Dear Minister,

We recognise that as Minister of Planning you bear a very great responsibility, given that the Salta development west of Walmer Street falls within a Priority Development Zone. There is growing community concern, as people become aware of the loss of public amenity that would occur were the Salta proposal to be approved in its present form.

Our group, which represents residents and river bank users in your electorate and far beyond, fully supports the criticisms made in the City of Yarra Council report that was tabled and adopted on 11 May 2016. Many of our group attended the meeting to show our unequivocal support for Council’s expert analysis and the recommendations they made. We spoke in favour of the Council’s conclusions. We also questioned the status and design treatment of Walmer Street...

…...the community’s major concern centres on the fact that Salta’s plans constitute a diminution of the public realm. No amount of developer hype can disguise the fact that public amenity and enjoyment of this extensively trafficked part of the Yarra River corridor would be seriously compromised by their design, particularly in regard to access to the river banks. People’s anger has grown as it has dawned on them exactly what Salta is proposing. The replacement of the bicycle/pram/disability ramp with a poorly specified, and seemingly grossly inferior, alternative is creating extreme concern in many quarters. The public perceives that several design decisions that Salta have made are directed mainly at increasing the value of their properties, at the expense of the well-being and amenity of the community...

Our group requests that you give serious consideration to the following recommendations:

1. Adopt in full the recommendations of the City of Yarra report.

2. Ensure that any revised plans that Salta is required to make are subject to the same scrutiny as the current plan.

3. Instruct your department to undertake a detailed bike and pedestrian traffic survey of the Walmer Street Bridge and associated City Trail, as a factual basis for determining the amenity impacts of alternative design treatments to protect and promote the community value of this area.

4. Once revised plans are submitted, require Salta to engage with the community, both residents and affected interest groups …, to make transparent the public and private benefits and impacts of the redesign of the Walmer Street environs. This should include the extent/duration of any interruption to access to the Walmer Street bridge caused by the proposed construction process. This should provide for access to all plans and models, and site visits.
The Facts and Figures
> This is the former Fire Brigade Training site. It is located in a Priority Development Zone, which means it is controlled directly by the Minister for Planning, the Hon Richard Wynne. The development of this site is therefore exempt from the normal VCAT planning rules.
> Salta lodged a development plan for the site in November 2015. Salta’s plans include two 10-11 storey buildings comprising 539 apartments and 788sqm of commercial floor space.
> This proposal is a variation of the plan submitted a decade earlier, when residents objected that the plan was too massive, too high and that it added to traffic congestion.
> Salta propose a development on a huge scale, which, if approved by Minister Wynne, will seriously diminish the public’s access to this important gateway to the areas on either side of the river, including the Capital City Trail.
> On 21 December 2015, Minister Wynne created a new River Yarra Protection Committee to draft legislation to provide long-term protection for the river environs.
> The City of Yarra Council has produced a major report that states: there are fundamental concerns with the setbacks, internal amenity, road capacity and the Yarra River environs. It finds these matters… would necessitate a redesign of the proposal… and until the issues are remedied Council cannot support the proposal. Note: the underlined sections are quoted from the Report tabled by Yarra Council on 11 May 2016. The recommendations of the Report were passed unanimously.

The Major Threats to our Public Amenity
> The proposed Walmer Plaza, design fails to acknowledge that Walmer Street is a key pedestrian and cyclist connection point to the river, that will be effectively privatised for the sole benefit of the developer. With 2 car tunnels and 700 car movements a day it is not a public Plaza.
> The development poses a serious threat to the amenity of residents of Abbotsford and Studley Park and many others who use the Walmer Street footbridge and bike/pram/wheelchair ramp each day.
> Yarra Council is extremely critical of many of the aspects the development, particularly issues of bulk, diminished public amenity and interaction with the river.

What YOU Can Do to Ensure Appropriate Development
> We are not opposed to developments that protect the local environment and public amenity. We believe, however, that lack of community information, developer hype and confusion over who is the responsible planning authority all contribute to the lack of transparency about the cumulative effects of the proposed developments around Walmer Street.
> We believe that Minister Wynne is sincere in wishing to leave a legacy of long-term protection of the Yarra environs. Here’s a real chance for him, to deliver.
> Sign the petition by accessing ‘Defend the Yarra Bank’ on the internet. (1000+ people signed.)
> Write to Richard Wynne to express your concerns: development.approvals@delwp.vic.gov.au
> Join Collingwood and Abbotsford Residents Association (CARA). cararesidents.wordpress.com. You don’t have to live in these suburbs to belong.
> Contact your local Councillors and MPs, Richmond (Richard Wynne) and the Federal seat of Melbourne (Adam Bandt).
> Read the comprehensive City of Yarra Council Report. You can access it at yarracity.vic.gov.au. Then go to 2016 Council Meetings. May, agenda
> Write to the newspapers. Share on social media. Inform friends and neighbours.

REMEMBER: BAD THINGS HAPPEN WHEN GOOD PEOPLE DO NOTHING

Walmer Street Action Group in partnership with CARA Sue Donovan, Trevor Flett, Mike Waller, Sue Lawes, Virginia Dods President CARA and many more concerned residents.