

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 food bowls 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 is set-up to highlight the critical role that land - use planning must play in combating the climate and ecological emergency. It is primarily intended to be a resource that action groups can draw upon.

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

We do not expect everyone to agree with everything we say, but what is important is that we collaborate in areas where we share common ground. We will not save the planet with one set of values alone but we can build a movement that is based around where our values intersect.

Mark Allen, January 2023

Why do we need a Town Planning Rebellion?

Town planning plays a critical role in environmental sustainability and it 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 disastrous. Many sources quote that cement production alone is the third ranking producer of anthropogenic (man-made) CO₂ 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 the food bowls that lie close to our major 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 outside of Brisbane's, 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 steering away from an economic reliance upon 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.

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 ongoing forms of direct democracy.

These points of focus accommodate a number of different approaches to urban living within the context of reaching net zero missions in the fastest possible time. Importantly, they cover a number of different housing needs that suit a range of demographics (including the homeless). We need to work towards an outcome where nobody is left behind.

Our **principal focus** is to give priority to inhabiting the many thousands of houses and units that lie vacant within our conurbations. In Melbourne alone, there are currently up to 82,000 empty homes. Maintaining, retrofitting and converting existing buildings is our underlying approach.

This connects with our **second focus**, which is to embrace the retosuburbia model as a means of increasing food security in the existing built form. Retosuburbia is a growing and established movement and we strongly recommend that you connect with it (details at the end).

Our **third 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, rewilding (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 **fourth focus** is a new approach to the construction of higher density housing within residential areas 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, future developments must not be at the expense of existing robust and retrofittable buildings (see the third focus). Housing stock that is not deemed to be salvageable can be replaced, but only with higher density public housing/cooperative housing style developments.

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 up-zoning. Additionally, we will 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 regarding transport. All proposed new road building projects would not proceed unless there is a 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 disused office space. This will help to increase densities if required, without the need for additional development.

Our **seventh focus** is to embrace the growing demand for alternative types of living such as granny flats and tiny houses. These can 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 to put more emphasis on redeveloping ex-industrial land (and land that was once utilised for other purposes). This is known as brownfield site redevelopment. It is a slow process but it can have positive net benefits if it is done well.

We will ensure that this kind of development will be approached in such a way that nature is reintroduced into urban areas and 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 recycled/carbon neutral or carbon negative building materials.

Our **tenth focus** is to reduce future development in high bushfire risk and flood prone areas by compensating people who own vacant lots in such areas with a plot of land in a small number of newly built eco-townships.

These townships will not be built on floodplains and will be easily defended in bushfire scenarios. They will be constructed on land that was cleared more than thirty years ago and will be built around permaculture

and carbon drawdown principles. The newly developed areas will result in a net biodiversity increase compared to what was there before. As well as helping to protect large areas of bushland from future development.

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 maintaining retrofitting, restoring, repurposing, creating 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 important that we discuss the demand issue of town planning as well as the supply issue. This means that we must be willing to have nuanced, rational conversation on the issue of population. In Australia, around 40% of population growth comes from births minus deaths and the remainder is from migration.

While migration has many positive benefits, it is the least equitable and proactive way of dealing with global issues around poverty and high fertility as there are far more people left behind when people are forced to leave their homeland in search of a better life.

This is not to criticise migration, only that it needs to be treated as one component of a much more holistic approach to the population issue in general. The post-growth approach that TPR advocates is underpinned by international collaboration through proactive/mutual aid that creates resilient, empowered communities across the world.

In our current neoliberal society, the driving force behind migration is primarily to grow the development-based economy and any progress towards a population naturally stabilising or declining is portrayed as being a bad thing. This attitude needs to change.

What is required is a shift in paradigm towards a degrowth model that can comfortably accommodate the inevitable decline in fertility rates that occur when important social parameters are met. Also, helping to create socially and environmentally resilient local communities across the globe through mutual aid will over time, reduce the need for people to migrate.

Of course, migration will continue to happen and this is a good thing but combined with taking a proactive global approach, we expect that future migration policy positively discriminate in favour of refugees, family reunions and people who feel that their role in healing the earth can be better served in Australia.

Due to the nature of the multiple crises that we are facing, we can expect populations to fluctuate in the short to medium term as more people become displaced. This can be accommodated for without pouring too much more concrete by focussing on retrofitting/converting empty and under-utilised buildings. There are 82,000 empty homes in Melbourne alone (and potentially hundreds of thousands of empty bedrooms).

At the same time, we need to keep challenging the neo-liberal line that populations must keep increasing in order to cater to our ageing population. In order for any population to stabilise we must expect to have a larger demographic of older people for a while. To deliberately grow the population in order to cater to an ageing one, only kicks the can further down the road.

An ageing population is very manageable in a post-growth society as our economy will be a caring one and many growth-based activities such as

construction (especially for new builds) will make way for roles that can better accommodate an older demographic.

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 an approach that embraces the stabilisation and decline in populations that occur when important social parameters are met. In the meantime, populations will fluctuate as the carbon and ecological emergency intensifies. This can be accommodated through TPR's ten points of focus. In the medium to long term, populations across the board will naturally decline as the impact of a degrowth based, caring economy supersedes the current pro-growth, pronatalist economic system.

As populations start to stabilise across the world, the need to construct new dwellings to accommodate more people will reduce and the emphasis will transition to which buildings we should preserve. Sadly, many contemporary homes are so poorly constructed that they will have to be demolished with the space returned to non-human nature. Migration therefore will become less a catalyst for new construction and more an opportunity to renovate the most robust of our existing houses and communities.

By helping to create a world that is comfortable with non-coercive population decline, we can better remove the engines that drive all kinds of growth, whether it be in population or per capita consumption.

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 draw down carbon while enabling the rewilding 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 decolonise 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 ensuring that sustainable planning is integral to the developing movements around degrowth and creating low carbon societies.

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 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 based movement.

You can find us online at:

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

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.

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>

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