

# Town Planning Rebellion (TPR)

End the concrete driven economy:

- Occupy empty housing
- Retrofit the suburbs and end the sprawl
- Affordable housing in the suburbs
- Public Transport and Cycleways not Roads
- Save our foodbowls and embrace urban agriculture
- Stop urban encroachment onto wildlife

*These demands must play a pivotal role in overcoming the ecological emergency. Green energy alone will not save our cities!*

**As part of:**

**A transition to a degrowth society and...**

**A move towards Holistic Activism and other types of Social Permaculture!**

**You are invited to join the movement...**

## Introduction

*"The global construction and real estate industry is often referred to as the 40 Percent Industry – as they are responsible for roughly 40 percent of emissions, 40 percent of waste, and 40 percent of energy, materials and water expenditure."*

*This doesn't factor in the environmental impact of building on farmland and natural habitat. It also doesn't factor in the short lifespan of many of the buildings that are currently under construction and that will not be fit for purpose in a few decades time.*

*Moving our focus away from 'development' (from the concrete economy) must be a central part of our urgent transition to a low carbon society.*

Town Planning Rebellion was set-up to highlight the critical role that land - use planning must play in combatting the climate and ecological emergency.

While we share the same three demands as Extinction Rebellion (XR), Extinction Rebellion does not necessarily share all of our points of focus. In our opinion it is important that XR do not stray from their three demands and to leave the more nuanced discussion to the Citizens Assemblies, which of course is their third demand.

This is why TPR is calling for there to be regular Citizen's Assemblies on Urban and Regional Planning. These forums will be a space where we can put across our ten points of focus as well as providing a space for others to put their perspectives forward. TPR does not see itself as having all of the answers. Our areas of focus are part of a wider ongoing conversation.

We also advocate that our shift in approach to town planning is part of a wider, integrated and comprehensive movement for change. We wish to be part of a movement of movements that includes everything from re-wilding, regenerative farming and the green energy revolution and this needs to be part of an overall shift towards some form of de-growth society.

Town Planning Rebellion also subscribes to the Holistic Activism approach so we are about utilising their third step (as well as steps one and two) which is about building points of connection with those around us, rather than focussing on our differences. The fourth step of Holistic Activism is critical thinking and we will work towards ensuring that critical thinking practices are imbued within the ongoing conversation that we are establishing.

If you have different ideas to us, we encourage you to set up and/or develop your own groups to pursue those ideas and to take them to the Citizens Assemblies.

We do not expect you to agree with everything we say, but if you agree with some of it, feel free to work with us in those areas where we share common ground. We will not save the planet with one set of values alone but we will make good headway by accepting those differences and building a movement based on where our values intersect.

### **Why do we need a Town Planning Rebellion?**

***Town planning plays a critical role in environmental sustainability and it is must be a fundamental component of our collective response to the climate emergency.***

The fact that there has been little emphasis on the short-term and long-term impact of our current planning and development practices in most of the discussions related to climate change is catastrophic.

For example, the ongoing demolition of robust, retrofittable buildings and their subsequent replacement with often less-robust concrete structures is disasterous. Many sources quote that cement production alone is the third ranking producer of anthropogenic (man-made) CO<sub>2</sub> in the world after transport and energy generation.

This has also removed many hectares of green open space, mostly in the form of private gardens that provide many benefits such as heat sinks and permeable surfaces that prevent water run-off. In many cases these gardens

also have the potential to grow some of our food and many are already doing so. In a low carbon society, reducing food miles will be critical.

Added to this is the fact that much of the new development that has taken place over the past two decades is built to a depressingly low standard. With a shelf life of only a few decades, these developments too will need to be demolished in the medium term, and of course this will be at the expense of further carbon emissions.

The long term impact of Australia's current development and town planning legacy is even more catastrophic when you consider the massive increase in car dependent suburbia and the loss of much of our food bowls close to our cities.

