

Shadow Minister for Planning and Heritage

Hon David Davis MP Shadow Minister for Planning and Heritage



The amenity and liveability of our suburbs is of vital importance. What we allow to be built today will form the foundations of our suburbs for years to come. Labor has been in power for 17 of the last 21 years. In this time we have seen the stripping back of rights from local communities when it comes to planning decisions.

In September 2018, planning scheme amendment VC152 to the Victorian Planning Provisions was enacted clearing the way for the virtually unrestrained establishment of rooming houses. Clause 52.23 exempts permit requirements on land where the proposed use is for the purpose of a rooming house. Under Amendment VC152, up to 12 people can be accommodated on a single property with little focus on residential amenity and traffic and parking issues.

Now, two and a half years later, we are seeing the negative impact of this amendment. In Burwood, for example, 18 properties are formally registered as rooming houses at Glengarry Avenue, Kilsyth Avenue, and Inverness Avenue alone.

The City of Glen Eira's *Rooming House* information factsheet states: "Historically, rooming houses were large-scale purpose-built facilities that were predominantly located in the inner suburbs of Melbourne." Now, today, they are proliferating across many suburbs, virtually uncontrolled. The Glen Eira factsheet goes on to say the rooming house sector is now characterised by small rooming houses, mainly utilising suburban homes with multiple bedrooms for accommodation.

In another City of Glen Eira document, *Improving standards for rooming houses*, the council states the number of rooming houses in Glen Eira has almost doubled in the past five years. Currently there are 49 rooming houses registered with Council that accommodate approximately 500 people. The document also states, "There are increasing concerns from neighbours, the community and authorised officers regarding the safety of local rooming houses".

With councils powerless to block the development of these rooming houses that comply with Labor's Planning Provisions, I am concerned about the impacts that this unchecked spread are having on local communities. Planning Minister, Richard Wynne, said of his amendment the "rooming house provision will facilitate the renewal and delivery of diverse social housing stock to meet the needs of disadvantaged Victorians". I support the provision of social housing, however VC152 does not require the purpose of a proposed rooming house to be for social purpose. Instead in Burwood rooming houses are being densely occupied by working professionals, working holiday visa holders, students and holiday makers.

The City of Glen Eira, in its *Improving standards for rooming houses*, has identified what it sees as "the problem". Vulnerable residents, Council says:

- can be exploited by rooming house operators;
- are often subjected to unacceptable standards of provision of facilities such as toilets and indoor living spaces; and
- lack security for their own spaces in rooming houses.

Council says nearby residents are:

- subjected to antisocial behaviour from time-to-time, partly as a result of poor standards; and

- confused about who has responsibility for policing and ensuring rooming houses and their occupants are good neighbours.

We need to safeguard the liveability and amenity of our suburbs. We do not want to be facing the consequences of inappropriate development in the years to come. We also need to do better by disadvantaged Victorians. As the City of Glen Eira points out in its *Improving standards for rooming houses*, "Some vulnerable groups living in rooming houses should be living in more appropriate and suitable accommodation, particularly families with young children, women escaping domestic violence, people with chronic health and mental health issues, the elderly and recent arrivals".

The document goes on to say:

- The current minimum standards for rooming houses are also insufficient and create a number of issues. This includes the lack of provision for common living areas which results in residents congregating in front and rear yards of properties where they sometimes engage in antisocial behaviour.
- Many rooming house residents express concerns about their safety. The vulnerability of many rooming house residents means that they can be easily exploited and intimidated as they generally do not have any alternative housing options.
- Rooming house residents often fear for their health and safety due to increased likelihood of conflict caused by unsuitable tenant mixes and dominant individuals or groups claiming ownership over communal areas.

At a public meeting in recent days, I and my Parliamentary colleagues were left in no doubt about the legitimate and growing community concerns about the lack of regulation over rooming houses. Victoria Police need to do more, and now, to keep communities safe. But the long-term message was also clear. Communities, through their councils, must be given a say in the location and control of the markedly increased number of rooming houses. Surely basic planning matter like traffic, parking and waste collection cannot be ignored.

Amendment VC152 is lazy housing policy, done on the cheap by a Planning Minister out of his depth. It simply does not stand up to scrutiny. It has not met the needs of disadvantaged Victorians as promised. It has proven not to be the panacea for historically inadequate investment in social housing from successive Labor governments Minister Wynne might have hoped. It is demonstrably destroying the liveability and amenity of our suburbs.

No-one, other than perhaps the operators of these proliferating rooming houses, is happy – not rooming house residents; not their neighbours. It's time for VC152 to go. ●

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