

# PlanningNews

Published by Planning Institute of Australia, Victorian Division

Volume 39 No. 5 June 2013



## Reformed zones



### In this issue...

- Wither activity centre policy?
- Native vegetation offsetting
- Biodiversity Conservation Strategy
- Gypsy caravan paintwork



## Vice-President's column

**Nicola Smith MPIA CPP**

Sitting here in a funky Collingwood café, sipping on my soy flat white and contemplating what topic to write about in my first column for Planning News I am distracted by the nearby young hipsters musing over a new bike route in inner Melbourne. The topic interested me less than their form of communication. Here were two people, discussing transport and planning through the comparison of images on their phones that they had saved onto Facebook, rather than through the 'old fashioned' method of story-telling.

Communication forms and mediums are changing and the planning profession is doing a valiant effort to keep up to speed.

As a now 30-something businesswoman who in her early twenties signed up to Facebook to interact with friends at home as I undertook the prerequisite sojourn in Europe, I am now amazed at the level that social media has infiltrated not only my private life but my professional life too.

Many of you will be aware of Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn and others may have dabbled in Instagram, Pinterest, Flickr, SkillPages, Vine and Klout. However, some may not. But it must be acknowledged that social media is a buzz phrase of the time. Be it short, medium or long term, social media is something all planners should be aware of, if not actively involved with.

The Planning Institute of Australia first created a social media account in 2011 with the release of a Facebook page closely followed by a Twitter presence which today has resulted in 3536 messages being tweeted to a total of 1363 followers internationally. Facebook and Twitter together with LinkedIn, YouTube and Flickr enable us to keep in contact with our 4800 members around the globe, tweeting items of international, national and divisional relevance. Often these messages are first released on twitter before being made available through more traditional channels of media releases and email blasts.

This practice is also adopted by local Councils, State Government Departments and Ministers alike. Twitter enables direct access to the Premier, Minister for Planning and Minister for Environment and Climate Change, amongst others, with real time feeds relating to relevant planning decisions and announcements. As a consultant, this keeps you up to speed with relevant items of interest; as a government planner, assists in informing across jurisdictions; and as a community member, enables you to keep a finger on the pulse of planning – particularly with the numerous changes in planning requirements which have been occurring over the past six months.

In fact social media has been used to great effect in community consultation. The recent Melbourne Planning Strategy (MPS) Community Forum saw 673 people congregate in a room to discuss the future of Melbourne. Their discussions were supplemented by lively online interactions with over 400 tweets received over the course of the day. The Plan Melbourne website, use of the hashtag *#planmelbourne* and online posting on the Plan Melbourne Facebook page in addition to more traditional methods of surveys and focus groups has increased exposure of the discussion paper "Melbourne – Let's talk about the future" and has enabled a greater cross section of the community to become involved. The active promotion of social media by DPCD has been very positive in engaging the community, widening dialogue and bolstering the



understanding of planning amongst the general public.

PIA has also continued to use social media to promote the role of planners and planning, specifically through the Planning Matters Strategy. This strategy was launched at the recent National PIA Congress 2013 with the objective of informing a series of key actions to Focus, Invigorate and Position members and the profession, specifically:

- Focusing our members to be bold planning professionals committed to delivering good planning;
- Invigorate the profession by inspiring planners to embrace change and understand the value we bring; and to
- Position the profession by championing good planning.

Discussion revolving around the Strategy has commenced on twitter at *#planningmatters* with comments also welcome at [policy@planning.org.au](mailto:policy@planning.org.au). The Victorian Division will be creating a divisional response to this national strategy and will update you in ongoing bulletins.

PIA actively engages in the social media space and supports the positive growth and knowledge it can bring. PIA recognises that social media has proven to be a valuable way of connecting people in times of crisis, providing access to isolated communities and a valuable community service. Although social media can be used to great effect, there is also the opportunity for strong criticism to bounce around in an otherwise unmediated environment. Social media can also be quite damaging, with the spread of misinformation. To this end, PIA provides an online guide: "Social Media for the Planning Profession – A guide to online professionalism for all planning professionals and students". I recommend you read this guide, available on PIA's webpage, to assist in enjoying the online community in a safe manner.

Social Media should not be looked upon as the domain of just the young. Social media channels may be short lived, and may change over time, but the ability to receive instant feeds, engage in virtual networking and explore our urban environment is an amazing tool that enables users to better understand the main streets of Florida, the piazzas of Rome and the public art of Melbourne. Look forward to chatting to you in the virtual world! ●

**Nicola Smith**  
**Vice-President PIA Vic Division**  
[nicola@nicheplanningstudio.com.au](mailto:nicola@nicheplanningstudio.com.au)