



Peter Seamer, CEO (John Woudstra / Fairfaxphotos)

A seamless transition

Having turned Federation Square into the iconic heart of Melbourne, Peter Seamer is now hard at work on his next challenge: making the growth suburbs of Melbourne attractive, affordable and exciting places to live and work.

Best known for taking over the construction of Federation Square at a time of major cost over-runs, a cynical public and a wary new government, Peter Seamer now looks back on the project as one of the best professional challenges of his life.

"That was a wonderful experience – I feel honoured to have done it. If you can get a Federation Square in your life, you're doing pretty well. When I'm 95 and sitting in a rocking chair with a quilt on my lap, I'll be able to look back on that."

But there's no sitting on his hands now. Weeks into the job as chief executive of the GAA, the symmetries between managing the construction of a city icon and the growth of Melbourne's fringes are becoming clear.

An engineer and planner with master's degrees in transport and urban planning, Mr Seamer is charged with overseeing growth where it's happening fastest and under the greatest pressure from developers and a market clamouring for affordable housing.

His can-do approach born out of keeping one eye firmly on the big picture and the other deep in the detail, will serve the Authority well.

"The management fundamentals have to be right. It's about doing everything only once but properly," he says.

One of Peter Seamer's very first acts at the GAA was to ask his chief planner Greg Bursill to put together a chart modelling all the steps a developer has to get through to turn empty paddocks into a construction site for a new housing estate.

The result is a daunting chart which spirals down to the floor with more than 500 steps in the planning process that can take up to five years, with plenty of duplication along the way.

"The most basic thing we can do is to work with developers, councils and the government to advocate for good quality development in the growth areas. So we're out there going into the various government agencies and councils saying: 'what about this', 'this is a priority' and 'this does need to be resolved'," he said.

"People have talked about streamlining planning systems for years, but our aim is to have Australia's best system for the way in which new land comes on stream for employment and residential developments."

He said the results would show up in housing affordability statistics and the quality of housing across Melbourne, as well as industrial land supply.

"Melbourne has the cheapest blocks of land of any capital city on the eastern seaboard and we want to keep this strong competitive edge. But we also want people living in these new suburbs to be very proud of where they live," he said.

"The only way to deal with this is from the bottom up. We have to make change and we have to bring everybody with us, which will be no mean feat. I'm not interested in writing reports that sit on shelves. I want to make a difference on the ground."

His record at Federation Square is a testament to making a gorgon's head of complexity come out right in the end.

He's also worked for private companies and local government including the being the CEO of the Cities of Whitehorse, Essendon, Greater Bendigo and most recently Sydney.

Continued on page 2...

Blatt pitches a different note

GAA Board member Felix Blatt brings to the Growth Areas Authority an added dimension – and an alternative note – to the operations of Government.

From selling power stations to the Chinese to improvising music, Felix Blatt has an impressive swag of experience from his life's career as a civil engineer and jazz pianist.

The chief advisor on projects for mining and exploration giant Rio Tinto has built on his early qualifications as a civil engineer to contribute to some of the State's major power and infrastructure projects.



Felix Blatt

From designing and building the Hazelwood, Yallourn and Loy Yang power stations for the former State Electricity Commission (SEC), he joined CRA Australia in 1989 as a technical consultant involved in infrastructure developments and project management. Four years ago after the merger with Rio Tinto, he moved entirely to the project field, designing and building infrastructure from roads to airports, railways, water and electricity supplies.

"As was my experience with the SEC, and now CRA / Rio Tinto, planning is the focus before you start anything. And project management, which is delivering what you promise in quality, time and cost," he said.

"My infrastructure background offers the opportunity for me to contribute something different perhaps, to what bureaucracies are used to doing in Government agencies, particularly with water, and roads and rail."

While his life's career is embedded in planning and structure, another aspect of his passions is improvisation. An accomplished jazz pianist, he was a member of the legendary Red Onions Jazz Band, which had Melbourne 'jazzers' grooving in the '60s and '70s.

