place-based interventions

2. Facilities and infrastructure investment—economic and employment

3. The importance of urban and social planning

4. Data to track key social inclusion outcomes

5. Importance of predictive capacity

6. Appropriate governance and institutional arrangements at all levels

7. Importance of scale

8. Importance of engagement, respect and positive story-telling

9. Sustainability

10. Need for an overall framework for an Australian approach to social inclusion (Smyth 2008a).

Options for enhanced liveability (TOR 6)

Planning for liveability in outer suburban Melbourne offers opportunities for innovative approaches to providing residents' wellbeing across the life course. We have mentioned issues concerning young people in the Frankston Mornington Peninsula region and the Caroline Springs area and noted these are of relevance to other population groups, but there are issues specific to older people that deserve some elaboration.

Age-friendly neighbourhoods

In a submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry on caring for older Australians, the Brotherhood raised concerns about meeting the needs of an increasing older population (BSL 2010). For example, the population aged 65 and over in the four SLAs of Craigieburn, Melton East, Melton (Balance) and Whittlesea North is projected to rise by over 400 per cent by 2026. While the growth is off a low base, the figures indicate considerable numbers of older adults seeking housing and services of all kinds in areas where very few currently exist. We suggest current urban planning should include careful attention to housing availability, housing type and neighbourhood design that enables older people to remain involved in their communities, while meeting their needs for access to appropriate services and acknowledging that limited physical mobility among this age group requires appropriate transport options.

A new strategic approach to innovative housing for Australia's ageing population might include universal design, environmental sustainability and adequate supply of social housing in age-friendly neighbourhoods, together with government support for remodelling homes or downsizing. As people age, a good variety of housing options facilitates wellbeing and enables care to be provided in settings of choice.

Environmental sustainability

Environmentally sustainable housing design needs to be a key feature of urban planning for people at all stages of the life course and to acknowledge differential health needs. For example, older people and infants may be more vulnerable to extremes of temperature and people on low incomes in particular face intensifying pressures to minimise the rising costs of their water and energy. Design solutions may include water tanks, north-facing windows, eaves, insulation and natural ventilation, as well as choice of materials.

We support the government's commitment to meet the COAG agreement to support 6-star minimum energy efficiency standards for both new and significantly renovated residential and commercial buildings. We also support the transition of all existing housing stock to meet an average of 5-star energy rating.

In addition to housing design, other climate change adaptation issues include the potential for greater food insecurity. Difficulty accessing affordable nutritious food is currently experienced by 6 per cent of the population of the Mornington Peninsula and 11.6 per cent in Frankston, the latter the highest percentage in the state (McCaughey 2007). Impacts of climate change, such as drought, floods and greater weather variability, will potentially heighten food insecurity, through increased instability of supply and associated cost increases. The challenges of addressing food insecurity are magnified in outer-suburban Melbourne where many people have less public transport or walking access to affordable, appropriate food.

Conclusion

In summary, the Brotherhood of St Laurence supports an approach to urban development that is informed by a social investment plan that ensures people of all ages and abilities are not excluded from educational, employment, social and recreational opportunities. Planned social infrastructure, supported by collaborative and inclusive governance structures, is the foundation of economically and socially inclusive urban development, and a basic citizen entitlement. We urge the government to plan adequately for the provision of employment and training opportunities, health care, transport infrastructure and services in urban planning. At the same time, we emphasise the importance of addressing housing affordability, as the present situation is likely to further entrench divisions within society and exacerbate the social and economic marginalisation already being experienced by some.

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