

RRVV

NEWSLETTER

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Residents of Retirement Villages Victoria Inc.
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GOVERNMENT INQUIRY TABLES ITS REPORT

On 7 March 2017, the Parliament of Victoria's Legal and Social Issues Committee tabled its long-awaited report into retirement housing. The Government has six months to consider this report and publish its response.

The Inquiry made 15 recommendations, all but one of which (Recommendation 1) are of immediate interest to current and prospective residents.

In summary:

1.That the Minister for Planning give consideration to provisions that encourage increased supply of retirement housing

2.That the Government review the *Retirement Villages Act 1986*

3.That Consumer Affairs Victoria collate its online information on retirement villages into a booklet and operators make this available, either in hard copy form or electronically, to residents

4.That the Law Institute of Victoria develop professional accreditation for specialists in retirement housing and provide training to general practitioners

5.That the Government investigates measures to ensure that all retirement village units hold the same owners corporation voting rights (*RRVV takes this to apply to villages transitioning from strata titles to leasehold contracts*)

6.That the *Retirement Villages Act 1986* and related regulations define whose responsibility

it is to pay for repairs and maintenance both inside units and in communal areas and that all works be undertaken within a mutually acceptable timeframe

7.That the Victorian Government require that retirement village operators disclose ingoing prices with and without deferred management fees

8.That the Victorian Government require that deferred management fees are applied on a pro rata basis

9.That the Victorian Government require retirement village operators provide very

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resident with an estimate of their exit fees every financial year

10. That the Victorian Government allows retirement village operators to pay either a refundable accommodation deposit or a daily accommodation payment for residents entering aged care until the sale of the resident's unit

11. That the Victorian Government give consideration to developing a model for mandatory accreditation for all retirement housing providers

12. That the Victorian Government ensure that an appropriate minimum Certificate level applies to retirement village management courses

13. That the retirement housing sector engage more proactively with disability and aged care design professionals

14. That the Victorian Government require that retirement villages report on compliance with maintenance plans funded by charges on residents

15. That the Victorian Government introduce a new alternative for low cost timely and binding resolution of disputes

Overall, RRVV is pleased with the report and believes it provides a strong framework for reform.

RRVV is disappointed that the Committee did not recommend rate relief for retirement villages. We will consult with members before planning further action on rates. RRVV is also disappointed that the Inquiry did not give residents the choice of refundable accommodation deposit or daily accommodation payment while in care waiting for the sale of their units. We believe allowing operators to make this decision is a backwards step.

Predictably, the Property Council (the peak body representing owners and operators) has resorted to scare tactics by claiming the

recommendations will increase costs. RRVV believes the recommendations if properly implemented will increase efficiency and so benefit residents.

RRVV appreciates the contribution of members who made an effort to write a submission to the Inquiry, to give evidence in person or to attend the public hearings. We know that the Inquiry committee members were impressed with both the number and strength of resident submissions.

RRVV now encourages members to contact us by phone or e-mail and let us know what you think of the report and what our next steps should be.

You may view the report on:

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/lsic/inquiries/article/2972> or on the RRVV website.



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RRVV NEEDS YOU



The RRVV Committee currently has five members and would like to invite more RRVV members to join its ranks to share the workload.

The members of the current RRVV Committee are:

- Lawrie Robertson
Vice President
- John Lumley
Treasurer & Membership Manager
- Peter Saalmans
Web Master and IT Manager
- Brenda Parker
Newsletter Manager
- Gail Henderson
Administration Secretary

A part-time Administration Assistant, Victoria Allan, is employed to support the committee.

Our immediate need is to cover the following tasks - noting that one committee member may fill more than one position:

- Treasurer. John Lumley, our current hard-working Treasurer, has indicated a wish to retire at the next AGM. Consequently, the RRVV is looking for a new Treasurer to take over from John towards the end of the year.
- Co-ordinator, Resident Liaison Officers - to manage our network of more than 100 RLOs.
- Policy Advisor – to assist the committee in formulating its submissions to government and liaising with politicians and public servants.
- Membership Manager - to promote new membership and nurture our current membership.

