

# REDEVELOPING THE PIER AREA: PT GREY

## What's happening?

GORCC's redevelopment plans were approved by all Surf Coast Councillors on 23 June 2020. They envisage a new aquatic club and a restaurant/event centre (a "beacon building"). But plans are on hold while the case is contested at VCAT. The case is scheduled to be heard in April 2021.

## Who has appealed the decision at VCAT?

It is not Friends of Lorne. Our Committee lodged a formal objection to the plans with the Surf Coast last November. But after the Council approved the plans the Committee was divided about pursuing it further at VCAT.

Some of our members at large have been in favour of the new development - others opposed. We decided to object to the proposal last year after GORCC failed to respond to our repeatedly raised concerns about the missing heritage element in their plans. After 16 months we still had no reply.

We opposed the demolition of the co-op building and argued that a new prominent, 'look-at-me' type building is inappropriate for the site, that car parking is excessive, and that events planned there could happen elsewhere in Lorne.

## What about the petition to save the co-op building?

Some 1527 people signed a petition to retain and repurpose the old co-op building. It was presented to Parliament by Richard Riordan, Member for Polwarth, in February. The petition was organised by Lawrie Baker who lodged a personal objection to GORCC's plans with the Surf Coast Shire, along with a copy of the petition.

The petition is from "the permanent and part time residents of Lorne." A lot of people who signed it do not fit this category. But, on inspection, about 480 people do. They include names we regularly associate with the Historical Society, the sporting teams, the aquatic club, the CFA, the Men's Shed, the RSL, the school, the Op Shop and people with almost every "old Lorne" family street name. Nonetheless, our elected representatives were unmoved.

## So, what next?

Some 48 additional conditions were put on GORCC by the Council (to do with lighting, the choice of materials etc). But community input to the physical look of what's still to be decided is not permitted (we asked). The remaining part of the old pier is to be retained and restored, regardless, and that work is proceeding.

GORCC has been asked to finalise its Cultural, Heritage and Creative Plan. Installations that could reflect the history of the site are being discussed. A number of Lorne groups are assisting, Friends of Lorne included.

Acknowledgement of heritage is a sore point for Friends of Lorne who have been campaigning for years for the remaining parts of the old crane to be reinstated as sculpture. In 2009 we were advised that "the crane is not considered by GORCC to be a key asset. However, no final decision on the removal of the crane will be made while the master plan is still in process." The crane was removed by GORCC shortly after but was 'rescued' and stored by Friends of Lorne.

## Could this have turned out differently?

Maybe. An objective, minimum standard on what constitutes adequate community engagement for major planning applications could have helped. Right now, there is none, meaning that competing narratives of the same events can be equally valid. GORCC can put out a press release saying that "the master plan process was engaging, it was sensitive, it was balanced and it lasted 10 years". Yet such a process can end with 480 Lorne people saying the final result is something they don't want.

It won't be easy to design objective standards for community engagement in Victoria. But Friends of Lorne is not alone in wanting it.

"Community engagement" can't just be how many people show up, complete a survey, or tick one box. To be meaningful, the process must extend to dialogue and deliberation. It must extend to the nature of decisions open to input and to the creation of a forum where views can be recalibrated in response to those of others. Community engagement is not an argument for "design by committee" or even simple "majority rules". It's about transparency and the occasions provided for listening and to-and-fro.

## Sound impossible?

Not to me. Seemingly wishy-washy concepts like "social cohesion" and "quality of life" are now objectively measured. If they weren't, it would not be possible for governments to adequately allocate budget dollars to things like youth health promotion or cancer care.

Meanwhile, we will provide updates on Pt Grey at [www.friendsoflorne.org.au](http://www.friendsoflorne.org.au) We hope there still may be opportunity for the community to be more closely involved. Hundreds of Lorne people want to make the Pt Grey decision better - the best it can be.

Penny Hawe, President, Friends of Lorne