

Media release

From Save Williamstown

Saturday, 26 March, 2010

Minister Calls in Project amid Conflict of Interest Concerns

Planning Minister Justin Madden has unilaterally rezoned the former Port Phillip Woollen Mill site and called in an 'independent' advisory committee to progress the plans for a 13 storey 'village' proposed by major developer Evolve.

Save Williamstown (SW), a local community group fighting for sustainable and appropriate development of the site, is angered by the decision, and mystified by its timing.

"We are highly concerned that this decision may have been motivated by the Minister's relationship with the developers," said SW spokesperson Godfrey Moase.

"Our elected Council was dealing with Evolve's application to rezone the site and develop it in an objective and accountable manner.

Why does the minister therefore need to take this out of Council hands and make these important decisions about our community behind closed doors in Spring Street?"

"At a Council meeting in December 2009, Hobsons Bay City Council asked the developer to modify its application according to the recommendations of the independent report it commissioned. The developer disappeared for a few months, and the next thing we hear the Minister has rezoned the land and called in a Panel. The obvious question is why.

"The Minister had previously promised to let the Council work through the development application, and now seemingly out of nowhere the Minister has made this decision.

"Our trust in the Minister has been broken," said Mr. Moase.

SW understands the following about the links between the Minister and the developers:

- The Minister went to the same secondary school and graduated in the same year as one of the Directors of Nelson Place Village. Both Justin Madden and Paul Jeremy O'Brien graduated from St Bernard's Essendon in 1978.
- The Minister worked closely with former Liberal Party powerbroker Ron Walker during the 2006 Commonwealth Games. Ron Walker has a 50 per cent holding in the joint venture to develop the site.
- By disposing of Council process and unilaterally rezoning the land to residential the Minister has increased the property value of the Port Phillip Woollen Mill site.

Save Williamstown has also called into question the timing of the decision.

"I would like the Minister to come clean with how long he has been intending to make this decision.

"Save Williamstown does not think it is any accident that the Mr. Madden has decided to make such a controversial announcement on the Friday before the Easter School Holidays start; after all, the Minister does have some quality Media Advisors."

However, SW has welcomed and backs the stand taken by local member for Williamstown, Wade Noonan.

“We commend Mr. Noonan on the stand he has taken with the community and for publically raising his concern for this development’s impact on the community, the tourism economy of Williamstown and the ongoing future of the shipyards and the thousands of jobs they create.”

The campaign for appropriate and sustainable development of the site has also received public support from former Premiers Steve Bracks and Joan Kirner, as well as upper house Greens member Colleen Hartland.

Mr Moase confirmed that he had personally written to Justin Madden on a number of occasions requesting the involvement of Save Williamstown in the consultative process, but had not received one response.