

**Moreland** City Council

# 1998

## **Mayor's Speech**

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**Democracy and Accountability**



# 1998 Mayor's Speech

## Democracy and Accountability



**Councillor  
Anthony Helou JP**

Tonight Moreland has elected its first Mayor from a non-English speaking background – we are making history, and in doing so we are confirming our belief in Australian multiculturalism. We are giving life to our principles of inclusion and acceptance, we are saying that all Australians can live the Australian dream and achieve great things in the Australian community.

In accepting the responsibility that Councillors and the community have placed on me tonight, I am deeply conscious of both the contrasts and the shared interests between myself and the outgoing Mayor, Rod Higgins. Our different paths and common aspirations are typical of the diversity of Moreland.

Rod is a second-generation waterfront worker, raised in the nursery, if not the birthplace, of the modern Australian labour movement. Both of us now find ourselves under some assault – in Rod's case as a result of upholding the principle of the right to organise and to be a union member; in my case because of the fact that some parts of this country – built and enhanced by waves of migration are now rejecting this history. Our ties are further enriched because of the historical support given by waterside workers to refugees, and to international causes of freedom and justice. They knew they were workers in a global marketplace long before most of us came to this realisation.

Nearly thirty years ago, I came to this country from Lebanon, a nation with a proud history and civilisation. I came without my family, without a knowledge of English, with a great fear of the unknown. Now my family is here, my apprehensions have been conquered, and I am at home. I have become an Australian in my attitudes and my view of the world but in doing so I have not abandoned my traditions, my faith, or my customs. Over these thirty years, Australians too have largely overcome their fears of the unknown, we have embraced difference, and this country is striving to become an international model of cultural diversity. Nowadays, there are many aspects of the Middle Eastern way of life that are increasingly part of mainstream life in Australia.

### **A defining political issue: indigenous rights**

I am deeply aware of my own roots, my origins, and the journey that has taken me to this position at Moreland. But tonight I am also thinking of the story of the Australian nation as we redefine ourselves as a republic and as we prepare for the international spotlight in 2000. Not all our fears about the diversity of our heritage, our cultures and our beliefs have been overcome, and our greatest blindspot, the history and rights of Australia's indigenous peoples, will be a defining political issue this year.

Let me state unequivocally that Moreland will support the Native Title Indigenous Working Group in its efforts to reform the 10 point Wik plan, and we will actively assist local groups such as Defenders of Native Title in their campaign. Together we will develop a community program to highlight the importance of native title issues and to advance indigenous rights. We will sponsor an indigenous history of the Moreland area and develop a system of markers to identify sites of significance to the indigenous community.

### **The Moreland team**

Part of the Australian tradition is about teamwork, of everybody pitching in and playing their part in the club, in the neighbourhood, participating in the broader community. By and large we have rejected individualism, and the blind pursuit of wealth to the disadvantage of the broader community. As members of the government of Moreland, our approach over the past two years has attempted to reflect these values, to embody the ethos of teamwork, to encourage the active participation of residents in governing this municipality.

Joint community and council committees, working parties, and forums are now entrenched in the government of Moreland. Residents now rightly expect to be consulted and listened to as part of the decision-making process. Council's staff are highly sensitive to the need for consultation and for actions to be endorsed by Council as the government of Moreland.



As elected Councillors we have brought with us a culture of participation, of active citizenship, of enacting and implementing a program endorsed by electors, of accountability for actions, of responsibility for decisions. We have worked as a team of Councillors committed to a common program, and we have all contributed – taking responsibility for our wards, for particular portfolios and Council functions, and for special Council and community projects.

Our commitment to teamwork, to partnership, to democracy, occurs at a time when Australians are generally ambivalent, cynical or hostile towards the processes of government and to politicians. There is a cynical view abroad that our federal and state MPs have turned politics into a form of self-promotion, that appeasing corporate interests is more important than acting on the needs of citizens, that principles have been discarded in the quest for self-advancement, that the thirst to exploit travel allowances and credit cards is greater than the desire to advance the common good and the public interest.

We are particularly fortunate that Moreland's federal and state parliamentary representatives are dedicated and hard working. We have benefited from the open dialogue with our parliamentarians, and they have a good appreciation of the key role local governments play within Australian democracy and the Australian federation. We want to build this into broader and more effective intergovernmental cooperation and have a commitment to maintaining and extending Moreland's successful Elected Representatives Forum.

### **The position of local government**

Local governments have not been immune from this pervasive cynicism and disillusionment. The State Government has encouraged a shift in the balance of decision making and power away from elected representatives to unelected managers and officials, and from local communities to state and federal governments; we have seen the code words of efficiency and restructuring

used to justify a redistribution of services and resources away from the most needy to the more affluent.

Politicians from other spheres of government have used accusations of venality to undermine the authority of local governments, for example in attempts to legitimise the appointment of State Government Commissioners to oversee amalgamations in Victoria in the mid-1990s. Over the past two years a major goal in Moreland has been to democratise the corporate structures of government produced by these 'reforms', and to develop a system and style of accountable governance that truly meets the needs and aspirations of all of Moreland's residents and businesses. We have been assisted immensely by a dedicated Chief Executive Officer and staff team committed to the principles of good governance and local democratic practice.