- Co-ordinator of visits by RRVV to villages – in particular rural villages.

Because a high percentage of the committee's work is completed by email, committee members need to have access to the Internet and be able to use it efficiently.

Communication skills, both written and verbal are valued highly as are organisational skills. Any knowledge of things legal or financial would be welcomed with open arms.

The Committee meets on the second Tuesday of the month from 10am to 1pm in a meeting room located within the COTA offices on the fourth floor of The Block Arcade in Melbourne City.

It has been agreed that any interested person will be invited to attend three monthly meetings of RRVV before being formally invited to join the committee. This is so candidates can become fully aware of how the committee works before committing themselves.

For further information, please contact any member of the current committee listed above - via phone 03 9015 8402 or email rrvv.vic@gmail.com

Please consider if you could become a member of the RRVV Committee.

DO RESIDENTS' COMMITTEES SOMETIMES INHIBIT RESIDENT PARTICIPATION?

From the day of formation nine years ago, RRVV has strongly advocated each village have a residents' committee. We still do. We are convinced a good committee can significantly enhance village life. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the many residents contacting our helpline (03 9015 8402 or rrvv.vic@gmail.com) who express some frustration with their village's committee.

Some of the main frustrations are:

1. Management dominates our committee
2. Our committee supports management proposals without first consulting residents
3. At the quarterly residents' forum our committee talks at us rather than listens to or involves us
4. Our committee is unduly secretive

This article focusses on common problems with unincorporated residents' committees in leasehold villages. If you live in a strata titled village or your village has an incorporated association representing residents and want to discuss the issues raised, please give us a call.

How can a committee remain independent of management?

Obviously, it is important for a residents' committee to have a good relationship with the village manager. However, if remaining on good terms with the manager requires accepting a subservient role, is this consistent with the committee's mission? Many of our callers think not.

Anecdotal evidence available to us suggests that committees that meet regularly without the village manager are better able to maintain a healthy independence. Among other things, they are frequently able to thrash out a consensus on contentious issues. Members who might be unwilling to challenge a management proposal in the presence of the manager become more willing to speak up. Similarly, members are better able to formulate policies that benefit residents in the absence of someone who must toe the company line.

When should a committee consult residents?

Some village managers attempt to dissuade committee members from consulting residents

on proposed changes to facilities and routines. They cite such things as:

- Consulting residents is my job
- The proposal is confidential

Some also attempt to dissuade members from taking soundings of residents' feelings by suggesting this is 'fishing for problems'.

RRVV suggests it is important for committee members to keep in touch with residents' opinions. Without a regular sampling of residents' views, members are likely to lose touch with current issues and descend into groupthink. Moreover, residents are likely to express themselves more candidly to fellow residents than to their village manager.

How might a committee engage residents at a quarterly forum?

A typical forum (i.e. village residents' meeting) may spend a lot of time on reports from the village manager, the committee chair and the convenors of various village groups. The reports may deliver useful information, but the format is hardly engaging. In some cases the chair does not allow questions from the floor. It is therefore not surprising that attendance is often poor.

Villages that put current proposals to a vote and seek opinion on developing issues generally attract higher forum attendance and achieve wider resident engagement.

In some villages, the chair shies away from opening the village forum to questions and debate because this makes the job difficult. It is, therefore, incumbent on residents who want to have a say to co-operate with the chair.

What should be secret and what should not be secret?

This topic can provoke heated debate. The residents of some villages want full

transparency. The residents of other villages may be less demanding, and some take almost no interest in the workings of their committee. Generally, particularly when the matter is contentious, residents want more information than most committees make available.

For example, residents often want access to minutes of committee meetings, and for the minutes to include an outline of the issues, the motions dealt with and how each member voted. Some villages only publish a synopsis, often in the form of a report by the chair. In many committees the members refuse to publish details of who voted for and against each motion.

RRVV acknowledges the concerns of committee members uncomfortable with high levels of disclosure. For example, it takes a lot of work to prepare detailed minutes. In many villages no one is willing to take on the job of secretary. Similarly, some residents who might otherwise nominate for a position on the committee decline to do so because they do not want to open themselves to scrutiny by other residents. Nevertheless, RRVV believes the evidence is clear – open governance facilitates better decisions and invigorates village life.

