

NUDFo8 puts rural issues on national agenda

William Kelly

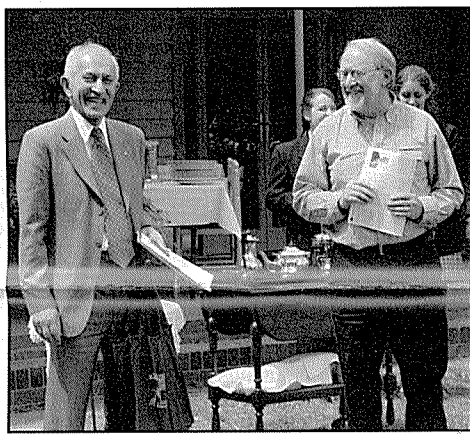
It's always risky to chart new waters or, in this instance, to chart new terrain. Rural towns and rural centres as a theme for the recent National Urban Design Forum was one such change of course. The other was to have the major part of the conference in a small rural town: a journey from cities of millions to a rural community of 1000+ people; a journey from major centres to the smallest town in a rural shire; a journey of 2½ hours from Melbourne - and light years away from our traditional knowledge base.

The NUDFo8 organisers wondered (and hoped) that there would be enthusiasm for the theme, and that the benefits would far outweigh any difficulties of logistics of small town conferencing. The long shot paid off. Both the attendees and the town will enjoy the lasting benefits.

A walking conference

A "walking conference," NUDFo8 addressed issues in an environment that was the subject of the conference itself - so participants could observe, experience, and engage with a country town, its environment and people while discussing these issues.

It is no secret that, with drought, reductions in rural employment, petrol pricing uncertainties and lack of public transport options, many bush towns are struggling. Nathalia, as the host town, has had the lowest rainfall of any town in Victoria in recent years, yet has managed, through a number of strategies, to not only survive but to remain proactive and optimistic.



▲ Governor of Victoria, David de Kretser (left), opening NUDFo8, with UDF Convenor Bill Chandler

Bendigo wins Australia Award for Urban Design

In an unusual move, the 2008 Australia Award for Urban Design was bestowed on the incremental transformation of an entire city centre. Rather than a single project or space, the judges recognised the accumulated impact of successive initiatives, policies and commitments contributing to revitalisation of Bendigo's city centre under the leadership of a succession of Councils and officers since the early 1990s.

The Award citation praises the enlightened approach being taken by the City. "The Council has shown great public leadership making significant public investment that has stimulated complementary private investment programs, which together have had a focus on people, public amenity, revitalisation and the progressive realisation of its plans over time."

In presenting the Award, Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett said Bendigo's achievement were "a model for how good sustainable urban design principles can help



▲ Rod Duncan (left) Manager Bendigo City Centre Program, receives the Award from Minister Peter Garrett, with Jan Boynton, Bendigo Director of City Strategy

The session topics helped set the scene: "So you reckon you're small", "It's a question of scale," "Community initiatives", "Art/Landscape/Culture", "Is the economy stupid?", and "Getting it all together." With enthusiasm and wonderful imagery, presenters carefully took us through a range of projects that varied in scale from those the size of villages, to small towns, to regional centres.

Learning about urban design in rural towns

We learned: how planners, landscape architects and artists need to look and act with particular care when working in rural towns; how they have to be mindful of local histories and contexts and the changing demographics of rural centres; plan in ways that capitalize on existing assets; identify human resources and capacities; understand the community and its aspirations; let the story of community be told; seek to respect indigenous culture in the process; expand the role of creativity and arts in rural centres; create images through art and landscape that have local cultural resonance - and always plan with sustainability in mind. It was quite an agenda!

In the midst of all this dialogue there was room for local art, local foods and wines, a campfire barbeque with a traditional bush balladeer, music by a classical string trio, and the "Famous Forum Dinner" - where local culture and stories were sheeted home by Nathalia's bush poet and yarn spinner, Tammy Muir.

With this as a backdrop, the 'business end of proceedings' was remarkable for the wonderful and passionate presentations (articles in this edition of UDF and the next edition) that showed the commitment, energy and achievements in a large number of rural projects, as well as the future possibilities in environmentally sustainable design, economics and community development.

We were very fortunate to have the Governor of Victoria, Professor David de Kretser AC, officially open the conference. He, with commitment and insight, addressed many of the key issues that we were to discuss over the weekend, and the last word here is his: "There is so much that needs to be done in urban design, whether it be in the city or in the country, and forums such as this are a wonderful part of the dialogue."

William Kelly is an artist, resident of Nathalia, and a UDF member and can be contacted at kelly@williamkelly.com.au

revitalised regional Australia". Initially a number of separate public realm initiatives and heritage restoration projects were undertaken, lifting the city's appearance and confidence. Grand gestures were combined with subtle, persistent initiatives, such as progressive undergrounding of electrical wiring that now extends over 13 kilometres of streets. This enabled extensive planting of deciduous street trees to complement the city's inland climate, whilst a consistent suite of paving materials was selected to provide quality and continuity.