### **Our major goal: policy implementation**

We have developed a wide ranging program of strategies, policies and plans to guide officers and the community about our priorities and approaches. Now we must focus particularly on implementation, on delivering the improvements we have planned and promised, on making a practical and valued contribution to raising the quality of life in Moreland. We have promised much but it has taken longer than expected in some areas for the results to be reflected in our community.

The whole Council is committed to ensuring that we complete the capital works program that has been announced, that we achieve the goals set for Council's Municipal Electrical Undertakings funds (MEU funds), that our policy initiatives are well resourced and translated into action. I feel that after two years, citizens acknowledge we are doing a good job in terms of caring for people, encouraging a diverse and tolerant community, and meeting many of the key community needs. But our own research shows that the community also expects an improved performance in terms of managing traffic, providing a clean environment, greening Moreland, and creating local employment and business opportunities.

We must now focus the considerable intellectual capacity and creativity of Councillors and officers on the task of implementation. We anticipate that over the next year Council's reliance on external policy development consultants will decline significantly, but there may be a corresponding emphasis on practical implementation assistance.

A major part of my speech tonight is devoted to how we will pursue the implementation agenda with a single-minded determination and resolve over the next year. Tonight we are not repeating our previous practice of presenting a comprehensive guide to commitments and initiatives; we are solidly focused on spelling out our most important priorities and ensuring that we will deliver.

Tonight I want to present to you:

- a brief review of community achievements in Moreland over the past twelve months
- the political context for this Mayoral year
- key priorities for action in the next year
- further details of initiatives that will be undertaken during my term as Mayor.

## The year in review: highlights in a year of achievement for Moreland's communities

### Municipal Electrical Undertaking funds (MEU funds)

In 1997, Council made the historic decision to reinvest the funds derived from the forced sale of the electricity businesses owned by the former Brunswick and Coburg local governments. The funds have been used to reinforce the financial security and stability of the municipality and to build services and programs of lasting benefit to the Moreland community.

In summary, Council has allocated these funds to:

- clearing outstanding debts and superannuation liabilities totalling \$17.5m. This action will enable Council to spend income on maintaining recurrent services and developing new capital programs rather than servicing these liabilities
- a \$4.5m rebuilding program for deteriorating roads, and footpaths
- creating the first local government energy conservation fund in Australia (\$5.5m)
- extending parks and purchasing new open space (\$3.7m)
- commencing the development of new centres for the arts, festivals and culture, and reinvigorating sporting and recreational facilities (\$4.7m)
- a social housing fund (\$1.5m) to address the decline of affordable housing
- consolidating Council's administrative functions on the Coburg site, developing a new citizens service centre at Fawkner, and attracting new community uses to the Brunswick municipal buildings (\$6m).

### Moreland's textile, clothing and footwear (TCF) sector

In March last year we made a commitment to protect thousands of jobs in Moreland's textile, clothing and footwear (TCF) sector: as a result we initiated a major campaign to oppose the recommendations of the Industry Commission. In partnership with employers, unions and other local governments we were successful in slowing the rate of tariff reduction and in achieving an adjustment package to assist the TCF industry. We are in the process of ensuring that our local businesses will benefit from this package. I would like to acknowledge the vigour with which Rod has tackled this task.

### Reconciliation issues

In 1997, we took a leadership role in local government on reconciliation issues, endorsing the need for Australians at all levels to recognise the destructive intentions and impact of the past state and commonwealth policy of stealing Aboriginal children from their parents. There was intense community debate over the appropriateness of Council's apology on behalf of the people of Moreland to the 'Stolen Generations'. This issue, combined with the campaign to recognise native title land rights will be a powerful political issue this year, and as I have already indicated, Council will support a fair outcome that keeps intact the native title rights of indigenous Australians.

### Moreland Plan

We consulted hundreds of residents and businesses as part of a thorough and continuing revision of the Moreland Planning Scheme. The result is a simpler planning framework that will help residents and developers to maintain the diversity of Moreland, improve our environmental sustainability, and help us to respond to future changes in population and employment patterns. Moreland Plan will help us to enhance our urban environment, control intrusive multi-unit developments, stabilise the employment base of Moreland, plan the development of community

infrastructure, and incorporate environmental issues into the assessment of planning proposals.

### Hoffman Brickworks

I really must highlight the work our local government has undertaken with regard to the Hoffman's site. The way we have tackled the Hoffman's site is typical of the Moreland approach. Council has seen an opportunity, has been prepared to engage the community in discussions, has brought in the relevant expertise to achieve the best result and has been prepared to back up its actions with dollars when it was clear that Council could ensure a good outcome.

Bricks from the claypits of Brunswick built much of Victorian Melbourne and the Hoffman's site is the last remnant of this once mighty industry. Protection of industrial heritage has not generally been seen as a priority in the past, but the Brunswick community has rallied around the Hoffman's site several times in the last decade.

Council has worked with the developer/owner, the Victorian Minister for Planning and Local Government, the Department of Infrastructure, the local community, Heritage Victoria, the National Trust and other interest groups to ensure an outcome on this site which protects heritage, which enhances the accessibility of the parklands, which supports urban consolidation on a critical site and which aims for an acceptable commercial use of the site. The consultation has been extensive and expensive, but the result has been broad ownership of development plans. Success has been dependent upon Council's readiness to commit funds on a commercial basis to the redevelopment of one of the kilns. The challenge for Council now is to see this project through, to ensure that the principles and plans developed are actually implemented.