He has a more modern focus these days through his own five-member group *Simplicity*, playing venues in and around Melbourne.

Creating melody from free-form music perhaps gives him an added perspective. Felix Blatt sees the GAA challenge as being able to manage disparate groups to get a positive outcome.

"The Authority covers so many areas," he says. "There is infrastructure, planning, finance and so on. Everyone wants their say and input, and it can be complex and political. But there has been a great start already – and we are working our way through it."

A seamless transition

Continued from previous page

Victoria, he reasons is much better off, but has to keep working hard at its advantages. "We do have a lower price base than NSW. We also have better and closer located development areas, but we need to do a lot of work to make our new growth areas really attractive places to live, and to keep land supply moving."

The key, he says is good efficient planning processes and better design. "While we need to concentrate on supply; we also don't talk about good design often enough. I think there's a lot of variability in the quality of housing estates around Melbourne. Some of it though, is really impressive," he said.

It is the GAA's role to provide the government with sophisticated advice about what is needed in the growth areas, and then to assist in its implementation.

"The next few months will be a critical time for the GAA as it becomes more focussed and starts playing a bigger role in our growth areas."

Mike Scrafton, the former chief executive who helped establish the GAA, has returned to DSE as General Manager, Corporate Services. Tass Mousaferiadis Director, Governance and Support, will depart the GAA later this month for a director's role at VicHealth. Their contribution to the GAA is acknowledged and greatly appreciated and the impact of their work will be felt for years to come.

Architects tackle affordable & sustainable housing challenge

Architects across the state were recently invited to put their creativity to the test in the design of smarter, greener homes that will set bold new benchmarks in affordability and sustainability for the future.

The Sustainable Affordable House Project was first advertised in the Domain section of The Age on Thursday 17 May. Expressions of interest were sought from architects who could help reduce the costs of building and running a new home.

"The quality of submissions has been excellent with around fifty architects responding," Minister for Planning Justin Madden said.

VicUrban will now choose four architects with a flair for innovation and experience in the design and delivery of quality sustainable and affordable housing to participate in a design and product development process.

The winning architects are expected to be announced in mid July and will be paid a fixed fee of \$25,000 each to prepare the design of two homes over an eight week period. A royalty of 0.5 per cent of the construction costs will also be paid to the relevant architect each time a house is built according to their design.

The architects appointed will produce a range of home designs to be owned by VicUrban and licensed to volume builders for construction.

"Making smarter housing designs available to volume builders in the future will provide Victorian families with more affordable and sustainable housing choices," Mr Madden said.

The aim is for these affordable and smart home designs to be truly valued by the people who live in them.

The initiative is being led by VicUrban, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, and the Office of the State Architect.

VicUrban aims to construct the first of three homes in 2008.



"Housing in Aurora"
(Source Aurora Development Plan, VicUrban 2003)



Super Health Clinics in the Growth Areas



Health Minister Bronwyn Pike opens Melton Health

“The new Melton and Craigieburn super health clinics will provide vital outpatient services closer to communities that need the support in Melbourne’s growth areas”

Two new super clinics have opened in Melton and Craigieburn in April this year marking an important new trend in health care.

The new health facilities provide extensive medical and allied health services to treat people without a stay in hospital.

“These new clinics mean a range of vital health services are close to where people live and are integrated into the hub of the community, which is what we strive for in creating more sustainable and liveable places,” GAA’s chief executive officer, Peter Seamer said.

The super clinics are part of the State Government’s ‘Hospitals for the Suburbs’ initiative which places clinics in key population growth centres. This is entirely consistent with what the GAA is trying to do.

“Melton and Craigieburn are key growth areas supporting many young families with populations set to rapidly expand over the next 10 years,” Mr Seamer said.

Services at the \$13.2m Craigieburn Health Service include a minor injury and illness clinic, a six-chair renal dialysis centre, six chairs for day medical procedures, pathology, radiology and specialist outpatient clinics.

