



Wednesday, 17 April 2024

SHAC submission to

The land at 42N Ballarto Road, Frankston North

SHAC requests that the site 42N Ballarto Rd be evaluated for its potential to deliver crisis accommodation services as well as longer term transitional and affordable housing.

SHAC is a community organisation concerned that adequate support be available to people who find themselves homeless and in need of crisis accommodation in the Seaford and Frankston areas.

SHAC has been advocating for over 10 years for more options in the Frankston area for people experiencing low income and/or needing crisis accommodation.

SHAC's opinion is that commercial Rooming Houses do not provide suitable conditions for crisis accommodation and the impact of so many commercial Rooming Houses is not good for Frankston.

SHAC considers the high numbers of commercial rooming houses in Frankston being used for housing crisis is a systemic failure and needs significant and urgent attention.

The Need is demonstrated ...

For some unknown reason, the problem of using commercial Rooming Houses for crisis accommodation is extreme in the Frankston area. The list of registered Rooming Houses on the Consumer Affairs Victoria website currently shows 91 Rooming Houses registered in the Frankston Local Government Area (LGA), 84 of them in postcode 3199.

This puts Frankston 3199 as the top postcode in Victoria for commercial Rooming Houses servicing the crisis accommodation population. The tertiary education postcodes of Clayton and Waurin Ponds have higher numbers but they are servicing the student population.

Most of these Rooming Houses are commercial businesses, with just three operated as not-for-profit by the WAYSS Housing Agency.

Many people in housing crisis situations refuse to live in commercial rooming houses. They prefer to sleep in their car, or in the bush, or parks, or at sporting ground shelters, or even on the beach. Most commercial Rooming Houses have a reputation among homeless people for being expensive, unsafe, crowded and managed remotely by a non-resident manager. SHAC members have heard this many times from participants in various crisis services we support like street meals and the local Winter Shelter initiative.

There are also many unregistered Rooming Houses operating and many with three residents or less (which means they are not required to be registered).

Some of the Frankston Rooming Houses accommodate students (many of whom attend Monash Peninsula campus) and a few accommodate workers on short-term contracts. But the great majority of the rooming houses in Frankston are occupied by a low-income population with crisis accommodation needs. These people can stay for a period of 3-12 months, or a shorter period, whilst many stay longer. Rental rates are commonly around \$250 per room per week, with facilities like kitchen and bathrooms usually shared.

The total number of people living in Housing Crisis in Frankston would seem to be substantial, thousands in number. SHAC considers this is a crisis level situation and needs a crisis perspective response as in natural disasters. These people need safe, affordable housing.

The scale of the population living with these issues of poverty and unsafe housing has a significant impact on the local communities and street culture in Frankston. There are frequent calls for policing, ambulance and by-laws officers at the commercial Rooming Houses. The externalised costs from commercial Rooming Houses are high.

Frankston City Council, in collaboration with Launch Housing and other local NGO's is running a rough sleeper

Coalition Members:

- St. Anne's Parish Social Justice Group

- St Vincent de Paul Mt Eliza Conference Social Justice Group

- Seaford Community Committee

- Residents of the Seaford Beach Cabin Park

program called Frankston Zero. It offers support and crisis housing services. The unfortunate aspect is that, with insufficient referral options, it also refers people to commercial rooming houses.

There have been studies about housing in Frankston but the need for crisis housing for those on low income is rarely mentioned. It is a critical segment of need in the housing sector in Frankston that is not being met. Commercial Rooming Houses are run as private businesses. Their primary motivation is financial, they are keen to maximise rents and their rates are set at what the market will bear, which is usually about twice the price of a similar room of local share houses, or Rooming Houses run by a Not-for-Profit agency.

Commercial Rooming Houses in Frankston are not designed for delivering the Crisis Accommodation service and should not be used for that purpose.

As far as SHAC sees things and understands from extended years of communication with Frankston Council very little is being done to develop alternative options. Yet safer, more affordable, supported, crisis informed options are clearly needed.

The over seven hectare Ballarto Road site is to our knowledge the largest surplus State Government owned site with potential for re-use to help alleviate homelessness in Frankston. It has buildings which could be repurposed for use as Crisis Accommodation, or other social purposes such as skills training for unemployed persons. It has land that could be considered for use as a modest cabin park or tiny homes village which residents argue are far superior to Rooming House accommodation in terms of safety, privacy, independence and legal standing (eg for periodic access by single fathers to their children).

We were very surprised to learn at the Information Session for the property (26 March 2024) that the planning study commissioned as part of the Government Land Sales Process did not undertake an assessment of the suitability of the site for housing, whether at market or 'affordable' price, or crisis housing. Parts of the site have already been developed for Police and State Emergency Services use. The large suburb of Carrum Downs is on the other side of the road. As such, a bus stops right outside the property, which is also close to a local shopping centre.

This was particularly surprising in view of the high public interest in the 'Housing Crisis', and the potential of State government land to help redress this crisis, as reported recently in feature newspaper articles including:

- 'Calls for social housing to be built on prized land in the middle of Kew' (Clay Lucas, *Sunday Age*, 24 March 2024): <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/victoria/calls-for-social-housing-to-be-built-on-prized-plot-of-land-in-the-middle-of-kew-20240321-p5fec6.html#>
- 'State land "fire sale" as housing crisis worsens' (Broede Carmody, *The Age*, 10 March 2024): <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/victoria/state-land-fire-sale-as-housing-crisis-worsens-20240307-p5fakh.html#>

This failure to examine the potential of the site for 'social and affordable housing' would also appear to contradict the Government's own recent report entitled *Victorian Government response to the Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria* (February 2024). This response said it would 'Support in Full' the Recommendation 42: 'That the Victorian Government investigate options for the prioritisation of the housing portfolio in processes for the sale of surplus government land.'

SHAC submits that the Government Land Standing Advisory Committee should:

- a) undertake an assessment of the site for its potential to offer a response to the critical need for more Social Housing and Crisis Accommodation in the Frankston LGA
- b) not sell-off this site, i.e. to immediately stop all plans to sell this site until these assessments have been completed and
- c) consider the options for making this site, or at least part of the site available, for sale or lease at a nominal price, for use by a suitable organisation to provide facilities to alleviate homelessness, crisis accommodation and related social uses such as employment training.