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### Multicultural Development Policy

One of the highlights of 1997 was the launch in February of Moreland's Multicultural Development Policy. Extensive review and consultation led to the preparation of the policy which had the prime purpose of improving access and equity for people from non-English speaking backgrounds in relation to services, communication, relationships with the local government of Moreland and positive community relations within Moreland.

Surveys, focus groups, internal analysis of Council's policies and practices and discussion were used to generate new policy and ensure that your local government genuinely embraced all of its cultural groupings. Council has since undertaken many initiatives to celebrate the ethnic, linguistic and faith diversity within the municipality. The key to effectiveness is improved communication and during this next mayoral year I will meet with as many community and cultural groups as I can, Council will more actively reach out to ethnic media outlets, and I will work with project Councillor Mike Hill to bring groups together to continue discussions about issues of concern to the whole community.

### Moreland's community festivals

A week after the Brunswick Music Festival and Sydney Road Street party, the importance of community festivals to the social, artistic, and civic life of Moreland does not need to be reinforced. Indeed, the number of festivals and the consequent demands for space, facilities, and resources are significant issues for Council.

Communities rightly expect that local governments will actively assist them to celebrate their identity, their culture, and their particular traditions. In Moreland, there are more than 20 community festivals, and Council took an important step last year when it adopted the Moreland Festivals Policy. We will continue to facilitate and sponsor festivals, recognising that festivals draw their strength by being rooted in particular communities; most significantly,

Council will construct a permanent, purpose-designed space for community festivals. Later in this speech I will announce Council's preferred site for this space.

### CERES

CERES (Centre for Educational and Research into Environmental Strategies) can now put its relationship with Council on a business-like footing after years of *ad hoc* growth and funding uncertainty and irregular support from local, state and federal governments. Council is working with the CERES committee to establish long-term goals, site plans, and realistic staged programs for the funding of these plans. This work is predicated upon Moreland's recognition that CERES is one of Moreland's special treasures. CERES symbolises the Moreland community's environmental awareness. CERES will remain a statement of how a degraded site and waterway, an industrial drain and backwater, can be recycled to advantage – to become a heavily used community asset extolling the virtues of community, environmentalism, education and art. Along with other colleagues I intend to maintain a particular interest in the CERES project and the implementation of the masterplan.

### Other significant achievements

These have included:

- holding the first local government constitutional convention in Australian history
- implementing the landscape plans for Moomba Park in Fawkner, which include the cultivation of a she-oak forest, and Jones Park in East Brunswick
- successful conclusion of the Optus litigation with Council with the establishment of a Cables Undergrounding Fund
- adopting a retail car parking strategy to improve access for local businesses while protecting the interests of residents
- continued reduction in the amount of waste going to land fill and an increase in the amount of material being recycled.

### Key issues in the year ahead

The 1996 census has produced an intriguing snapshot of the outstanding needs and trends of the municipality. Some of the key findings are:

- Moreland has an ageing community, with more than 15% of the population aged over 65
- of all of the municipalities in Victoria, Moreland has the 5th highest proportion of persons born in a non-English speaking country of birth, 32% of our total population
- high unemployment – particularly as a result of employment losses in Moreland's traditional industries – has contributed to extremely low incomes for Moreland residents. Moreland's adults are most likely to earn less than \$200 per week; over 75% earn less than \$26,000 per year
- many of the area's low income earners are fully or partly reliant upon welfare: more than 50% of families in Moreland are either dependent on welfare or are classed as the 'working poor', surviving on a combination of very low wages and government benefits
- Moreland has a high level of home ownership, 78% of dwellings are privately owned or being privately purchased. However, for many home buyers, home loans would be a substantial burden. Median monthly housing repayments have increased by more than 33% over the past five years.

### **Funding injustices**

The resources available to meet these needs are constrained by a series of funding injustices, with the people of the northern suburbs contributing heavily to the taxes and charges imposed by other spheres of government, but not receiving anything like an adequate return by way of services and investment in community infrastructure. Moreland and neighbouring municipalities are vulnerable to an 'inverse Robin Hood syndrome' with our residents' funds being redistributed to the eastern suburbs and the rural sector.

A wide range of examples illustrate the injustices imposed on our community:

- the introduction of tolls to use the existing Tullamarine freeway infrastructure, which has already been paid for by the public purse
- environmental spending from the sale of Telstra used to assist the bush (and Coalition Government electorates) while the degradation of the urban environment is ignored
- the use of Parks Victoria parkland levies on our water rates to subsidise the redevelopment of Albert Park while our parks and creeklands are starved of resources.

And then there is the scandal of the State Government's use of gambling to tax the low paid of the north through the distribution of electronic gambling machines. Last year Moreland's electronic gambling machines raised \$14m in State Government taxes and contributed a further \$2.5m to the Community Support Fund; by contrast, machines in Boroondara raised less than \$5m in taxes and contributed less than \$1m to the Community Support Fund. Yet there are limited gambling support services located in Moreland and no Moreland-based projects have received funding from the Community Support Fund. Gambling is a heavy impost draining resources from our community while leaving some significant human scars; it is in effect a regressive tax on communities like Moreland.

