

# Opening Address for *Planning and Health: Building Sustainable Communities on the Urban Fringe*

Cr. Graham Smith, Mayor, City of Casey

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City of Casey Council Chambers

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Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen. Welcome to the City of Casey, Victoria's fastest growing municipality and the third fastest in Australia, and the setting for today's forum on *Planning and Health: Building Sustainable Communities on the Urban Fringe*.

This seminar builds on momentum generated at three seminars held since November 2001 and organised by the Department of Human Services, VicHealth, and the Planning Institute of Australia. These forums provide an opportunity to showcase best practice in integrated planning and share information.

A key aim of the forum is to enable planners from different disciplines to exchange ideas, and brainstorm strategies for dealing with challenges and enhancing collaboration. Topics today will include:

- Local case studies highlighting the relationship between planning, community development and wellbeing;
- Examples of successful integrated planning and how these outcomes were achieved;
- Exploring strategies for achieving integrated local planning; and
- Using the latest Census data for local planning

These forums have been organised to form partnerships with the local government sector, and draw on local expertise. I am encouraged by the growing awareness that there is so much to be gained (in social, economic and environmental terms) by making a more concerted and co-ordinated effort to improve community wellbeing.

Conducting and disseminating research is critically important to ensuring a more informed approach to meeting local government responsibilities, and planning for a healthy community. For example, the Department of Human Services' Burden of Disease study has documented how the overall health status of Victorians - and the health burden costs to the community - vary markedly according to where we live. Different locations offer varying degrees of access to healthy environments, food, services, amenities, health information, education, employment, housing, and opportunities to experience sense of community and sense of place. Local government's traditional geographical concern with people and place is critical in addressing the root causes of these disparities.

The National Health and Medical Research Council recently identified some disappointing and costly health trends, such as increasing levels of obesity, especially

amongst children. We need to help create neighbourhoods and townships that are so attractive, safe, well-serviced and accessible that people will want to get outside and use their feet, bikes and public transport instead of relying on cars.

Promoting discussion on best practice is another important step in helping councils to reflect on why they work in a particular way, and to identify strategies for changing existing work arrangements and priorities to achieve not only 'more with less', but also to offer their staff a greater level of job satisfaction at the end of what are often difficult working days. Councils will always have 'not enough money' to meet 'too many demands'. Therefore, ensuring that Council staff work more closely together in a more strategic way is clearly the only choice we have of making genuine improvements in our general quality of life at the local level.

I am delighted to see that today's forum will showcase research, ideas and best practice undertaken right here by the City of Casey, by our colleagues in neighbouring municipalities, such as Cardinia and Mornington Peninsula, and other municipalities on Melbourne's urban fringe, such as Yarra Ranges, Nillumbik and Wyndham.

I thank the Planning Institute of Australia and Department of Human Services:

- For being prepared to work together, and with us,
- For showing leadership by organising this series of professional development opportunities, and
- For being prepared to convene them in local areas such as Casey and Warrnambool, as well as the more usual metropolitan locations.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted to open today's forum on *Planning and Health: Building Sustainable Communities on the Urban Fringe*. I encourage you to reflect on what you hear, to participate actively in discussion, and to share today's messages and outcomes with your colleagues, neighbours and local government personnel.

Thank you.