As these initiatives made the value of urban quality apparent to an expanding group of stakeholders, objectives for enhancement of the city centre were articulated and formalised, culminating in the cross-disciplinary Bendigo CBD Plan in 2005. This provides a widely shared vision for strengthening the city centre, incorporating amenity, prosperity, sustainability and identity. One of the Plan's key policies is "designing a high quality environment", placing design at the centre of policy and decision-making.

Prosperity tied to image

It became increasingly apparent that the city's prosperity was tied to its image, and quality was important for business. One benchmark indicator is the number of dining venues extending into public spaces. By 2008, outdoor venues had risen to 230% of the number licensed in 2000, responding to the climate, enhanced amenity and growing sophistication of the city.

The City of Greater Bendigo has also become more sophisticated in planning, delivery and

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▲ Forum lunch on the banks of Broken Creek at Nathalia

NUDFo8 Day 1

Erin Lancaster

I was eagerly anticipating attending NUDFo8. Not that I actually knew what Urban Design was...but I was excited to be able to learn about it and how it affected me and my town. I quickly learnt from mingling with an interesting mix of artists, designers, landscapers and urban developers that it involved a mix of creative vision, of consulting with people and relating to the locals, and enhancing what was already there - in order to improve the feel of community. It's not about whacking a statue into a town square, as some people may think!

I was lucky enough to be involved with the fun part - the lunch and meeting the Governor of Victoria, David de Kretser. I was impressed with his friendliness, and the feeling of respect he commanded in a humble way.

The sessions on the first day revolved around small communities, a subject I had had a fair bit of experience with, but I'd never considered the advantages and disadvantages from

quite so many angles before. John Scott (a proud local of Nathalia) and Simon Jones (a Harrierville local) opened my eyes to what a blessed lifestyle living in a small town can be, and the challenges involved too.

It was reassuring to see so many professionals putting their minds together to champion the cause of small communities and how to better them. As Simon Jones said, "we are the drivers of change". Urban designing is one of those things where you're able to positively impact a lot of people by directly impacting their environment.

To be able to change a town, it's important to understand the way it works, which was something explored in various ways by various speakers. I was inspired and encouraged by the things I listened to and the people I talked to. I feel that the future is in safe hands.

Erin Lancaster is a Year 11 student in Nathalia and can be contacted at annecordelia5@hotmail.com



▲ Dining out on quality design in Bendigo

advocacy. The integrated vision plan recognised that the inter-dependent components of an urban centre need an integrated approach to delivery, embracing not only the City's own inputs, but enhancing relationships and coordination with the private sector and public agencies. The Bendigo City Centre Program, a place-based mechanism pursuing 'joined-up' delivery of agreed objectives across traditional division of tasks, has resulted in increased effectiveness and accelerated implementation.

In delivering on a commitment to enhanced pedestrian amenity, safety and convenience, the Bendigo has adapted a radical mindset shift from Europe to Australian conditions. Core retail streets in the city centre are being converted, applying the 'shared space' approach that essentially makes streets pedestrian spaces that vehicles can enter as subsidiary users. The logic is that ambiguous uncertainty reduces speed, enhances vigilance by drivers and reduces collisions and their consequences. A by-product is greatly enhanced public areas devoted to pedestrians and passive uses.

Two commendations

Two commendations were also awarded by the Australia Award Jury: GHD Pty Ltd and the South Australian Department of Energy, Transport and Infrastructure for the 'Glenelg Tramline Extension'; and Landcom for 'The Landcom Guidelines'.

The Australia Award for Urban Design was established in 1996 as an initiative of the Prime Minister Keating's Urban Design Task Force. It is now jointly sponsored by the Planning Institute of Australia, Australian Institute of Architects, Australian Institute of Landscape Architects and Urban Design Forum, making it the prime national award for excellence in the built environment.

Full details of Bendigo's Award nomination and further information can be accessed at www.bendigo.vic.gov.au/citycentreprogram Further information about the Award can be obtained at www.planning.org.au

StanHOPE

Liesl Malan

With yet another failed season this year, my thoughts have been on the town of Stanhope. I've had a soft spot for this town ever since the community approached us for some help in revitalizing their town centre.

This small (population 514) dairy farming town between Shepparton and Bendigo has been hard hit by the ongoing drought but, like many small Australian towns, they have a remarkable community filled with ideas and solutions. With the aid of community facilitator Neil Noelker & Associates, our role was simply to draw their ideas out and consolidate them into a series of plans so that they could seek funding.