### **Rates impact in 1998**

In 1997, a number of the strictures imposed by the State Government's rate cap were lifted. Council is mindful of the need for continued responsible financial management and the limited capacity of many of our residents and businesses to meet any rate increase. However, Council is anticipating that a slight lift in rates will occur in the next financial year. We are facing continuing cost pressures, such as the forthcoming enterprise bargain and other increasing costs of providing services, and a decline in revenue, such as reduced funding of services from other spheres of government and a reduction of \$900,000 in our budgeted estimate of untied grants from the Commonwealth Government. Without a slight lift in rates it is highly likely that core services in road maintenance, human services, and parks would be cut. Like most communities across Victoria, this community will not wear further attrition of service levels. One major downside of the municipal restructuring has been the loss of services and the threat to basic infrastructure.

### **New enterprise bargain**

The negotiations for a new enterprise bargain are likely to be resolved in the next few months. Work on the proposed agreement has been a collaborative exercise between unions and management. Council trusts the process will be concluded without industrial disputation, and welcomes the positive approach of both management and unions.

### **Municipal Association of Victoria membership**

Moreland is proud to be the foundation local government member of the Victorian Local Governance Association. But we have noted that the character of the Municipal Association of Victoria has changed substantially over the past year, in no small part due to a focused and effective VLGA. The development of the Code of Good Governance, for example, highlights the new spirit of cooperation between the two bodies. We will continue to be a member of the VLGA, but we have also taken the

decision in principle to rejoin the MAV providing the two organisations sign a satisfactory working arrangement.

### **The future of Darebin**

We look across our Merri Creek border and decry the lack of democracy in Darebin. The presence of the State Government appointed Commissioner is a stark reminder of the recent dark days when local democracy was suspended across the state. The Minister should not split the municipality and he should restore the elected Council immediately. As Councillors we will not participate in any discussions with the government about the possible partition of Darebin, and further change must not occur simply at the whim of a Minister.

### **Approaching Council elections**

Council has adopted a three year program of reform and policy renovation and we are nearing the end of our first term based on that platform. I am mindful that there are a number of aspects of the platform that still need to be completed; but we will not be compromised by our awareness of the forthcoming 1999 Council election. We will not unnecessarily delay decisions because of the approaching election.



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## The year ahead: key priorities for 1998-99

### Greening Moreland

Extending Moreland's parks, purchasing land for conversion to open space, and encouraging stimulating areas for passive recreation have been major priorities of Council. Our commitment to develop a network of parks and open spaces stems from our desire to promote biodiversity, to help reduce the greenhouse effect, and to provide safe public spaces for community interaction; in short, to develop Moreland as an environmentally sustainable city.

We will continue to actively pursue opportunities to acquire sites where the Moreland Open Space Strategy has identified a deficiency in public open space. A relevant example is our recent decision to purchase four residential blocks on the former Oak Park High School site to achieve a significant improvement in open space for that new subdivision.

Significant parts of the municipality reflect the harsh urban environment characteristic of a large metropolis. Many of our streets and neighbourhoods and our major arterial roads need to be softened and humanised, they need to be treed and greened.

Following Council's recent adoption of a comprehensive street landscaping strategy, I am announcing tonight that Council will spend \$1m over the next three years on street landscaping improvements in residential streets, key avenues and intersections throughout Moreland. One important priority will be to develop a significant and distinctive treatment of the northern gateway to Moreland at the intersection of the Western Ring Road and Sydney Road in Fawkner.

Monies for this project will come primarily from a redirection of unspent funds in the recurrent capital budget presently earmarked for open space purchases, and a redirection of \$160,000 from the MEU monies dedicated to open space purchases. This will lead to one of the biggest and most

extensive landscaping projects undertaken by a local government in Melbourne and will result in a real and tangible improvement in the look and feel of our neighbourhoods. Importantly, the planting program will use local native plants, shrubs and trees wherever possible. Our best estimate is that this commitment will lead to an additional new planting of about 3000 trees in the next three year period.

### City Link and Moonee Ponds Creek

Greening the streets of Moreland becomes even more urgent because of the ugly scar created by City Link and the environmental vandalism associated with its treatment of Moonee Ponds Creek. Rather than being a beautiful gateway to Melbourne and returning the Moonee Ponds Creek to its natural environment as promised by Laurie Cox, the Chairman of Transurban, this project is ensuring that the Moonee Ponds Creek remains a concrete drain. There has been little care or concern for the rights of residents, and precious little thought about its impact on visitors to Melbourne. The noise walls being constructed are appalling; they are no substitute for the quality engineering solutions provided for the freeway extensions in Melbourne's eastern suburbs. The government and the freeway owners have put the pursuit of profit above any other priority.

To date, our efforts to achieve better outcomes have not resulted in any significant change of plans by Transurban or the Melbourne City Link Authority. Council has already committed half a million dollars to the improvement of the Moonee Ponds creek environment. Within the next few months Council will commence a series of pilot projects along the few remaining green parts of the creek in order to demonstrate that a naturalisation plan is feasible and desirable. These projects will be used to demonstrate how productive a careful financial investment in the creek environment can be and will serve to demonstrate the wider benefits which could be achieved through an appropriate contribution from the State Government.

