

PRESIDENTS REPORT 2025

Welcome to our Members and Guests to our Annual General Meeting for 2025.

This Report gives a very quick run-down on the major issues since the last AGM and addresses our activities under 4 pillars:

- Heritage
- Planning
- Engagement and
- Membership

However, before I do that, can I publicly welcome Janique Lambert to our Committee. Janique responded to a request in our Bulletin for Members to volunteer to join our committee. In the short time she has been on the Committee, Janique has provided major assistance to our hard-working Secretary Jan Armstrong Conn in such matters as meetings agendas and minutes including the significant workload involved in putting on this AGM. So welcome and thank you Janique.

Turning to the 4 pillars:

HERITAGE:

This has been possibly the major activity of your Association since I joined the Committee in 2021. It was triggered by the announcement by the Melbourne City Council of a Heritage Review of that part of South Yarra forming part of the City of Melbourne. That is, the part of South Yarra to the West of Punt Rd. The CoM appointed GML Heritage Pty Ltd to conduct the review which culminated in 2023 in a 4-volume report totalling some 2000 pages. Your Association was an active participant in the work of GML, and we appointed well known Heritage Architect Nigel Lewis to assist. Following the delivery of the Report to the Council, the recommendations were reviewed and adopted largely unchanged by the Council in June 2024 and submitted to the Minister for final approval. We became increasingly concerned with the delays in obtaining this final approval and were mightily relieved when this final approval was granted in the last month. The approval provides ongoing enhanced protection for the many heritage properties in our area which are so important in maintaining the liveability of South Yarra and also Melbourne as a whole. As I have said, the GML Report was prepared with our support and there is a great deal of work and expertise invested in it.

We are keen that this not be lost and are taking steps to ensure firstly, the Report and supporting volumes remain available for public scrutiny. Secondly, we are negotiating with GML and other relevant stakeholders to publish a history of South Yarra based on the Report which we will make available to our members for purchase at cost. We anticipate a quality production of some 250 to 300 pages including illustrations for a cost around \$80. We hope it will be on sale during 2026 and that there will also be a digital version available online. We shall keep you updated as to progress through our regular Bulletins.

PLANNING:

This will always be a key area of focus for your Association. Since the Poolman House – Solo Club successful permit challenge, I am pleased there has been a welcome

absence of inappropriate development proposals. However, we try and keep a close watch on all planning applications and regularly report on these through our Bulletin. Our limited resources mean we will generally not be the lead objector against any proposal but will assist objectors in mounting opposition to inappropriate development throughout our suburb. Further information as to how we may be able to assist is on our website and Members are encouraged to contact the Committee to discuss any proposed development they are concerned about.

ENGAGEMENT:

In representing the interests of Residents, it is important we have strong relations with the various levels of Government. Chief amongst these is local government with the City of Melbourne. Also significant is the State Government where we form part of the seat of Prahran in the Legislative Assembly and I welcome the State Liberal Member for Prahran, Rachel Westaway. Rachel has kindly agreed to be our guest speaker today and I will introduce her later in the meeting. Following a restructure under the Bracks Government in 2003 we also form part of the South Metropolitan Region in the Legislative Council where we are represented by 5 Upper House parliamentary members. In day-to-day terms, our principal interaction is with the City of Melbourne. They profess a desire to communicate with residents, and the Lord Mayor seems keen to foster this. We regularly attend meetings with City of Melbourne staff and probably the main meeting is with what is known as the Presidents of Residents Committee which meets every few months and is usually attended by the Lord Mayor and numbers of Council members and staff. Let me just say that I don't think open and clear interaction with residents comes easily to Council staff and there is a degree of frustration shared by most if not all the Presidents of the various resident groups as to the quality of the communication. A recent example is with the works carried out at the corner of Domain Rd and Park St over the last few months. A letterbox drop was made by the Council advising that they were doing a "signalised intersection upgrade, reconstructing pram crossings and associated civil works". Residents were invited to contact named people for further information. I have contacted the people whose names were provided on 3 occasions now and none of them really had much idea of what was being done or why. My last phone call was about 2 weeks ago and was quite inconclusive. I was told there are further minor works to be carried out such as moving the pedestrian light control for crossing Park St closer to the actual crossing and a further letter drop is being planned.