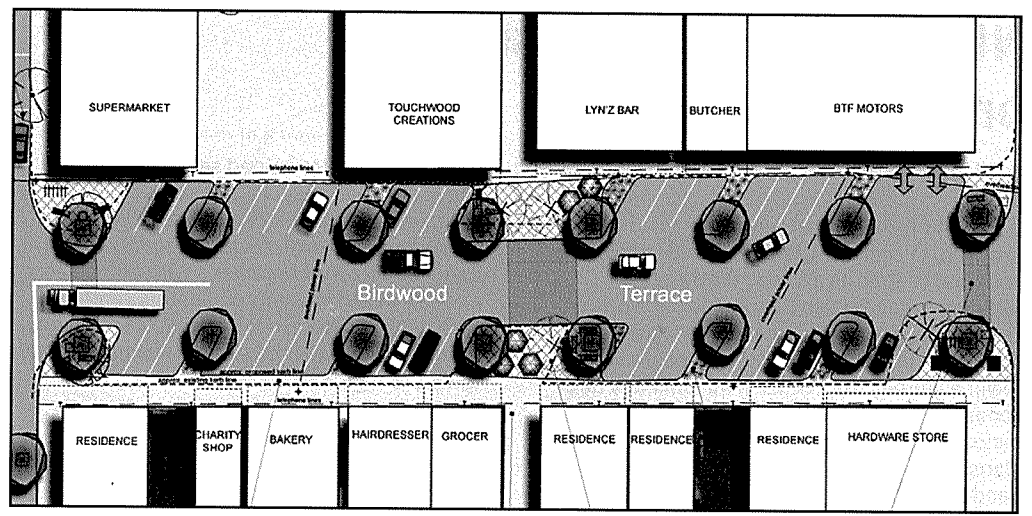
Community members were aware that many people travelling along the Midland Highway pass by without realizing that the town exists. The local economy is struggling and the population is in decline. Our role was to bring as many as possible of the community's ideas and wishes together into a plan to upgrade the main street and to provide a traveller's rest stop.

As we spent time in the town, poured over historical references and looked at the rather limited base data, one of the things that became really clear was that the town had 'great bones'. It had been beautifully laid out

by the original surveyors with the main street, Birdwood Terrace, forming a crescent off the Highway. The town centre remains close to the Highway, but isn't bisected by it. McEwan Place was clearly not just the small park space of today but rather the intended town square at the heart of the town. The original placement of the railway line on the western boundary of Birdwood Terrace completed the classic town layout of its era.

Small, simple intervention

Our suggestions to resolve the range of problems presented relied on small, simple interventions. Stanhope has a history of fruit growing, so we suggested ornamental pear street trees to recreate a stronger sense of seasonal change. By extending the street trees along the full length of the crescent, a striking boulevard will be evident where both ends of Birdwood Terrace join the Highway. Since we no longer need to turn a bullock cart in the main street, we suggested planting the trees on either side of the road way to create a more pedestrian-friendly scale. Some minor modifications to the footpath in the central business district were suggested to take advantage of the northern aspect, with outdoor dining and small seating areas. By reorganizing the parking spaces we were able to ensure that no spaces were lost - and perhaps a few gained!



▲ Design improvements for Birdwood Terrace, Stanhope

The concept design for McEwan Place retains all but one of the existing trees. All other trees, the gazebo, flagpole and memorial are retained. The proposed design includes a more formal public square to provide the 'central heart' originally intended when the town was laid out.

The design for the traveller's stop integrates the proposed amenities block, the town bus stop and a walking path. The carpark provides parking for visitors and possibly an overnight area for caravans and motorhomes. Its location at the end of Birdwood Terrace encourages visitors to explore the town on foot.

Some key directions were established – guided walk and interpretation opportunities, lighting (including up-lighting of the street trees), contemporary heritage rather than mock heritage, and opportunities to tap into existing festivals and events. A great deal more work is needed, but it's something to build on.

Liesl Malan is Director of Liesl Malan Landscape Architects, and can be contacted on www.lmalan.com.au

Regional Development Victoria

John Joyce

At the recent National Urban Design Forum, RDV Regional Manager Mr John Joyce outlined a planning process that is seeking to identify issues and opportunities of significance across the region. Once these have been identified through a process of regional engagement, the key social and economic infrastructure needs will be further analysed to provide Government with a business case for investment into Hume region. This process is linked to a state-wide strategy that will serve to highlight to the Government the key investment needs and incentives across regional Victoria.

Urban design, as part of liveability, has already been identified by many communities as a significant factor in future sustainability of jobs and communities. NUDFo8 was a wonderful opportunity to feed this information back to the practitioners, as well as discuss other issues.

Regional Development Victoria (RDV) is the Victorian Government's lead agency in developing rural and regional Victoria. It is responsible for promoting regional development, and it provides strategic advice to the Minister for Regional and Rural Development about the state of rural and

regional Victoria in relation to economic, social and environmental issues.

RDV's focus is on regional planning, investment attraction, job creation, exports, creating stronger economies, communities and infrastructure to create a strong and growing provincial Victoria. It has programs to: promote business and industry development; work with local government and communities; help new businesses establish themselves; and pave the way for existing industries to grow and diversify.

In November 2005, RDV led the coordination and development of the \$502 million five-year

action plan for growth in provincial Victoria, Moving Forward: Making Provincial Victoria the Best Place to Live, Work and Invest.

In June 2008, the Government marked the half-way point of Moving Forward with a \$68 million package of new and refocused initiatives and programs under Moving Forward: Update – The Next Two Years 2008 to 2010.