We hope that the establishment last month of a local government and community coordinating committee for the creek will yield the same positive results that the Merri Creek Management Committee has produced for the Merri. The Moonee Ponds coordinating committee will have responsibility for the whole of the creek valley including all the areas north of Bell Street.

We recently presented a \$1.2m claim to City Link for compensation for open space lost during the construction of the freeway. We will devote all compensation paid by the City Link Project to mitigating the damage done to Moreland by City Link.

It is clear that Moreland's streets will be used by motorists seeking to avoid City Link tolls. It is in the mutual interests of Transurban and Council to ensure that traffic uses the freeway rather than Moreland's arterial roads and residential streets. We will be insisting that Transurban make a significant and continuing contribution to traffic calming measures in Pascoe Vale, West Coburg and West Brunswick to minimise the impact of the expanded freeway. To discourage the use of Sydney Road as a major arterial alternative to City Link we will be insisting that VicRoads downgrades the status of Sydney Road before the Western City Link is opened.

We are already mounting a major education and information campaign to alert our residents to the broken promises and limited vision demonstrated in the City Link project to date.

### Pentridge redevelopment

A cooperative and positive working relationship with the State Government has evolved over the redevelopment of Pentridge. We are working collaboratively with the Victorian Government Property Group on land use and urban design issues and the result of this work will become evident in the next few months. Thousands of residents have been through the decommissioned complex over the past year, and we are anxious to hear the community's views about the future of the site.

At the next meeting of Council on 23 March, I will be moving that Council establish a steering committee to oversee Moreland's input into the planning process. The vision we have developed for the site includes:

- ensuring that the national heritage significance of this site is appropriately recognised
- the possibility of attracting a major educational facility that will enrich education and learning opportunities in the northern suburbs, or a major cultural institution that will help to establish the municipality as a leading centre for the arts in Melbourne
- a business incubator that will nurture the creation of new jobs in industries such as energy conservation, information technology, communications, and tourism
- a model residential housing development that sets standards of excellence in design and energy conservation, and helps to meet the demand for affordable housing in Melbourne's northern suburbs
- strengthening the community infrastructure especially Moreland City College, community welfare organisations and Council's leisure facilities
- improving public transport links and designing a more rational traffic management system
- attracting new and additional business investment to provide jobs and support the long term health of the local economy.

#### Next steps in community planning

In the two years I have chaired Council's Approvals and Traffic Committee I have been struck by the widespread community concern about the pace of multi-unit development and the perceived threat to neighbourhood character posed by these planning applications. These concerns were also evident during the formulation of Moreland Plan, and have found expression in community movements such as Save Our Suburbs. It is clear that residents expect local governments to have more discretion in considering multi-unit developments and

to apply tougher tests on developers than those outlined in the State Government's Good Design Guide.

#### During the coming year, Council will:

- have particular regard to the impact of all developments in the municipality on community amenity and urban character
- rigorously enforce the site analysis and neighbourhood character tests for multi-unit development applications
- institute a program to encourage multi-unit applicants to use architects in the design of projects
- examine how the Moreland Planning Scheme can be used to negotiate more affordable housing developments
- encourage a mediation process where serious conflict arises between applicants and objectors
- conduct a major education and information program about rights under the Victorian Planning Provisions; Moreland Plan; and Council's approach to multi-unit development
- conduct an internal program to identify best practices in multi-unit development
- encourage better standards of design by establishing awards for energy efficiency, affordability, and design excellence in residential housing and commercial buildings
- campaign with other local governments and peak bodies to restrict discretionary Ministerial intervention in planning matters.

#### The future of Moreland human services

In the 1996 Mayor's Speech, Council committed itself to 'being a key provider of community services throughout the municipality.' Council is a major provider and funder of human services, spending more than \$14m in this area in the current financial year. The introduction of a purchaser/provider split by state and federal governments for human services programs, allied with the substantial cuts to core services in child care, aged care and youth services, has raised questions about whether

Council can realistically maintain its 1996 commitment. In the aged care area, for example, the inability of funds to keep pace with the demand for home care services means that more than 100 Moreland residents are waiting up to eight months to receive this service and more than 60 residents wait up to four months to receive home maintenance services.

Councillors are now analysing one of the most important reports made to us in the past two years. The Human Services Impact Statement prepared by Hayden Raysmith, challenges Council to define a new role for local government given the magnitude of change in the human services field over the past few years. It is worth quoting from the report at length:

*Targeting to those in greatest need has been a mechanism for limiting governments' responsibility, redistributing resources from high need areas to very high need areas, and increasing specialisation and fragmentation...*

*Priorities are determined by market forces through the purchase of services. More and more human service activities are being forced into the market framework and the private economy...*

*governments' role in community development, social cohesion and citizen participation is not part of the new framework...*

*the new paradigm...has dealt harshly with dissent, discredited those who have expressed doubt or been critical...*

*it has denied historical experience ...*

*language is used to disempower the citizen, weaken democracy and reinforce a centralised corporatist model.*

The report highlights the extent to which, as service providers, local governments such as Moreland are vulnerable to cost shifting in human services, especially in youth and family services and care of the aged. Our community is increasingly paying for services and care that should be essentially provided and funded by other spheres of government.