The Health Service will also set up a specialist rehabilitation program, including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology, podiatry, hand therapy and diet and nutrition services. The program will provide orthotics and prosthetics and include a rehabilitation gymnasium.

The \$13.8m Melton Health facility will provide high-level care on a same-day basis, including 12 renal dialysis chairs, six chairs for day medical procedures and chemotherapy and a range of specialist public medical clinics – paediatrics, obstetrics, antenatal services, gastroenterology, oncology, haematology, palliative care, endocrinology, diabetes, orthopaedic and general medicine.

Melton Health, in the Woodgrove Shopping Centre, will also cater for urgent care, chronic disease management, such as asthma and cardiac rehabilitation, and offer outpatient allied health and rehab, such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology and podiatry. Other services include a rehabilitation gymnasium and X-ray and ultrasound diagnostic services.

Cranbourne East is the first of the eight Precinct Structure Plans being rolled out on 800 hectares in the Casey area. The Growth Areas Authority is finalising an agreement with landholders to take over the job of delivering a plan by the end of the year so re-zoning can start early next year. It will ultimately be home to 15,000 people.

Cranbourne West is also on land spanning 800 hectares. A plan for the area went on exhibition this month and will involve about half the area being set aside for industrial and employment development, with the remaining half for residential development. There’ll be distinct activity centres to cater to the twin needs to attract jobs into the area and provide high quality housing.

Cardinia Road, near Pakenham, is a large land area of more than 1,000 hectares that will one day be home to 20,000 people. There’ll be medium density housing around a brand new railway station called Cardinia Road to service commuters on the Berwick-Pakenham line. It will also have a shopping centre alongside the station as well as community facilities, parks, schools, kindergarten and maternal health services.

Officer is being driven by VicUrban, the government development authority. Spanning 900 hectares eventually 20,000 people will live in this former highway hamlet. The existing station will be redeveloped to form part of a new main street style shopping centre. It will have supermarkets, a discount store and medium density housing immediately surrounding the main street. The plan will go on public exhibition in the next couple of months.

Merrifield at Hume in the city’s north is being spearheaded by the developer MAB. Covering 420 hectares it will form a new gateway to Melbourne from the city’s north. Because of the crucial first impression drivers will have of the city, a great deal of care is being taken to make that impression a good one. Rather than seeing the back of industrial buildings, the focus will be on Kallkallo Creek wetlands, tree plantings and a very strong landscape theme. Getting access to jobs in the north is another key focus, with manufacturers to locate there alongside corporate headquarters and smaller operations. A substantial number of jobs are expected to be attracted into the area.

Cranbourne North. This development exceeds many guidelines and exemplifies what the GAA is trying to deliver. It boasts a new town in the middle of the area, called Casey Central, with a main street feel, surrounded by a residential area that Greg Bursill describes as “a little different”. It will have a better, simple grid-like road network, footpaths, a community ‘spine’ of schools and plenty of parkland. The project involves the re-zoning of 300 hectares of land, after a long process. Up to 15,000 people will live here in a development being carried out by the Stockland group.

On The Fast Track

The GAAs Planning Director Mr Greg Bursill said, "Melbourne will have at least eight new, large-scale planned communities ready to move into the construction phase by the end of the year".

The Growth Areas Authority is fast-tracking work on eight Precinct Structure Plans to take the pressure off places where land is at its scarcest, and progressing a further 12 plans for new suburbs.

Four of the priority areas are in Casey-Cardinia where a growth explosion over the last decade has left a zoned land supply of only four to six years, well below the state's benchmark of 10 years.

Precinct Structure Plans involve master planning for whole communities of up to 30,000 people. They lay out where the main roads will be, the shopping centres and other services such as schools and parks, along with housing and places of employment, and how it all relates to transport.

First priority among the eight plans is Cranbourne East where the GAA is finalising a funding agreement with landowners who will pay the Authority to develop the structure plan, to present to Casey Council and ultimately, the Minister.