John Joyce is Regional Development Victoria's North Eastern Regional Manager and can be contacted on

Bendigo Bank supports communities

Peter Halden

The Nathalia Community Bank Branch of Bendigo Bank was proud to be a sponsor of the National Urban Design Forum 2008. And it was a wonderful opportunity to showcase our town.

The Nathalia and district community is always on the lookout for initiatives that will advance the quality of life and contribute to a thriving and prosperous community. This is why the community got behind the concept and established the 14th Bendigo Community Bank. Since its inception, the district residents and community groups have supported the Bank.

The Bank provides extensive banking services Monday to Friday as well as Saturday morning. Due to the fantastic support from the local community, it has grown and it now makes a reasonable profit that it shares with shareholders and community groups.

More than \$90,000 has been put back into the community so far. Through the Bank's philanthropic arm, Community Enterprise Foundation, many local organisations have benefited from donations to help with local projects. They include Neighbourhood Watch, Numurkah/Nathalia Legacy, Barmah and District Tourism, Nathalia New Years Eve Carnival, Uncle Bobs, St Vincent de Paul, Nathalia Scouts and Guides, Nathalia Fire Brigade, Lions and Rotary Clubs, local Kindergartens, Broken Creek Landcare, local Schools and Sporting Clubs. The Community bank also provides sponsorship for a number of organisations.

Those who bought shares at \$1 each have been getting a return on their money and this year will receive a franked dividend of 8%. The bank has also been behind bigger projects that have allowed for improving and expanding the economic, cultural and social infrastructure for the benefit of the whole community.

Strategic plan developed

In conjunction with the Bendigo Bank, the local bank board organised for a strategic plan to be developed for the town. This plan set out strategic economic goals and was put to the local community for discussion. A number of these initiatives have been taken up or are in the process of being developed. Out of this, the Nathalia Economic Development Group was established to implement the strategic plan for Nathalia. The main aim of this group is to achieve sustainable and balanced growth for Nathalia.

One of the major projects that the Bank supported was the Department of Sustainability and Environment office building, which not only provided a more pleasant working environment for the employees, but it kept jobs in town.

The Board has always sought opportunities to grow the business and has become part of the Bendigo Telco. This provides cost efficient phone, mobile and internet services

to individuals and business. Setting up the automatic teller was another service to provide 24hour banking for customers, as well as those travelling through town.

The bank has been proactive in providing information sessions for the community. Samples of these have been housing investment, superannuation, water, succession planning, and financial planning seminars. Breakfast meetings have been a popular way to provide groups with information.

Recently the Board has decided to take on the challenge of a new branch and opened in a neighbouring town. This has allowed for further growth and soon we will begin putting money back into this community as well. This move has extended the business and the community bank now has 11 employees. The great way staff support customers have been a hallmark in our success.

Peter Halden is Branch Manager of the Nathalia Community Bank and can be contacted at peter.halden@bendigobank.com.au

NUDFo8 Day 2

Shon Bailey

On the second day of NUDFo8, the emphasis was on what has been done, what is being done and what can be done to improve and expand our towns. The theme was not just dropping a big something (eg big banana) to make it interesting, but rather revealing what is already there in our communities.

Kaye from the Nathalia Community Bank Committee reminded us locals, and explained to those from Melbourne and beyond, just how much has been happening in the small town of Nathalia - where there has been a major project every decade for the last century. "How is it we can take these dreams and reveal what is already there?" she said. The Nathalia Bendigo Community Bank is proud to say they have contributed \$10,000 to the strategic plan which outlines many areas that require further development.

Bill Kelly, a local artist and social rights activist, explained that we must start "planning for the un-plannable" because "when you do something you must consider the implications for six generations", because any planning you do today will be there for a long time. To help explain this notion, he spoke of the Nathalia Main Street Plantation which "for whatever reason" was created almost 100 years ago, it was planned well and is "one thing that makes Nathalia interesting....where everybody meets each other". Without spaces like it, he believes we are "missing out on an awful lot". Bill also invited us to change our thinking about collaborations and to realise that as a team member "if you give yourself over to the idea that you're all working toward the same goal, the ego floats away".

An indigenous artist, Ben McKeown, spoke about how he "ended up in Melbourne...(but) didn't know how to embrace the city" until he realised that "communities are built up

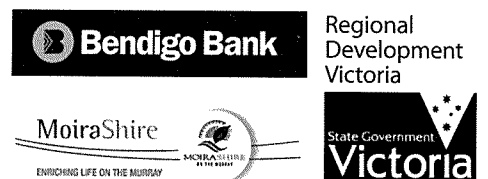
of people" and therefore we need to honour that in urban design. He believes that culture isn't just buildings though. "There's street culture, there's army culture, there's indigenous culture". While he was in Melbourne, he helped create a project which included 30 independent living spaces with communal living above a car park, where before the space was mainly used for "bad city stuff at night". As a result of creating this hostel, the area was no longer as rough and it gave many, otherwise homeless, people an opportunity to be part of a community. He impressed on everyone the importance of not working "against the space, work with it" - which is exactly what he did above a once run down car park.