We will work through the implications of this report over the next six months, and our response will influence the policy proposals we take to the 1999 Council elections. We will actively explore greater regional local government cooperation, regional service integration, and regional service purchasing as a means of ensuring Moreland's continuing influence over the nature and funding of human services. We will focus on those services that are best provided at the local community level and we will ensure appropriate integration of services at the regional level through cooperation, collaboration and formal alliances amongst local governments and local agencies.

Beginning this year we will produce half yearly statements of social and economic well being in Moreland relying on Australian Bureau of Statistics data and other indicators of social health. We will provide regular updates on a range of issues including:

- housing costs
- school retention rates
- employment and unemployment
- income
- higher education participation
- health, morbidity and mortality.

The statements will be developed in conjunction with the Centre for Urban and Social Research at Swinburne University and we hope they will become valuable tools in attracting funding support and services to Moreland.

### **Empowering Moreland's young people**

Major issues confront youth in our city and across the nation. Employment, training, housing, drugs of dependence, leisure, recreation, culture, sport, adequate income and social support and advocacy are all issues which Council seeks to address in partnership with other spheres of government and the community. Funding for youth support services in Moreland has been severely cut by the State Government over the past year, despite strong representations by the Local Government of Moreland to the Victorian Minister responsible for Youth and Family Services.

Special consultations with young people will also be organised in the lead up to the preparation of the 1998-99 Council budget. We will also make special efforts to involve young people in the governance of Moreland through Internet events and by producing a youth issue of *Moreland City News* this year.

An active group of young people in Moreland has been nurtured over the past year and they are organising a youth summit planned for mid-1998. The summit will be a major effort to bring together young people, Councillors, employers and educators to examine the issues that are excluding and disadvantaging Moreland's young people.

### **Employment and business development**

The chronic unemployment difficulties experienced in the Moreland community demand a fair, far reaching, and creative response from local government. The TCF campaign demonstrated how influential local governments can be in terms of local economic issues. With the emergence of a new and highly competitive market in the provision of employment placement services, we have an opportunity to think seriously about the role we can play in facilitating employment creation in Moreland. We will bring together leading practitioners, brokers, employers, and service agencies to help us develop a strategic role in this task.

Sydney Road will be the focus of considerable effort in the coming year as more than a dozen current and proposed projects are advanced to give renewed energy and activity along one of Melbourne's great retail strips. At its next meeting, Council will establish a new implementation working group to bring these projects to fruition.

In coming weeks, work will commence on realising the Glenroy Place vision as Council, in partnership with traders and the local community, attempts to ensure the continued viability and commercial success of the Glenroy shopping area.

### **Energy conservation fund**

Council has nearly completed a feasibility study examining options for the proposed energy conservation trust. The purposes of the trust will be to:

- promote energy conservation in Moreland
- conduct community-based research
- negotiate better energy outcomes for local businesses and residents
- establish Moreland as a national centre for green industries.

The feasibility study has highlighted the complexity of establishing trust arrangements under the existing Local Government Act and these issues must be resolved during the remainder of this year. A threshold decision relates to how Council can balance the need for the trust to act effectively with some independence while ensuring appropriate accountability to Council.

### **Social housing fund**

The legal and accountability issues related to the energy conservation fund will have an impact on the scope and capacity of the proposed social housing fund. As soon as these issues have been resolved, work will begin on the feasibility and implementation of our social housing fund commitment. In the meantime we will:

- examine how the Moreland Planning Scheme can be used to negotiate more affordable housing opportunities
- identify opportunities for joint venture relationships in affordable housing
- examine Council's asset register to identify opportunities to promote affordable housing
- continue to support the shop top housing program with financial, architectural and planning support.

## Implementation of the Moreland Leisure Plan

In 1997, Council adopted the Moreland Leisure Plan and allocated \$4.7m to the upgrade of deteriorating recreation and sporting facilities, and the establishment of new arts and cultural facilities.

Tenders for Art in Public Places projects at six key locations in Moreland have been called. Work has commenced on renovating the change facilities at the Brunswick Baths, resurfacing of the Harold Stevens Athletic Track, and renovating the C.B. Smith Reserve pavilion in Fawkner. Extensions to the gymnasium at the Coburg Leisure Centre, and improvements to pavilions or playing surfaces at ten sports grounds, including the City Oval in Coburg and the Raeburn Reserve in Brunswick, have been funded.

Council will not close the Pascoe Vale Pool. Instead we have allocated \$40,000 towards its immediate upgrade. Swimming and water play facilities at the Coburg Leisure Centre will be enhanced. All communities in Moreland face ageing community infrastructure, with facilities in Pascoe Vale particularly rundown. Council has an opportunity to collocate services and facilities on one accessible and modern site in Pascoe Vale; we are still considering a suitable location. Work will commence in the coming financial year on consolidating tennis facilities into one centre of regional significance and returning redundant courts to open space and parkland.

MEU funds will seed a new neighbourhood house and community centre in Glenroy or Fawkner and a recommendation on the location and scope of the new centre will be made to Council in the next two months. However, the final shape of the project will be influenced by the outcomes of the current State Government review of the neighbourhood house program.