Of course, there are some caveats. For example, a village manager might share proposed staffing changes with the residents' committee. The committee should not publish this information before the manager has advised the staff. Similarly, a committee might review tender information but should not publish details in the minutes before the award of a contract. The normal provisions protecting a resident's personal information apply.

RRVV recommends residents' committees formulate a disclosure policy that defines any exceptions but otherwise gives residents access to all committee information.

RETIREMENT HOUSING FORUM ON 1ST MAY

Residents of Retirement Villages Victoria (RRVV), Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG), Council On The Ageing (COTA) and the Consumer Action Law Centre (CALC) are holding a joint Housing Forum to discuss the recommendations raised in the report on the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Retirement Housing Sector.

You are invited to come along and have your say on the recommendations, so we can work together to support the government to act on positive change for older people.

**Monday 1st May
10am – 2pm**

Victoria University City
Convention Centre

L12, 300 Flinders Street, Melbourne

Ph: 9919 1326

For more details on this event, please check RRVV's website residentsofretirementvillagesvic.org.au closer to the date.

Please RSVP to HAAG on
03 96547389

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE - FROM THE BEEHIVE RETIREMENT VILLAGE

This is not a happy beehive.

The Big Bumble Bees have still not advised the Basic Bees in The Beehive what the future of The Beehive will be. The Sales Bees have been withdrawn as has all advertising of units in The Beehive.



Apparently the Biggest Bumble Bee of all is considering options for the future of The Beehive and has now appointed a group of Consultant Insects to assess The Beehive. What these very smooth, young Consultant Insects would know about living in a retirement village and ageing is hard to understand.

The Big Bumble Bees have refused a direct request for information on one of the mooted options, causing rumours to fly and stress to increase. The buzzing of anger is deafening and many discussions have occurred wondering where best our stings could be aimed.

What is the old saying: "Information is Power"? The sense of disempowerment when information is purposely withheld is infuriating and the Big Bumble Bees are wielding this power unashamedly.

Some of the Basic Bees have fought back. They have written a submission stating their views of what they think is best for the future of The Beehive and have sent it to the Biggest Bumble Bee of all. This has apparently been read but purposely withheld from the Consultant Insects. Why?

Gathering information about a community like The Beehive is a very vexed undertaking.

Toward the end of 2016, about when the first rumours of what might be in store for The Beehive began to circulate, a written survey of all the bees in The Beehive was conducted in order for the Big Bumble Bees to know how the Basic Bees were feeling about their beehive. Responses could be anonymous.

Two thirds of the bee population chose the passive/aggressive method of hitting back at the Big Bumble Bees by not filling in and returning the survey papers.

Of the remaining third many saw an anonymous response as a means to vent their anger and frustration with the Big Bumble Bees.

The ridiculous outcome of this is that the Big Bumble Bees will consider the survey's results as part of their decision-making on the future of The Beehive.

The Consultant Insects have been contracted to talk to individual Basic Bees in The Beehive to learn what they think might be done to improve The Beehive

Then I guess the Biggest Bumble Bee of all will do what he wants with it.

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED BECOMING A LIFE MEMBER OF RRVV?

As an alternative to paying a membership fee of \$10 each year to belong to the RRVV, you may like to consider paying a one-off fee of \$100 for Life Membership. The equivalent figures for couples is \$15 per annum and a life membership fee of \$150.

With a life membership you won't have to remember to pay your subscription every year and you won't be bothered by reminders from the RRVV! Life membership also helps

to reduce RRVV's postage costs, as well as saving paper on reminders.

Please consider taking out a life membership instead of renewing your annual membership this year.

The RRVV would like to thank all our existing 545 Life Members and is hoping to increase this number in 2017.

PROFILE OF COMMITTEE MEMBER - GAIL HENDERSON

I spent 30 years of my life until recently living in Hobart, Tasmania – a very beautiful part of the world. I am 72 years old and have three “adult children”. (The English language is awkward when describing offspring, all of whom are now in their 40s).

