



ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC.

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RHSV Statement on Queen Victoria Market 'People's Panel'

The RHSV has participated in good faith in the first two sessions of Melbourne City Council's 'People's Panel'. We were assured that 'everything was on the table.' But it has now become clear, as the panel's web portal proclaims to participants, that our 'remit' is only to 'help shape the delivery and location of trader and customer facilities at Queen Victoria Market' and that the nature of these facilities is non-negotiable.

At our second session, we were seated at tables with plans of the market and pieces of paper representing cool rooms, store rooms, prep rooms, break-out rooms, compost spaces, and 60 additional toilets, which comprise the Council 'renewal' package. I was told by the officer who was the 'host' at our table that this package was non-negotiable.

This package is virtually identical to former Lord Mayor Robert Doyle's proposal to excavate two (later three) levels underground for parking to replace the current carpark (slated to become an 'activity square') and for a host of new facilities to transform the market's mode of operation. Traders now operate in the traditional manner: they bring goods to their stalls in their vehicles, and then set up and operate out of their vehicles. The Doyle plan was to have them bring the goods to loading docks, store them underground, and bring them up via lifts to fixed stalls. It has become clear in the Panel, that this is the current 'renewal' plan, and that the long range aim is to shift much of the market to 'hospitality' (does this mean fast food?), which is why the plan involves so many preparation rooms.

The market's traditional mode of operation is part of its attraction and of its cultural value. The market's heritage character is a major drawcard on which to build. The new structures required to access the underground services would fatally compromise that character: the sheds would be cluttered with lift wells, vehicle access ramps taking up Shed D, vent shafts and other services, all in a modern sleek Scandinavian design at odds with the look of the market.

Heritage Victoria rejected this proposal. They found the financial plan unconvincing. They noted that the sheds would have to be dismantled and rebuilt, completely changing them from their Victorian construction. They accepted our argument that the intrusion of modern structures was unthinkable.

We therefore assumed that the People's Panel was an attempt to reset and find a common basis. The Panel turns out, however, to be an attempt to force the appearance of consensus while avoiding democratic discussion. Time has been split between presentations from Council officers and divisions into small groups with tasks set by the facilitators. No alternative views are presented or permitted. Never has there been open, general discussion, never a plenary session, never a vote, still less discussion of the vision for the market and what changes that vision would require.

For the People's Panel to constitute meaningful consultation, we need to be able to discuss the broad issues:

- whether a massive change in the market's traditional mode of operation would improve the market or cause it to go the way of the Prahran Market.
- whether the five years of disruption required for Council's proposal would alienate much of the market's customer base, opening the market to the transformation to 'hospitality'.
- whether the renovation and restoration of the market and the provision of services (such as electricity, internet, water and sewerage) require excavation of three underground levels or whether this can be done more simply and incrementally.
- how to market the QVM effectively to new demographics, both as shoppers and as potential stall-holders; the traditional, low-cost mode of operation offers the possibility to attract traders and customers from the new groups of immigrants coming to Melbourne.

The RHSV is committed to participation in discussion wherever possible, but that discussion must be open and in good faith. That has so far not been the case.

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