Liesl Malan and Adam Haddow spoke about how important it is to "educate ourselves about design" because there is "enormous potential here", but we must realise "we can do it", we can make our towns bigger and better for all.

NUDFo8 opened my eyes to urban designing which I previously knew very little about. In short it involves town planning, in physical, artistic and mental attitude-changing ways for the development of towns or cities. And it showed us that we can make a difference and improve the places where we and others live.

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Thanks to NUDFo8 Sponsors



Getting it all together in country towns

Bruce Echberg

Nathalia and Shepparton are two country towns I know well - as a part time resident of Nathalia, and over a decade of providing professional urban design and landscape services to Shepparton.

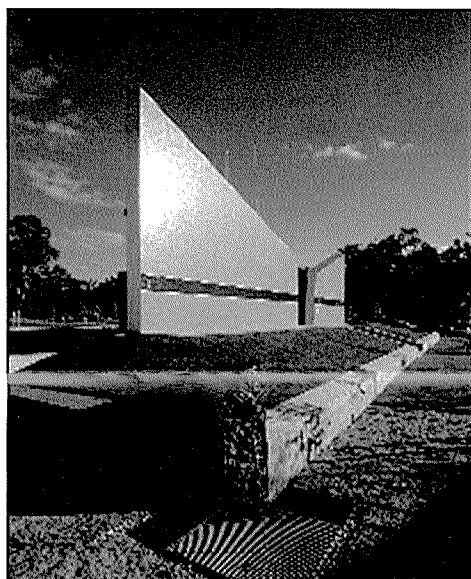
They, in many ways, epitomise the typical rural situation in Australia because they are both working rural service centres relatively untouched by influences of tourism and sea change that effect towns closer to capital cities or in coastal, historic or scenic settings.

Nathalia, population around 1500, is untouched by gentrification and landscape makeovers. The last significant streetscape improvement - apparently designed in the 1980s by the local sign writer - included the major innovation of putting power below ground down the main street, and installation of now-dated, over scaled, gooseneck streetlights. The three heritage pubs remain unrenovated, not having seen a coat of paint for many decades.

Shepparton, around 40,000 residents, and more dynamic economically has been steadily working on its public realm over the past decade, though not at the same level as other competing regional cities such as Bendigo.

Does good quality public realm make a difference?

One issue I have pondered is: how much difference does the development of good quality public realm mean to the social and



▲ Shepparton War Memorial, a public space and memorable town entry

economic performance of real working country towns like Shepparton and Nathalia. Most residents are, after all, comfortable in their settings and enjoy the simple rural life. They are always suspicious of change.

What seemed to emerge during our two days of presentations and discussion in Nathalia is that without nice streetscapes, cafes and bookshops, the town is struggling to attract tourists to stop and spend time in the town. More importantly, teachers and doctors choose not to come to Nathalia or, if they do, they find other places to live. Young people feel obliged to leave after secondary school for further education, employment, and the wider cultural experiences that they can find in larger cities. This is less pronounced, but also occurring in Shepparton. Places like Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo on the other hand seem more successful because of scale and the quality of their centres, and they now attract young and professional people in a similar way to Melbourne.

Achieving Sustainability

Of course, this is a separate and secondary issue to sustainability of rural settlements. Here are some personal observations on where I think we need to go to develop rural settlement in response to climate change.

Small settlements, like Nathalia, should become self sufficient in day-to-day facilities like schools, shops, medical and recreation facilities. All these facilities should be in easy walking/cycling distance and this needs to become the preferred way to access them by most residents, not just the young and old. Public transport to larger centres should be available. As fossil fuels decline we need to be able to reduce car use without compromise to lifestyle.



▲ Water sensitive urban design at Lake Bartlett, Tatura



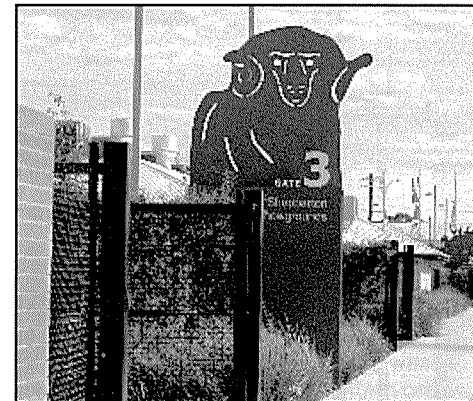
▲ Small community meeting space in Toolamba, recommended in an earlier Urban Design Framework

More efficient use of energy and water can be achieved through better building and garden design, and some urban consolidation. Large rural lifestyle lots should be discouraged, and subdivided where possible because they are unproductive and cause sprawl of the worst kind.

