

Property Podium



Stephen Mayne

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Stephen Mayne is a business journalist and governance advocate who recently resigned from Manningham City Council to run for a council position at the forthcoming City of Melbourne elections. In the lead up to the Property Council's Growth Summit 2012, Property Victoria asked Stephen to give us his ideas about the big issues for Melbourne.

There aren't too many councils which take applicants to VCAT for under-developing a site. But at Manningham City Council we have been determined to deliver on the vision to intensely develop the land around Westfield Doncaster, which is now the fifth most valuable shopping centre in Australia.

Bring on the 4000 apartments so more of the 15 million annual Westfield visitors each year can walk to the centre. And bring on much-needed associated infrastructure investment, such as Doncaster Rail and the path finding proposal for a \$6 million sewerage treatment plant that will deliver a third pipe solution to numerous new apartment towers.

This may sound excessively pro-development, but at the same time Manningham has fought tenaciously to protect our green wedges and low density residential zones. John Alexander complains that Sydney has built out the vast majority of its private tennis courts but in Manningham we still have a staggering 1400!

It has not been easy being the loudest defender of high rise development on Doncaster Hill since 2008 but the rationale is pretty straight forward. The vision has been clear for a decade and everyone knows where they sit on height limits, zones, set-backs and car-parking.

In order to cope with Melbourne's annual population growth of about 80,000, councils need to be given residential growth targets. At Manningham, we knew it was 460 new dwellings per year and we actively identified designated areas along main roads and near activity centres to handle this growth.

These areas contained only 13 per cent of our resident population and it gave great certainty to the other 87 per cent which VCAT has respected.

The challenge is holding the line when objectors line up. Developers in Doncaster have been largely silent as officers and councillors copped a media beating from a noisy minority.

With good communications from all stakeholders, you can win the argument but confidence in the system breaks down if transparency fades or the goal posts are moved.

Victoria's VCAT system dramatically reduces corruption because power is vested in the hands of independent and

professional arbitrators. It's a good low-cost system, even if third party appeal rights frustrate some developers.

However, the same doesn't apply with the Planning Minister whose call-in powers are way too extensive. If the Minister wants to play God, there should be far more comprehensive public explanations of his interventions. The City of Melbourne has considerable planning expertise yet no power to determine any application greater than 25,000 square metres. This should be changed.

Public cynicism is further exacerbated by Victoria's failure to improve its political donations system, similar to recent measures in NSW and Queensland.

I'm more than happy to support sensible development on its merit which complies with the rules laid down, but when former politicians pop up as lobbyists or donations start to flow, it just makes it harder to resist the squeaky wheel elements.



Driving Victoria's Economic Future
Growth Summit 2012

Stephen will be speaking at the Property Council's Growth Summit 2012 on **7 September 2012**.

For more information and to reserve your place visit www.propertyoz.com.au/vic.

Friday 7 September | Peninsula at Atlantic, Docklands



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