The land takes in 800 hectares of paddocks but will ultimately be home to 15,000 people.

It's an area the authority's director Greg Bursill is very familiar with, having lived in Hampton Park and Narre Warren and spent 10 years as a planner at the City of Casey.

"I can relate, because I know what it's like to take the train for an hour to work. I know about crowded transport capacity problems in the growth areas, I live it. I also appreciate how good life can be, close to the country and in the hills." Greg Bursill said.

"We take a more holistic view of an area and that changes the way you look at things: it gives you a different answer, it's probably the same one the community wants.

"They look at a place and wonder why the shopping centre isn't built and why they can't get around easily. They don't care why: they just say fix it – and that's how we look at it too."

Greg Bursill deals with all the nuts and bolts issues to assist councils and developers to build better communities.

He's been asked by new chief executive Peter Seamer to map out the entire planning process from raw paddocks to someone moving into a new house and the results point to a pressing issue.

"At the moment, it takes three to five years. There is 520 steps, it can take a bit less if all the moons are aligned but often they're not. It's almost like a glacier that moves really, really slowly," Greg Bursill said.

Seeing the entire process on one big chart highlights how laborious it is.



Ballarato Rd in the Cranbourne East study area



Land in the Cranbourne East study area

"There are at least 2-3,000 phone calls that are made through that process, a couple of thousand pieces of correspondence, something sits in 2,000 to 3,000 in-trays and there's hundreds of meetings to get from acquisition through to structure plans, rezoning, planning permits, construction plans, handing it over to the council and building a house."

The GAA's aim will be to significantly decrease that timeframe by working with all the players involved to reduce duplication and unlock good development outcomes.

"We want to make it simpler, but also to get better outcomes. If you take some of that process away you can get people to focus more on the actual outcome on the ground."

Twenty Precinct Structure Plans are underway, with eight slated to be finished by Christmas. Aside from Cranbourne East, the others are at *Cranbourne West; Cardinia Road; Officer; Merrifield in Hume; Cranbourne North; Aurora at Epping North and Epping North East.*

It's a sizeable workload. "I'm the type of person that gets bored if things are just easy and systematic and well and truly manageable. Someone else can do that. I'm attracted to something a bit more challenging, so the growth areas are great."

Streamlining planning processes will involve a lot of consultation to change long standing practices, but Greg Bursill believes if the detail is right, they'll be welcome changes.

"In every discussion we have, it just confirms that this is a serious problem. Each agency and every person in the process has their cog in the machine and it's perfect, but when you try to get the whole thing to work, it doesn't work as efficiently as if you designed the whole thing from the start.

"Our role is to make sure that at the end of the day everything the community needs in these places is there," he said.

Epping North East spanning 500 hectares is a new development which is also setting new standards when it comes to protecting its environmental assets: red gum grassy woodland and stony knolls that have been fully integrated into what will be a predominantly residential setting. Several landholders are involved and the area will one day be home to 14,000 people. There are a couple of different activity centres, new schools and lots of open space. The plan has gone through the amendment process and is currently back with Whittlesea council for final consideration.



Epping North East Local Structure Plan 2005 (Source City of Whittlesea)

Aurora at Epping North is being touted as setting a new benchmark for Australian residential communities. Set on about 400 hectares, it represents new ways of planning to create harmony between the needs of the environment and new residents. Neighborhood shops, schools, public transport and parklands will all be close by, with everything designed to be in walking distance. Residents will also be able to enjoy the benefits of living cleanly and greenly through efficient use of water and energy. This will save on housing running costs and reduce greenhouse gases. A mix of home styles and builders will work at the site.

University Hill offers a unique living and working opportunity

“This is truly an exciting development and there is a lot we can learn from this project which will be applicable to other growth areas”



An artist's impression of the University Hill Town Centre, Town Square

A new employment base is opening up in Bundoora with global companies attracted to MAB's transformation of University Hill.