Council has made a considerable financial investment to save one kiln at the Hoffman Brickworks site, and we are committed to ensuring that other community benefits flow from this important investment. Council believes the site has the capacity to attract a

major cultural or arts institution that will help cement Moreland's place on the cultural map of Melbourne.

Council is kickstarting the development of the proposed arts precinct in Brunswick through the upgrade of key facilities. At this stage our preferred position is:

- redevelopment of the Mechanics Institute in Glenlyon Road as a community theatre and performing arts space
- provision of a quality art gallery and exhibition space in the vicinity of Brunswick Town Hall
- development of parts of Clifton Park as a permanent community festival site.

Combined with public art projects and new capital works for Sydney Road, these proposals will give the arts precinct concept the momentum it needs.

### Council services and the redevelopment of Moreland's civic centres

Incorporating extensive community consultation, Council has developed plans to consolidate its administrative offices at the Coburg site, and to provide integrated service points in Brunswick, Glenroy and Fawkner. This will result in greater administrative efficiency, improve Council's service provision, and enhance our strategic planning role.

Council needs a central seat of government and for this centre to become a focus of civic, social and political activity for the entire community.

Coburg is the best place to centralise a number of Council's administrative functions because of its accessibility from many parts of the municipality, and its proximity to public transport. The existing offices will be retained and new infill buildings added, in this way preserving the historical and cultural values of the site. Rebuilding on the Coburg site will commence in the next few weeks; during the construction period a number of Council services will be provided from an alternative site in Sydney Road, Coburg.

The style and form of the building, its work spaces, public spaces, galleries, and meeting

areas will reflect Moreland's cultural diversity and artistic and craft talents. Our goal is not just to create a modern and efficient office environment but to infuse Council's central place of governance with the arts and culture of the Moreland community. As an example of this, I have arranged for a seedling from the ancient cedar forests of Lebanon to be planted at the commencement of building works at Coburg. This gesture will help to symbolise the links between Council and the diversity of cultures in the municipality.

In Brunswick, the Council's presence will be maintained. A new and more accessible Council Chamber will be built, a service centre and other community facilities provided as well as a continued community focus for the Town Hall, Atrium and Library. Council intends to sell the John Curtin Building in Dawson Street to provide funds and to redevelop the Brunswick offices for Council and community purposes. The loss of the Curtin building will be compensated for by developing new community and arts uses for the remaining office and public space facilities in Brunswick.

Crucially the project includes the development of a much needed Council service centre for the Fawkner community. This should be operational by the end of this calendar year.

## **Further 1998-99 commitments and initiatives**

### **Internet access**

Council recognises the importance of the rapid emergence of the information economy. It is now more important than ever for our citizens – especially our youth – to come to terms with information technology. The effects of the information revolution cannot be ignored. Council has supported the establishment of 'Virtual Moreland' – a group committed to linking local and overseas Internet sites to promote the local community and to provide tuition in the use of the new technology to individuals, schools and businesses in Moreland. Council has also established an Internet site as a gateway to the changes and challenges that we face in this area ([www.moreland.vic.gov.au](http://www.moreland.vic.gov.au)).

Council will embrace information technology as a means of improving services and information to the wider community, and also for optimising the performance of the Council organisation. This speech – for example – was made possible by accessing the contributions of the various contributors through electronic mail and will be available through Council's home page. We look forward to future availability of Council agendas, minutes and other information on the Internet site, and to the potential of some live transmission of Council meetings and public meetings over the Internet.

### **TV Moreland?**

Whilst Council preferred undergrounding, and therefore objected stridently to the ugliness of overhead cables and the wasteful stupidity of laying two sets of cables, Council recognises the benefits of superior communications technology. Some cable TV operators are developing innovative local cable television opportunities, and over the next twelve months, Council will assess the exciting prospect of local cable TV as a means of improving the use of community facilities and reinforcing community interaction and participation.

### **Review of Council meetings**

During the year, Council will give serious consideration as to how to improve public awareness of Council meetings and our decision-making processes. We will review how we publicise meetings and convey the results of the Council process. We will improve our communication effort to ensure that interested parties are aware of relevant Council meetings and of the opportunities for participation and debate.

### **Moreland gambling policy**

Moreland will lead the way in trying to create order out of the mess left to us by the State Government's flooding of the northern and western suburbs with electronic gambling machines. For the past twelve months, Moreland has had its own moratorium on the introduction of further Electronic Gambling Machines. Following the impressive study undertaken by the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority which clearly shows that the community requires management of this plague, Moreland will work with venue operators, community groups and support agencies to develop a Responsible Gambling Strategy. The strategy must be portable so that other communities can work up compatible approaches.

### **Women's summit**

The Moreland Women's Summit being held on 3 May 1998 will bring together women from a wide variety of backgrounds, ages and communities to consider key issues affecting women, including:

- health issues
- ageing
- economic independence
- family and children's services
- political involvement and representation.

This important event will provide Council with an informed and powerful perspective from women on the policy and governance issues facing Moreland.

### **Transport privatisation**

Privatisation of the public transport system has the very real potential to weaken and fragment coordination of this important social and environmental resource. Moreland will use the best means at its disposal to achieve local and regional coordination of the system and to ensure unnecessary reliance on motor vehicle transport is minimised. This can best be achieved through sensible planning that is informed by local knowledge and local solutions.