When you factor in the loss of valuable biodiversity and irreplaceable habitat such as the valuable native grasslands on Melbourne's urban fringe or the thousands of hectares of eucalypt forest that are being destroyed to create developments such as the North Lakes and Springfield developments on Brisbane's fringe, we paint a bleak picture.

Our ten points of focus may seem overly radical and therefore unrealistic to many but it must be emphasised that **we cannot turn around the ecological crisis without a radical shift away from a society that is driven by real estate and property development.**

Therefore we need to start the transition now.

The good news is that the kind of world that TPR is working towards will create far more meaningful communities that work within rather than against the limits to growth. No one will be forced out of their home and neighbourhoods will no longer be destroyed by poorly built, overpriced development. Our neighbourhoods will be cleaner greener and safer and they will be more inclusive. There will be more local food and more nature. Our suburbs will become places of regenerative living.

## Town Planning Rebellion's Ten Points of Focus

We firmly believe the role that sustainable town planning should play in mitigating the environmental emergency has been understated and that this needs to change as a matter of urgency.

It is critical that we return to localised decision making processes while ensuring that those processes are non-discriminatory. Importantly, the mantra of think globally, act locally (as well as sharing knowledge and resources through mutual aid) is essential.

There are ten points of focus that we are carrying forward. These points are general summaries. The finer details will need to be determined through citizens assemblies and other areas of focus will likely emerge in those assemblies. They attempt to accommodate a number of different approaches to urban living within the context of reaching net zero missions in the fastest time possible.

Importantly, they cover a number of different housing needs to suit different demographics. This, combined with a strong emphasis on low cost housing, coupled with a wider strategy of de-growth (and beyond) will ensure that we properly **tackle homelessness** as well as any fluctuations in population. We need to work towards an outcome where nobody is left behind.

Our **principle focus** is to ensure that uninhabited houses and units in our cities and towns are inhabited. In Melbourne alone, there are currently up to 82,000 empty homes. It is essential that the process of filling our existing uninhabited living spaces is in place before considering future development.

Our **second focus** is to end all housing development on or beyond the urban fringes of our towns and cities. Exceptions should be made for developments that are part and parcel of a wider project to draw-down carbon into the soil, either through regenerative farming practices, re-wilding (in cooperation with First Nations people), biomass planting projects or bush regeneration.

Any such housing projects would endeavour to use recycled materials as well as carbon neutral and/or carbon negative building materials such as hempcrete, as part of the wider carbon drawdown project of which it is a part.

Our **third focus** is to embrace David Holmgren's retrosuburbia model as a means of accommodating increased densities and increasing food security in the

existing built form. The idea is that existing buildings and gardens are predominantly re-purposed rather than being demolished or destroyed to make way for new structures. This is already a growing and established movement and we strongly recommend that you connect with it (details at the end).

Our **fourth focus** is a new approach to the construction of higher density housing within residential areas of our cities and towns. This is known as urban consolidation and it does have benefits if it is done right. In other words, if it is not used as a green light to raze entire neighbourhoods to the ground or to build sub-standard developments for the investment market.

Therefore, any new development that does take place must not be at the expense of buildings that are robust and retrofittable (see the third focus). Housing stock that is not deemed to be salvageable can be replaced, but only with higher density co-housing style developments that are preferably run as cooperatives.

This is very different from the current model where entire neighbourhoods are zoned for higher density development. This forces up land prices, pricing people out of neighbourhoods while enabling robust housing to be demolished.

By removing the policy of zoning and replacing it with selective, well designed densification projects across all areas for the purposes of affordable housing, we can prevent the gentrification that comes with upzoning. Additionally, we avoid the environmental expense of losing housing stock (including heritage buildings) that could be retrofitted and/or better utilised.

Existing gardens would (as much as possible) be incorporated into any new developments and those gardens could be a resource for the new communities that are created.

Our **fifth focus** is on transport. All proposed new road building projects will not proceed unless there is very good reason. Our focus from hereon will be almost entirely on improving and interconnecting walkability, public transport networks and bicycle pathways.