With the opening a major supermarket as the anchor retail tenant, and manufacturing group Siemens becoming the first occupants of the Business Park employing 380 people, the project is on its way to achieving the goal of 3,000 new jobs.

The 104 ha MAB Corporation development has already claimed awards for excellence from the Planning Institute of Australia and the Landscape Institute of Australia, as a mixed-use development in a growth area setting.

“This is a unique community development project because it provides residential, business retail and community functions which take advantage of the environmental features rather than seeing them as a constraint,” said Karoline Dinevski, Project Manager for Growth Areas Development at the GAA.

“This is truly an exciting development and there is a lot we can learn from this project which will be applicable to other growth areas”, she said.

University Hill is 18 kilometres north of Melbourne's CBD on the corner of the Metropolitan Ring Road and Plenty Road,

Bundoora, adjoining the RMIT University Bundoora Campus and the Plenty Gorge Parklands.

It combines a mix of business, retail and residential uses in a clever design, developed through a collaborative approach, which allowed all stakeholders to contribute, including City of Whittlesea, VicRoads and Parks Victoria.

“It's unique in terms of a re-use development, taking in part of a former psychiatric hospital, the natural characteristics of the Plenty Gorge and red gum reservations, and offering true employment, where people can work, live, recreate, enjoy entertainment and access a medical centre all within a walking distance,” Ms Dinevski said.

MAB are currently working with the GAA and Hume City Council on a similar concept, with an employment emphasis, for the Hume employment node in Kalkallo referred to as Merrifiield.

Iconic tenants include Hard Yakka, BMW, Siemens and VicRoads.

The first stage of the Town Centre opened on 29 May and MAB's Brand Junction outlet project is also underway.

Building Healthier Communities

The GAA is commissioning the *Creating Liveable New Communities Project* to identify the key elements needed to create sustainable new communities in Melbourne's growth areas.

Jean Parson, GAA project manager is excited about the project because it will provide local government and developers with practical examples and evidence for creating new communities. Much of the existing work focused on turning around existing communities, she said.

The project aims to develop a strategic framework and best practice tools to enable the GAA and partner organisations to create safe, healthy, active and strong communities.

Ms Parson said, that the features of these communities would include creating walkable neighborhoods and clustering services, such as corner stores and community facilities close to public transport that connects communities and contributes to local economies.

Ms Parson said partner organisations had strongly supported the GAA initiative and had shown a tremendous willingness to work together and contribute financially to achieve practical outcomes on the ground.

Contributing to the project are the Department of Human Services, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Department for Victorian Communities, Municipal Association of Victoria, Vic Health and National Heart Foundation. Representatives from the development industry have also been invited to participate.

The outcomes of the *Creating Liveable New Communities Project* are to complete an analysis of relevant local, national and international literature to identify models, case examples and strategic but practical solutions for creating sustainable new communities.

Ms Parson said the Victorian Government's vision of social sustainability was encapsulated in *Growing Victoria Together (2001)*, which sees promoting the sustainability of our environments, communities and industries as a major challenge requiring a whole of Government effort.



Managing Melbourne's housing boom

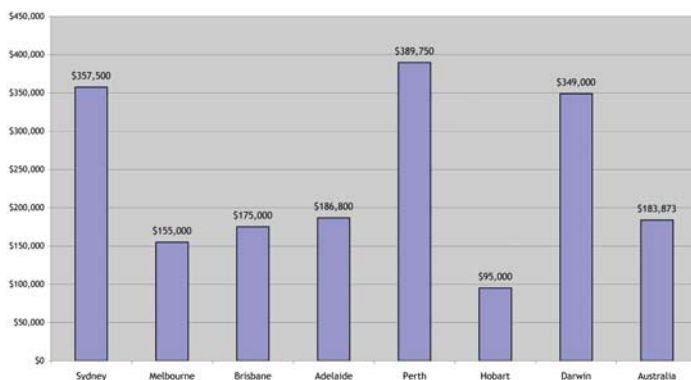
Melbourne is growing by almost 1,000 people a week, attracting more new residents than Sydney, Brisbane and Perth. And three of the country's six fastest growing local areas are in Melbourne – Melton, Wyndham and Casey.