Personal observation as to what has been done is that the pedestrian crossing has been moved closer to the corner, bright yellow gravel has been laid on the pedestrian crossing area in Park St and access for wheelchairs and other wheeled vehicles has been improved. However, the current appearance of this important site for our area has suffered considerably in the process and we hope to persuade the CoM to improve this area.

The Council has also appointed a neighbourhood partner for each of the resident groups within the City of Melbourne and our relationship partner is Kimberley Pierzchalski. She organises regular meetings with residents and some of you have probably attended sessions she runs at the South Yarra Senior Citizens building in Fawkner Park on a regular basis or attended a coffee event at one of our excellent cafes which Kimberley organises and I recommend you contact her if you have any queries.

about the activities of Council. Whilst we can't say we are satisfied with the present level of communication we have with the Council, we think it important to work on the relationship in conjunction with other residents' associations to try and get some good outcomes for the area.

During the year under review, the Council conducted a neighbourhood survey as to the needs and desires of our residents. Some of you no doubt took part in this survey. The top 3 priorities from the survey for South Yarra were found to be.

1. Affordable housing and homelessness support
2. Better roads, parks, public transport and parking.
3. Creative and cultural events to connect community.

Respondents were asked to indicate the local activities they may be interested in being part of and the most popular were attending a local event, joining a local group and volunteering. In any event, there is a wealth of information on the Council website, and I recommend you review the content of the site to ascertain areas which may be of interest to you. As I have said Kimberley is also a useful resource for you to contact to find out anything you wish to know about South Yarra.

Our engagement with the State Government is secondary to the City of Melbourne. Many of you will have attended last year's AGM when the guest speaker was Alison Leighton, the CEO of the Melbourne City Council. Following a resolution that the meeting wanted tram travel along Park St and Domain Rd restored, Alison intervened on our behalf to facilitate a meeting with senior offices of the Department of Transport. This meeting was attended by me, Michael Butcher and Andy Grainge resident. The upshot is that the Government will survey traffic usage after the new underground becomes fully operational and make decisions as to the routing of the tram after that. Until then, no decisions will be made as to the routing to be adopted and they assured us that, until then, all options are on the table. We shall continue to monitor the situation, but it is clear that nothing is going to be decided for some little time.

One other engagement I shall mention is with St Martins Theatre where we became a sponsor during the year and plan to make annual donations of \$1000 for 5 years to support the excellent work they do. St Martins is a well-run local institution and has a great history in the area.

MEMBERSHIP

I am delighted to report that, at the Committee meeting held in September, we resolved to make our Secretary Jan Armstrong Conn an honorary life member of the Association. This honour is open to a person who the Committee believes has made an outstanding contribution to the Association and Jan certainly is well qualified for the honour.

She has been the Secretary since 2010 and continues to provide high quality work in this demanding role with our Association. Well done Jan.

Our membership is of the order of 170 out of an overall population of about 9000 and we are a comparative minnow of the suburbs making up the municipality of the City of Melbourne. By way of comparison, the CBD has a residential population of the order of 55,000. Even Docklands boasts a residential population of the order of 17,000.

Membership numbers have been fairly static over recent years. It is worth noting that the more members we have, the greater our ability to provide meaningful service to our membership. So, if you know of any resident in the area who is not a member, please encourage them to join. We are always open to suggestions as the worthwhile activities we can carry out so, please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or would like to make a comment or suggestion on any issue you think may be relevant to our activities. If you have a keen interest in South Yarra, I also encourage you to join the Committee. Contact me or one of the existing Committee Members if you think this may be of interest to you or would like further information.

One membership issue we will take up in the current year is a revision of our Rules. Over the years, it has become apparent that there are areas where some of the existing Rules are in conflict with each other or can be simplified to make for easier administration. It had been my hope to propose a number of changes to you at this meeting, but we ran out of time. Our current thinking is to have a special general meeting early in 2026 to update the rules.

James Syme
President MSYRG Inc