



Thursday, 12 June 2025

SHAC proposal for
42N Ballarto Road, Frankston North
(Previously known as the Keith Turnbull Research Station)
For Attention: Sonya Kilkenny, MP

SUMMARY

Thank you for the opportunity to be part of the process for determining the future of this site.

SHAC requests a Homeless Accommodation facility be the new purpose for the site, either the whole site or part thereof.

In brief: a safe, affordable, well-located, well-managed facility that offers people in difficulty a chance to re-group, gather their health and plan their next step.

The new purpose:

- Accommodation options covering crisis need, transitional and long term
- Tenancy Support; services for health, welfare and achieving a successful tenancy

We consider that safe accommodation for the homeless in Frankston and surrounding areas is a significant and urgent need. The population in housing stress and homeless has grown significantly and the Ballarto Rd site could be an ideal place to respond to this need.

We have a very good, first-hand, understanding of the local needs. Associated with this we have also considered possible housing options for the site, in conjunction with both not-for-profit and commercial parties.

We believe it is important that the community, including those with a particular stake such as ourselves, be a part of the decision making process. As such, we would appreciate staying in touch with those considering the future of the site.

As a first step in this process, we would like access to the site, to assist our examination of possibilities and options.

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

The NEED is demonstrated

Frankston has few suitable options for crisis accommodation and for many years, commercial Rooming Houses have been used as the default option. In 2014, when SHAC first looked there were 34 commercial Rooming Houses registered for the Frankston LGA, today there are 103, and no sign of the growth slowing. The Frankston postcode 3199 appears to be contesting for the top postcode in Victoria for commercial Rooming Houses servicing the crisis accommodation population. There are also many unregistered Rooming Houses operating, estimated to be equal or more than the number registered.

A low-income population, who have accommodation needs, occupies the great majority of the rooming houses in Frankston. (The remaining accommodates students attending the local Monash campus and a few accommodate workers on short-term contracts at local hospitals and other work-sites.)

SHAC's opinion and the opinion of many others is that commercial Rooming Houses are not suited to providing crisis accommodation. Commercial Rooming houses are all too expensive for the low-income homeless and many are too unsafe and poorly resourced. We hear this repeatedly from the residents, from neighbours, from Housing and Welfare workers who use them for referrals, from the wider Frankston community, the Police, the medical and ambulance service and from Council services who witness much disruption that can occur and carry the externalized costs of this distasteful strategy. The lack of crisis accommodation in Frankston is a serious problem.

Many people in housing crisis refuse to live in commercial rooming houses. They prefer to sleep in their car, or in the bush, or at sporting ground shelters, or similar expose and risky locations. Most commercial Rooming Houses have a reputation among homeless people for being too expensive, unsafe, crowded and poorly managed by a non-resident manager. SHAC members have heard this many times from participants in various community-based crisis services we support and assist.

Two significant reports on this by local agencies have been "Open the Door - the Resident's View of Life in a Rooming House"ⁱ from the Peninsula Community Legal Centre (PCLC) Rooming House Outreach Program and the report on the "Frankston City Housing Forums and Roundtables 2022"ⁱⁱ from "Round Table Consultation" by Frankston Zero.

The use of commercial Rooming Houses as the default for Crisis Accommodation is widespread across Victoria, and growing. It was well documented in the Victorian Parliament's "Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria" 2021.ⁱⁱⁱ There are also many unregistered Rooming Houses operating, likely as many or more than the number registered. SHAC considers the emergence of commercial rooming houses in these numbers shows a systemic failure in Victoria's Homelessness response. This is an expensive policy blind spot, both financially and in human welfare terms. SHAC is keen to advocate that this needs urgent attention. The 1000's of people in housing crisis should not be expected to continue to sleep in their cars or in commercial Rooming Houses or rough sleeping situations until enough public or social housing becomes available to house them.

There are three Rooming Houses in Frankston run by WAYSS a not-for-profit housing agency based in Dandenong. The WAYSS Rooming Houses offer rooms at half the price, better rooms and a safer well-managed house. If WAYSS or any other Housing NGO's were interested to take on more Rooming Houses in Frankston that would be significant and helpful but SHAC has not heard of any movement toward that.

Adding all this together and the total number of people in Frankston and surrounds living in housing crisis would seem to be substantial, thousands in number. SHAC considers this is a crisis level situation, needing crisis perspective to formulate a better response. What SHAC has come to understand from extended years of communication with Agencies, with Frankston Council and with those who are in housing crisis situations is that there's more welfare support available but very little is happening with crisis housing.