Our **sixth focus** is to look at retrofitting the existing built spaces that are currently not used for housing, such as converting double garages into habitable units (there are a lot of them in the relatively low- dense outer suburbs) and converting disused office space. This will help to increase densities without the need for additional development.

Our **seventh focus** is to embrace the growing demand for alternative types of living such as yurts, granny flats and tiny houses. These have the advantage of being able to be slotted into existing communities with minimal impact on the land and on surrounding flora and fauna... and a growing number of people are choosing this lifestyle choice.

Our **eighth focus** is on redeveloping ex-industrial land (and land that was once utilised for other purposes). This is known as brownfield site re-development. It is a slow process but it can have positive net benefits if it is done well. This should only occur in addition to the above seven points and only if there is a human need for this additional development and/or if it can be achieved without having an impact on our urgent need to draw down carbon.

We will ensure that this kind of development will be approached in such a way that nature is reintroduced into urban areas and that that carbon neutral building techniques are employed throughout (see the ninth focus below).

Our **ninth focus** is to fully embrace passive solar and energy efficient design as well as the utilisation of carbon neutral or carbon negative building materials.

Our **tenth focus** is to reduce future development in high bushfire risk areas by compensating people who own vacant lots with a plot of land in a small number of newly built eco-townships. These townships will be built to be easily defended in bushfire scenarios and will be built around permaculture principles.

This will protect large areas of bushland from future development while providing security to people who would otherwise live in high bushfire risk areas. The offer will also be extended to people who have lost their house in a bushfire.

*Even though the development based economy as we know it today will end, there will be large amounts of work in retrofitting, restoring, repurposing, create permaculture, planting urban orchards etc to keep everyone employed.*

## **We Are Part Of A Wider Integrated Movement**

Town Planning Rebellion is part of an integrated movement of movements that understands the urgent need for systemic and behavioural change. This is why we are supportive of the 'Join The Degrowth Revolution' as well as Holistic Activism and the wider social permaculture movement.

We understand that we must move away from the notion that you can have infinite growth on a finite planet and we understand that we cannot transition away from the ecological emergency with the same thinking that led us into it.

***You can check out these movements at:***

***Join the degrowth revolution facebook group and <https://holisticactivism.net/join-our-movement-of-movements>***

***TPR cannot achieve its aims without a new economic model that is radically different from the current property and development driven growth based economic paradigm.***

In the words of Professor Will Steffen, "the neoliberal economic system we've bought into is completely at odds with how the earth works. We have to change this value system that we operate under. We need a social tipping point that flips our thinking, before we reach a tipping point in the climate system."

## **First Nations Sovereignty**

Town Planning Rebellion recognises the sovereignty that First Nations people have over the lands that we call Australia and we recognise that those lands were never ceded.

We strongly recognise the need for treaties to be signed with First Nations people, not only to start to heal the immense traumas perpetuated through colonisation but also to ensure that First Nations culture is central to the path that we collectively take forward.



TPR recognises that indigenous culture and knowledge is crucial to healing the decades of damage caused by colonisation. We also understand that what we have to say is one part of a wider conversation that must include the representation of First Nations people and for it to be on their terms.

## **Population**

It is disingenuous to discuss the future of development and town planning without making reference to population growth. In Australia, around 40% of our population growth comes from births minus deaths and the remainder is from migration. Any policy around migration is inherently discriminatory and shuts out far more people than it can ever let in. This is especially true in the current neo-liberal society where the driving force of migration is primarily to grow the development based economy.

The goal of helping to create socially and environmentally resilient local communities across the globe through mutual aid (one of our key policies), will over time, likely reduce the need for people to migrate. Also, the empowerment of women that happens through this process will enable couples to make informed choices about the number of children that they wish to have.

In terms of future migration, we must ensure that the movement of people from one place to another is not used as an excuse to increase 'development'. Instead we will focus on a different kind of development that is retrofitting empty and under-utilised buildings and appropriately redeveloping predeveloped spaces.