### **Moreland public health plan**

Comprehensive analysis and policy development addressing the health needs of the community will be undertaken in 1998 as part of the review of the Municipal Public Health Plan which is in progress. In the coming year, Council will seek to consult the community on a range of issues identified by the health needs analysis and to develop a Healthy City Charter. A new Health Plan will be launched in July.

### **Agenda for action on drug and alcohol issues**

Reducing drug use and abuse, and minimising the personal and social harm it causes, is one of the great challenges confronting society as we move toward the 21st Century. At the first meeting for 1998, Council adopted an action plan developed by the Drug and Alcohol Working Party. The *Agenda for Action on Drug and Alcohol Issues* in Moreland 1998 is a framework for Council to develop policy and initiate actions around local priority issues which includes enhancing services, community education, health promotion and syringe disposal. Implementation of the action plan will include the development of an issues profile on which a series of public information sessions will be held throughout the year.

The *Agenda* is framed within the principles of harm minimisation and identifies three priorities for action:

- undertake research and planning to inform the development of drug and alcohol strategies and services in Moreland, including service mapping and development of a drug issues profile for Council's consideration
- promote community understanding and knowledge and encourage informed debate on drug and alcohol issues in Moreland
- enhance and extend existing systems, drawing on the resources and expertise from agencies and community partners.

### **Community safety and injury prevention**

Moreland is developing a comprehensive community safety program with the support of VicHealth and the Department of Human Services. In 1998, the program will begin implementing a series of priority initiatives to reduce injuries among children and older residents. The program will look particularly at home settings and sporting environments and work with residents, service providers and community organisations to reduce the incidence and risk of unintentional injury. Moreland's community safety approach will also address crime and violence in the city and Council is seeking the support of the Victorian Justice Department through its Safer Cities and Shires program to develop a Community Safety Plan.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, I give you an undertaking to continue the first class work of the Council and its administration over the past two years. The program mapped out tonight indicates that we will continue to move ahead, that we will ensure that our platform is implemented, that we will continue to provide innovative and community-based leadership in local government. We will not surrender to the temptation of stagnation in an electoral year.

Our priorities are not driven by the desire for electoral success, but by our desire to do the best for the citizens of Moreland. Sometimes there are difficult decisions to be made and these issues will not be shirked for short term electoral gain.

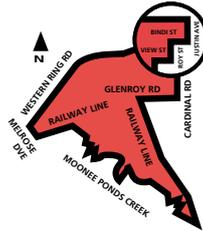
Finally, let me issue this challenge to you the residents and business people of Moreland: get involved in your local government, take part in the processes of consultation and Council meetings, have a strong voice, and make it heard. Together we can do great things for this community and the City of Moreland.

# Councillors – Elected March 1996 for three years



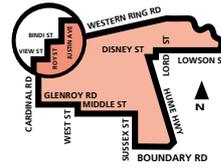
Rosemary Kerr

## Grandview Ward



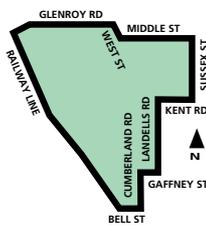
Tony Abela

## Box Forest Ward



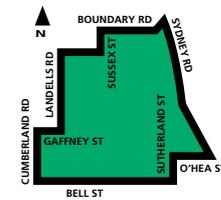
Geoff Lutz

## Westbreen Ward



Rod Higgins

## Lincoln Mills Ward



Chris Iliopoulos

## Glencairn Ward



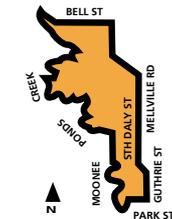
Stella Kariofyllidis

## Newlands Ward



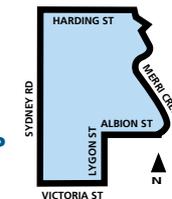
Andrew Rowe

## Moonah Ward



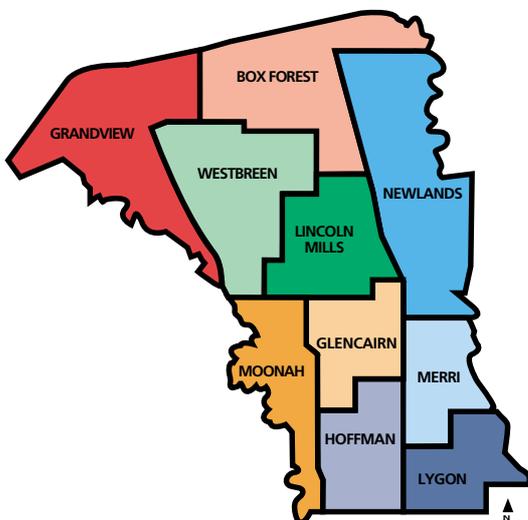
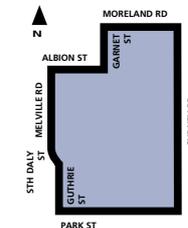
Anthony Helou (Mayor)

## Merri Ward



Mike Hill

## Hoffman Ward



Glenyys Romanes

## Lygon Ward