Larger settlements, like Shepparton are self-sufficient, with a wider range of services and facilities. However, their density and scale is not sustainable. They are too car dependent, energy inefficient, and lack the amenity and activity of larger cities. The way forward seems to be:

- Reduce car dependence and increase facilities for walking and bike riding, reduce surface and on-street car parking.
- No more greenfield development of housing at suburban or lower density! They are too car dependent and use too much energy and water.
- Explore models of well connected, new satellite high density sustainable communities, that are custom designed to provide a range of residents including seniors, with modest sized, affordable, quality, car-free, housing with a zero carbon footprint, in attractive rural settings. These are being developed in Europe with minimum fuss, but don't seem to be even on the radar in Australia.
- Redevelopment of the central areas of existing larger settlements at much higher density, encouraging mixed-use development. This could be an era where regional towns develop to have more sophisticated liveable urban environments. Small cities like Shepparton are blank canvases, ripe for resurgence as new models for 21st century living.

- Enhanced public transport within and to the centre.
- Quality public space and parks that have modest water use are as important as quality private and public sector buildings.



▲ Shepparton Showgrounds, key site for development of year round events

In all country towns

Good urban and landscape design is essential, whether by consultants or council staff. Councils need visionary strategic thinkers that understand design and can provide leadership and continuity of approach. Current churning of professional staff in local government is limiting their achievement.

Retro-fitting our towns and cities for the post-climate change era is the major challenge of the next decade and beyond. We need government at all levels, as well as academics and practitioners, to show real leadership. Time is running out!

Bruce Echberg is an urban designer and landscape architect, and Director of Urban Initiatives Pty. Ltd.

Changes in climate and water - impacts on small towns

Scott Seymour

It is timely to consider the impending and current impacts of climate change on small towns. There is a sobering view of the trajectory of the extent and impacts of climate change on increased variability for rainfall and weather patterns, and the potential associated social, economic and environmental effects on small communities. A key feature of a sustainable town is that it has a good age demographic - and towns without water are not attractive to younger families.

Small townships are important as centres for important social structures, commerce administration and, critically, a sense of community cohesion and intrinsic value.

With the decline in rainfall in many areas, the productivity of rural lands are likely to change or decline, thus affecting productivity, disposable incomes and rural economies.

Cool temperate/semi-arid/arid

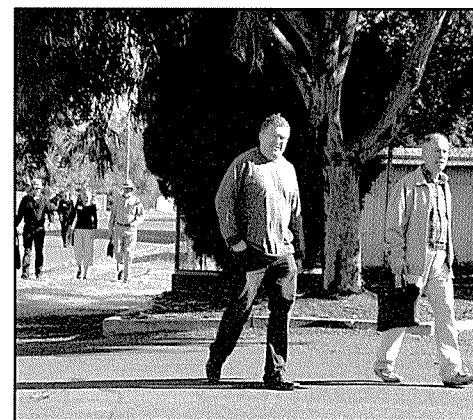
Many areas of Victoria will move from cool temperate climate to a semi-arid and those currently in semi-arid areas will move to arid conditions. Under such a scenario, our water resources will become scarcer and need to be better managed and used far more wisely.

But it is not a situation without hope. We need to adopt an adaptive management approach that uses all available technologies and management approaches - starting NOW!!

These included the adoption of Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD), water conservation plumbing and total water cycle management. Townships can still be attractive places to live in if we are smart. Not a drop of water must be wasted.

There are many ways in which communities can become empowered, and they demand the careful adoption of sustainability approaches to water management - such as reuse of treated wastewater for improving the presentation of townships that maintains its attractiveness and sense of pride.

Scott Seymour is Director of Aquatic Systems Management Pty Ltd, and can be contacted at cnsseymour@bigpond.com



▲ Walking in the sunshine at NUDFo8 in Nathalia

Growth in small and medium Victorian towns

Bill Uncles

Despite the common concern for the future of small towns, over the ten years to 2006, small and medium sized Victorian towns have generally experienced growth.

Urban population change over the 10 years to the 2006 Census was examined using the ABS Urban Centres and Localities series. Like all data-based studies, the devil is in the detail and for 2006, ABS changed the basis for reporting this data. Where previously ABS counted persons resident on Census night, they now report on the more useful basis of usual place of residence. The key impact of this change is winter resort areas such as

Dinner Plain and Marysville appeared to have suffered strong falls in population.

The research included all towns and cities in regional Victoria and grouped them by size. Overall, more towns increased rather than lost population. From 1996 to 2001, the total growth was slightly stronger than in the following five years, yet for those towns that lost population the decline was stronger in the earlier period.

Over the 10 years, the total population living in 312 regional cities and towns rose by 139,100, with 221 towns gaining population of 145,100, while the 91 towns that lost population lost 6,000 persons. The lowest annual growth rates were in towns with a population of between

200 and 250 persons where population declined by 0.7% per annum, then 800 and 1,000 persons with growth of 0.6% and then 2,000 to 5,000 persons with 0.8% growth. The strongest growth was seen in towns with 500 to 600 persons (3.1%) and 1,200 to 1,500 persons (2.3%). The big cities of Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo grew at a rate of 1.5% per annum.