This will include everything from filling the 82,000 empty homes in Melbourne (and potentially hundreds of thousands of empty bedrooms) all the way to filling entire ghost cities in China. We will also look towards housing increased populations through all ten of our points of focus.

Based on this premise, we also expect that any migration policy would positively discriminate in favour of refugees and in favour of people who feel that their role in healing the earth can be better served in Australia

In conclusion, migration policy should not be tied in with a 'development' driven agenda as it is now. Instead it must be tied in with creating low carbon communities based primarily on utilising existing built infrastructure and this should be accompanied by a program of mutual aid that works to empower communities across the world.

## **Mutual Aid**

Our response to the climate emergency must involve working both at the local level and at the international level. Of course, radical town planning policies will need to be a central component of that approach.

What is important is that we share our knowledge with the rest of the world as part of a wider program of mutual aid where ideas, resources and knowledge are shared freely across borders. This will enable communities across the world to be best equipped to create resilient, regenerative communities that draws down carbon and enables the re-wilding that is required to help reverse the sixth great mass extinction.

We will share our ideas on sustainable town planning as part of an ongoing conversation on the global stage. It is essential that the world works together by sharing ideas and resources but it needs to be very different to the way it was done in the past.

In other words we need to de-colonise aid and instead approach it as a sharing of ideas that will lead to the creation of ecologically resilient communities across the world that can fully embrace everything from regenerative farming, First Nations approaches to re-wilding, and permaculture through cooperation and not coercion.

## **Joining Town Planning Rebellion**

If you connect with what we have to say, we warmly invite you to join us and to play as large or as small a role as you see fit. We really want to grow this movement and we are at the very beginning... and time is short.

We are an ongoing conversation and there are many ways that it can be carried forward. We have no time to lose. If we do not change the way we approach planning and development we will not stand any chance of overcoming the ecological emergency.

The role of TPR is to share our ten points of focus with as many people and groups as possible, so that we can add to the ongoing conversation. This includes our approach to Mutual Aid and the need for treaties with First Nations people as well as our adherence to Holistic Activism principles.

## **There are three ways of connecting with us:**

The first is for people who connect with all of our approaches and who wish to set-up their own branch of TPR. Existing branches provide assistance and ongoing support and collaboration in order to make that happen.

The second is for existing activist groups who wish to discuss and/or incorporate some or all of our ideas with the intention of broadening their scope.

The third is for individuals. This is for anyone who would like to help TPR spread the word about some or all of its ten points of focus and to help work towards initiating and participating in Citizen's Assemblies.

Individuals may also want to join because they would like to set-up their own group that would incorporate some or all of TPR's ten points of focus.

## **TPR's services to members:**

We provide one-on-one support, give talks and run interactive workshops on a semi-regular basis and travel around the country to do so. We also work with all of our members to set-up and participate in Citizens Assemblies, workshops and other avenues of collaboration.

As a holistic activist based organisation, we recognise that it is a movement of movements that is required and not a single movement as that would be susceptible to division, so our work is involved in building on areas of intersection.

We can also provide support to individuals and groups in countries other than Australia to set-up a Town Planning Rebellion movements.

You can find us online at:

**<https://holisticactivism.net/town-planning-rebellion-tp>**

To join us, please go to **<https://holisticactivism.net/contact>** and put TPR at the top of the message.

We also have a facebook group called **Town Planning Rebellion (TPR)** and would love you to join.

We look forward to hearing from you and we value your feedback.

## **Further Information:**

For more information on Citizens Assemblies go to:

<https://newint.org/features/2019/12/14/citizens-assemblies-and-next-democratic-revolution>

For more information on the Retrosuburbia Movement go to:

<https://retrosuburbia.com/>

## Articles related to TPR

<https://redlands2030.net/climate-emergency-town-planning-approach>

Urban and Regional Planning for the Climate Emergency by Mark Allen,  
Green Left Weekly, Sept 2017: <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/urban-and-regional-planning-climate-emergency>

The author would like to acknowledge that this booklet was written and published on Wurundjeri land of the Kulin Nations.

# Edition Two 2020