Pathways to planning

Ryan Thomas

I fell into planning – thankfully! I am thankful as it is a rewarding profession that satisfies my need for lifelong learning and helping to promote community wellbeing. It has provided me with opportunities I couldn’t have imagined in my youth. I have met Ministers, inspirational public servants, helped plan future port and rail development, written briefs and speaking notes for a premier, judged a PIA award, assisted planning some of our fastest growing communities, met young people passionate about improving the wellbeing of others and had some fancy dinners.

I fell into the planning profession through a passion for how cities impact on the environment. This lead to enrolling in RMIT’s Master of Social Science (Environment and also something called Planning) as it sounded like environmental studies with a focus on cities.

I hadn’t heard of planning and decided to immerse myself in planning subjects. I soon realised that all those debates I had growing up with my father and grandfather who worked at the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works prepared me well for planning studies and in my first year I received results all distinction or above.

Despite receiving good results, I struggled to find employment in the field. I was lucky to be selected in a career enabling opportunity through PIA’s Provincial Victoria Local Government Internship Program. I was placed in Moorabool Shire Council’s strategic and statutory planning teams for six weeks and thankfully two competent planners taught me how planning schemes operated and the planning scheme amendment process.

As a PIA Victorian Young Planner Committee member I have realised that PIA is an important capacity builder for young planners. The young planner events provide professional development and networks which at one recent event lead to a young planner finding employment. PIA has also commenced a mentoring program which I encourage to be continued.

After working in the field and conducting a small straw poll with some young planners I have found that falling into planning is not such a rare pathway. One pathway included signing up for what they thought was business planning! Most participants identified they came to the profession with a purpose. Reasons included promoting positive community legacies; having an appreciation of policy and the built and natural environments; providing good job opportunities; and an enjoyment of the computer game Sim City.

Whatever pathway, planning can be a rewarding career. My father and grandfather both can point to integral parts of our infrastructure legacy that they helped build. Recently, PIA’s Young Planning Committee was invited to discuss the future of our built form as part of Melbourne, Let’s talk about the future Discussion Paper. I enjoyed the discussions and felt that the Ministers Advisory Committee listened. Perhaps some of our suggestions will become part of our legacy too.

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approved the development but imposed conditions requiring changes to the internal layout of a number of the apartments and privacy screens.

Briers v Banyule CC [2012] VCAT 1287 – the Tribunal approved the removal of a 17 metre high Yellow Box Tree. The tree was located in the rear yard of the second dwelling in a dual occupancy development. The Tribunal held that this was a classic case of where development had been allowed to encroach far too close to an existing tree and there comes a point where there needs to be an acknowledgement that such a large tree could not comfortably co-exist with dwellings in such proximity.

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