Morwell (-424) and Stawell (-395) were the towns that lost the most population over the 10 years, while Torquay (3,867) and Lara (3,187) in Geelong's hinterland had the most growth. Notable population declines were in the apparently successful tourist centres of Beechworth (-308), Daylesford (-205) and Lorne (-115).

The Statistical Districts with the lowest growth in urban populations were in the Wimmera, where town and cities lost 1000 persons, East Gippsland which gained only 900 persons, and the Western District (2,600). The strongest growth in urban populations was in the Central Highlands, with an urban population gain of 18,800, Barwon 15,300 and Goulburn 9,900.

Overall the very small towns remain at risk, but growth has been quite strong in most urban areas.

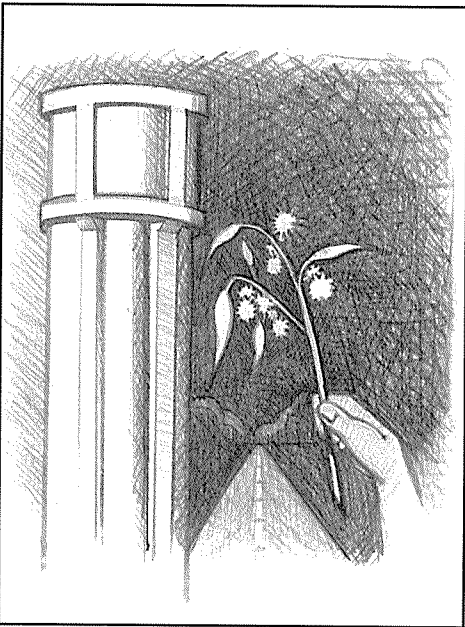
Bill Uncles is Director of Saturn Corporate Services Pty Ltd and can be contacted at bill.unkles@saturneconomics.com.au

Living in a small town

John Scott

I presented a talk at NUDFo8 on this theme. I have lived in more than a dozen small country towns during my rather nomadic work life, and have observed a significant reduction of goods and services available to the people who live there. It seems that rural decline, the term given to the shrinking number of people who live on farms, may be at the heart of the problem. This demographic shift in rural population has continued for more than 70 years.

Once there was a farming family on every square mile (640 acres) and a rural settlement every 20 miles or so to service these families who arrived on foot, bicycle, horseback or in a horse-drawn gig. These settlements usually included a church, primary school, tennis courts, public hall, general store, grain silo, fire brigade and, if you were lucky, a pub.



▲ Symbols of Nathalia (sketch by William Kelly)

Over recent decades, all farms have at least one car and the size of farm machinery has increased from small horse drawn implements to huge ploughs towed by massive four-wheel-drive, 400 horsepower tractors. And three tonne Bedford trucks have been replaced by B-doubles capable of shifting 60 tonne in every load.

So things have changed. Farms have been sold to neighbours who have increased their holdings to 2500 acres (1000 hectares) or four times the original farm sizes. Each time this happens, three farming families have been displaced.

Eventually the small rural settlements are no longer required as farmers drive longer distances to acquire goods and services. Most of them have been reduced to a poorly-maintained hall and a tennis court. All of the primary schools were closed 30 years ago, as baby-boomer children moved onto secondary school and caught the bus to the near-by town. And the railway lines that carted the grain from the silos have also been closed.

Whose fault is it?

It's no one's fault, it's just progress...time marches on. Even the small rural towns that boomed 30 years ago with their new-found patronage are now in trouble themselves. They struggle to maintain banks, petrol stations and franchise-based businesses that watch the bottom-line and relocate their businesses to more productive provincial centres. And professionals such as doctors, lawyers and accountants also find it beneficial to base their businesses in larger centres leaving small towns with depleted services.

So why would anyone choose to live in a small country town? For me it is about relaxed living. I have chosen to spend this stage of my life in a tranquil, peaceful setting free from the noise and stress of peak-hour traffic experienced in metropolitan cities. Nathalia has all necessary services and parking is



▲ Blake Street, Nathalia

convenient; there are no parking metres, no traffic lights and only one round-about. Crime is almost non-existent and it is safe to walk anywhere, day or night.

But more importantly it is about belonging to a community – knowing the people where you live and being part of a rich social fabric. It is sharing the elation of a football grand final, the sadness at the funeral of a family friend, delivering 'meals-on-wheels' to our aged citizens or going to the school concert. Surely it is these human experiences that

make us the type of people we are, and the interconnectedness with the people in the town that determine our happiness.

So why would you want to live in a small country town? Because it feels good to be part of a community where you are known, valued, trusted and respected.

John Scott is Deputy Chair of the Nathalia Economic Development Committee and can be contacted at john.scott@aanet.com.au

Small towns – how small is small?

Simon Jones

The prospect of wealth from gold mining in the valleys and mountains of northeast Victoria proved a formidable lure for many in the 1860's. Digging and dredging for minerals in the Upper Ovens Valley continued until the early 1970's, and remains evident today through the relic machinery and altered landscape characteristics of the small towns of Harrierville and Wandiligong. This mountainous region resonates with the ebb and flow of the economic and industrial changes of the late 19th and 20th Centuries: starting with mining, then shifting to agriculture and resource extraction, then evolving again to focus on tourism, now including lifestyle.