Planning Minister Justin Madden recently told a Housing Industry Association gathering that Victoria would need 627,000 additional households over the next 25 years to meet the needs of the growing population. The Minister said he would look to the GAA for advice on development trends and to monitor individual land supply in each of the growth areas, to maintain Melbourne's competitive advantage for affordable housing.

Land prices in Melbourne today are half the cost of Sydney's. But simply releasing more land for development would not address the housing affordability issue. Instead, a multi-faceted approach was needed. In Hume, for example, where there is only one major developer, there is higher than average land prices per lot. "The GAA is working with Hume City Council to complete plans for Craigieburn and Greenvale and this will increase the supply of zoned land supply and allow more players to enter the market," he said. As well as releasing more zoned land, the Government was streamlining planning approvals, developing more affordable housing options, investing an additional \$500 million to increase the supply of social and public housing and abolishing the special land tax to contain the cost of residential development. "It's complex and there's a lot of work to do ... but rest assured that I will be seeking advice from many sources including industry organisations," the Minister said.

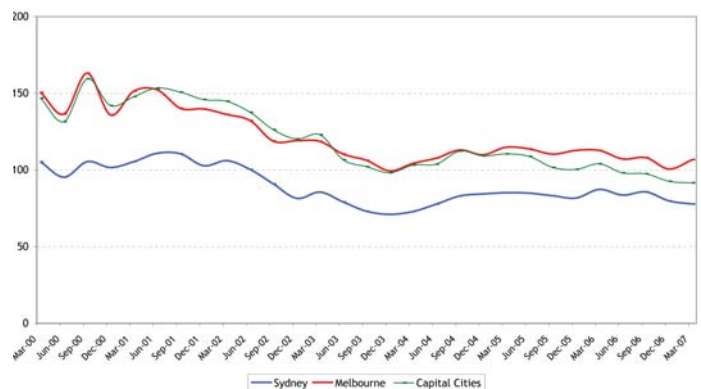
One of the significant trends for new housing demand was the ageing population, with an expected 135,000 additional homes needed to meet future demand. A further 200,000 homes would be required for the natural growth of Melbourne's population, 200,000 for people moving here from interstate and overseas, while the trend towards 'sea, tree and city' living would require another 90,000 homes.

VACANT LOT PRICE IN DECEMBER 2006



Source: HIA-APM Land Monitor, May 2007

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY INDEX, MELBOURNE, SYDNEY AND CAPITAL CITIES



Source: HIA-APM Housing Affordability Index, June 2007

Heritage Help

New regulations under the Aboriginal Heritage Act came into force on 1 July 2007 to strengthen protection for cultural heritage and clarify the responsibilities of councils and developers. In the past, developments have been delayed due to the discovery of Aboriginal cultural heritage – such as scar trees and human remains – after a development has begun.

Cultural heritage plans are now needed if a development is located within a known area of cultural heritage sensitivity that hasn't been disturbed, and for high impact developments such as road building. A regulatory impact statement estimates an additional 121 to 220 cultural heritage plans will be required in Victoria each year – about half of these in the growth areas.

Cardinia is expected to generate 14 additional management plans a year; *Casey* 15; *Hume* 14; *Melton* six; *Nillumbik* 11; *Whittlesea* nine and *Wyndham* 13. The Mornington Peninsula's coastal areas are likely to have the highest number at 45. To aid the transition, the Growth Areas Authority is working with the Municipal Association of Victoria and Aboriginal Affairs Victoria on new guidelines and more refined maps out-lining undisturbed land in sensitive areas across the growth areas.

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The Growth Areas Authority is always interested in your views about our programs and initiatives, and the issues covered in this newsletter.

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