I have been single for 26 years and therefore fit closely the demographic of most residents of retirement villages who are predominately single women.

At the urging of my family I moved to Melbourne and have now lived in a Retirement Village for just over two years. It took me a little while to adjust to retirement village living but eventually I settled well.

Mine is a common story. I was privileged to be able to be at home for 20 years concentrating on raising our children. Divorce forced me into paid employment for the next 20 years.

Firstly I was working with people who had been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, mainly counselling members of the Society and educating the community on what it is like living with Multiple Sclerosis. I then worked for the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (as it was then) for a further 12 years.

It is my experience in the Department that I hope equips me to contribute to the RRVV

Committee. For the first few years of my employment with the Department I was a Complaints Officer dealing with complaints against Residential Aged Care facilities brought by residents and their families.

Following that I was a member of a team which assessed Community Aged Care service providers against the Department's Standards.

The retirement village sector has boomed lately and I believe will continue to do so as the so-called “baby boomers” age. The retirement village expansion has outstripped the legislation under which the sector is managed.

RRVV is very aware of the lack of regulation within the retirement village sector and constantly lobbies governments to bring about change in order to strengthen the rights of retirement village residents.

I enjoy being a Committee Member of RRVV.

Gail Henderson

An archaeologist is the best husband a woman can have. The older she gets the more interested he is in her. *Agatha Christie*

I'm at an age when my back goes out more than I do. *Phyllis Diller*

At my age, flowers scare me. *George Burns*

You know you're getting old when the candles cost more than the cake. *Bob Hope*

I've learned that life is like a roll of toilet paper. The closer it gets to the end, the faster it goes. *Andy Rooney*

Whatever you may look like, marry a man your own age - as your beauty fades, so will his eyesight. *Phyllis Diller*

You can live to be a hundred if you give up all the things that make you want to live to be a hundred. *Woody Allen*

NBN AND RETIREMENT VILLAGES

The rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN) raises significant issues for retirement village residents. A wide range of telephone and related services will be disconnected, including landline phone services, Telstra BigPond and Optus cable internet services and all ADSL internet services. The RRVV understands that these services will in future be provided exclusively via the NBN*.

Village operators clearly stand to benefit when their villages are joined to the NBN. Connections to the NBN will help to sell vacant units, and such villages can be promoted as being “state of the art”.

Many residents, however, have no need for an NBN connection. Evidence suggests that only a minority of retirement village residents are interested in being connected to the internet, but all residents have a need for a basic telephone service. To meet this need, residents can use mobile phones (or “smartphones”) instead of a landline. Those residents who require an internet service can subscribe to broadband wireless services for internet access. Neither of these arrangements involve the NBN and both mobile phones and wireless internet will be permitted and will coexist with the new NBN*.

Consequently, village operators do not need to connect all residents’ units to the NBN and it would be unfair for an operator to expect all residents in a village to pay for the cost of an NBN connection.

An RRVV member reports that their village operator proposes to connect all units in their village to the NBN – to be paid for by residents – regardless of demand and without reference to alternatives such as mobile phones and wireless internet.

The RRVV position in this matter is:

- Residents’ needs and preferences should be taken into account when the NBN is being considered.
- All available technical and commercial options should be assessed, with special reference to emergency communications
- Village operators should bear the cost of the changeover to the NBN.

To help us lobby for retirement village residents’ rights, RRVV would like to hear your views and experiences regarding the rollout of the NBN to your village. Please let us know what progress has been made to date in connecting to the NBN, what arrangements are being considered or proposed, who is going to pay and other issues that you consider important. Your input would be much appreciated via:

- Our website www.rrvv.org.au/contact/ or
- Email to rrvv.vic@gmail.com or
- Mail to RRVV, PO Box 215, Melbourne 3001



* For detailed information on which services are to be disconnected have a look at: <http://www.nbnco.com.au/connect-home-or-business/information-for-home/will-it-work-over-the-nbn/what-services-will-be-switched-off.html>