The small towns of the Upper Ovens and Upper Kiewa Valleys include the relative major centres of Bright, Myrtleford and Mount Beauty, which offer a unique lifestyle choice in a visually rich landscape, fortified by evident past endeavours on which the alpine small towns were established. These townships continue to be interdependent: the health and prosperity of one affects all the others - socially, economically or environmentally.

While the natural and heritage characteristics of these townships contribute greatly to the region's tourism, the remoteness of the alpine townships combined with increasing economic pressures, including rising fuel costs, present the local communities with significant challenges to ensuring their sustainability and longevity.

There is no pot of gold

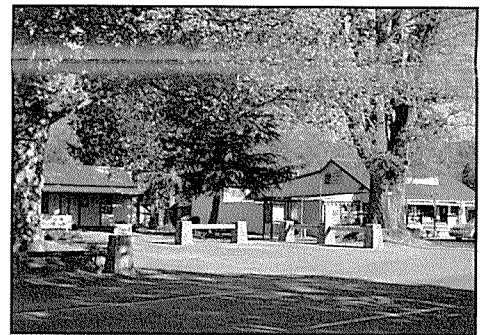
There is no pot of gold, no single endeavour that is sufficiently reliable to adequately provide for the small towns of the Upper Ovens and Kiewa Valleys, and the communities of the Alpine Shire recognize that a range of initiatives must be employed to secure their sustainability in to the future.

Local knowledge has been an essential ingredient to developing Framework Plans for each of the small towns including Harrierville, Wandiligong, Porepunkah, Tawonga and Dederang. The Framework Plans provide the necessary guidance for Alpine Shire Council and the township communities to respond to the challenges - presently facing all small towns across the nation. The Framework Plans recommend a range of improvements

to enhance the unique characteristics of the township supporting their liveability and tourism potential. These projects are typically subtle – including connecting pathways, street tree plantings, stone walls, planters and interpretive signage.

The Framework Plans articulate the shared aspiration of the small communities for greater self-reliance through local trade and access to services. However, the relatively small and dispersed population of Alpine Shire is potentially insufficient to achieve the necessary quantum of local trade and service activity necessary to achieve sustainability. Consequently, more investment is required to provide more jobs, more local trade and service opportunity, ultimately providing greater self reliance.

Rural and regional townships currently need to maximize the opportunities for investment to become more liveable and sustainable. However, Local Government in rural areas are typically ill-equipped to drive the changes necessary to capitalize on current and emerging investment opportunities. Additionally, Victorian State Planning Policy fails to adequately recognise issues and



▲ Harrierville

opportunities at the local level, subsequently limiting growth and investment potential.

Local Government and local communities must be better equipped with the appropriate skills and, more importantly, the authority to support the realization of the specific investment opportunities that are locally unique - if they are to achieve sustainability. The alternative is yet another historical relic in the rural landscape.

Simon Jones is Landscape Architect with Alpine Shire Council, and can be contacted at simonj@alpineshire.vic.gov.au

Conferences

Whole Life Urban Sustainability and its Assessment

22- 24 April 2009, Loughborough, UK

The conference themes are: Urban planning and design for sustainability; Sustainable buildings: design, performance and assessment; Quality of life in the urban environment; Stakeholder participation; Urban sustainability and the move to low carbon developments; Measures, assessment theory, complexity and uncertainty. For more details see <http://sue-mot.org>.

Unequal Places: Planning and Territorial Cohesion

1-3 April 2009, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK

There is a dedicated urban design track chaired by Tim Townsend, and a special session on obesogenic environments to which

all those interested in linking urban design and health are particularly welcome. The Planning Research Conference is now actively seeking abstracts. Further details and online submission at www.apl.ncl.ac.uk/aboutus/unequalplaces.html

More footprints less carbon

7-9 October, 2009, New York University in Manhattan's Greenwich Village

New York City Department of Transportation is proud to host the 10th annual Walk21 conference. The themes are: Walkable communities are sustainable communities; Paved with gold: investing in the public realm for a successful city; There is more to walking than walking; design strategies for urban quality; Fit cities: community design for active living. Submissions must be forwarded to walk21nyc@dot.nyc.gov by 27 February, 2009. See www.walk21.com for more details.

Revitalising Built Environments: Requalifying Old Places for New Uses

International Symposium, 12-16 October 2009, Istanbul, Turkey

Jointly organized by IAPS-CSBE 'Culture & Space in the Built Environment Network' and the IAPS - Housing Network in collaboration with Istanbul Technical University, Faculty of Architecture; Istanbul Bahcesehir University, Faculty of Design and Architecture; The Turkish Chamber of Architects and YEM-The Building Information Centre.

The deadline for submission of abstracts is 9 January 2009. Complete details at www.culturespace2009.org

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