The national debate around affordable housing has been well aired in recent years and much funding committed, but SHAC is concerned that advocacy and funding announcements for crisis accommodation has been largely absent apart from occasional support for women and children fleeing domestic violence. On the

occasions when we have raised this concern, we have been told that "the multi-story social housing blocks being planned and built around Melbourne will solve it; they will provide the crisis accommodation along with the transitional and longer term accommodation". SHAC acknowledges these blocks will suit some but we are concerned many in homelessness crisis in Frankston have moved on in their lives and many have life-skills not well suited to living in a multi-story apartment block and undertaking the tasks of looking after themselves and the apartment. Our proposal for Ballarto Rd proposes a simpler building format. The philosophy is focused toward safe, affordable accommodation with community support where residents have space to stabilize and sort out their next steps.

SHAC presented this proposal for the Ballarto Rd site to Frankston City Council at their meeting of 22 April 2024 and requested Council support for SHAC's call for the Ballarto Rd site to be assessed for its potential as a crisis accommodation facility. The Frankston City Council voted unanimously to support.^{iv}

THE VISION

On 13 May 2024, the Government Land Standing Advisory Committee (GLSAC) held a hearing to consider a rezoning proposal for the site as part of the preparations for sale. SHAC made a presentation saying the preparations for sale should be paused and the site assessed for its potential for Crisis Accommodation and other housing options. In late 2024, SHAC was notified by GLSAC that the application to rezone had been "withdrawn by the applicant" and we note the site is no longer on the list of properties being prepared for sale. SHAC is unaware of where the discussions within Government on the future of the site are up to but we are keen to say it is a great site for a Homelessness Facility and its potential for this should be fully explored. (SHAC's submission to the GLSAC hearing is attached.)

A seven-hectare site of unused government land is very rare in metropolitan Melbourne and SHAC strongly supports that the Government keep it and develop it. We note it is no longer on the governments listing of properties being prepared for sale. It is well located with a police station on one side and an SES facility on the other and rear boundary shared with a bushland reserve. There is a bus stop out the front and shops, medical clinics and schools nearby. It has many buildings which appear in good order and likely to be well suited to re-purposing for accommodation and associated services. The site in whole or in part could be a significant housing project with a range of housing options and housing support services.

There are extensive grass areas that could suit a cabin park. The cabin park service model has been shown to be extremely effective for this homeless and at-risk population at the nearby Seaford Beach Cabin Park (SBCP). The SBCP has shown itself to be a worthy example of a small facility of 70-80 units, constructed from portable modular units. The culture is that people will be treated with respect and they are expected to do the same in return. It has a well-liked and respected onsite manager 5.5 days a week; its cabins are sought after by local welfare services seeking accommodation for their clients. It operates with the strong support from the Council and the neighbouring community.

A combination of renovated buildings and cabin park could provide up to 200 units of accommodation. Accommodation that provides a safe space to which to retreat. An opportunity to get away from rooming houses where residents are often required to share bathrooms and kitchens. It could allow significantly healthier, financially responsible and well-managed experiences for homeless people than is currently on offer in Frankston and surrounding areas. It could be a resource that benefits a range of local communities where homelessness issues are occurring. It could be a shared hub with integrated, community-based services with peer workers providing pathways to permanent housing. It could have a community kitchen, gardens, a community bus etc.

SHAC has been speaking to this local need for some years and met with a wide range of interested parties: local government, Community-based groups, NGOs, Developers, Registered Housing Authorities, Cabin Park Owners as well as many residents in Rooming Houses, local community and people homeless sleeping in cars and sleeping rough. We are confident there is support and goodwill across that wide community and professional spectrum wanting to support action like this to alleviate the housing and homelessness stress apparent in Frankston.

REFERENCES

ⁱ Open the Door! The Resident's View of Life in a Rooming House. Peninsula Community Legal Centre (PCLC) Rooming House Outreach Program 2020:

<https://pclc.org.au/open-the-door-the-residents-view-of-life-in-a-rooming-house/>

ⁱⁱ Frankston City Housing Forum and Roundtables Frankston Zero 2022 Summary Report & Recommendations: The Final Report at https://www.melbournezero.org.au/frankston_zero

ⁱⁱⁱ Parliament of Victoria, Inquiry into Homelessness. Final Report, 2021 and Government Responses to Final Report, 2024:

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries/inquiry-into-homelessness-in-victoria/reports>

^{iv} Frankston City Council Open Meeting 22 April 2024 Minutes Item 11.4 42N Ballarto Rd Frankston North:

<https://www.frankston.vic.gov.au/Council/Council-and-committee-meetings/Past-Council-Meeting-Agendas-and-Minutes>