

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2006

### Introduction



It is with great pleasure that I report to you on the past year of the Women's Planning Network.

Our past 12 months have been challenging and very rewarding. The commissioning of the Research Project into the accessibility of affordable housing for women has been a great achievement.

The past year, like previous years, has offered the WPN challenges and opportunities. I am proud to say that each one has been met with a level of passion and commitment that has ensured that whatever it was, it was done with gusto, sorted out with ease or at least.... enjoyed over a glass of wine!!

2005/2006 saw the WPN comfortable and at home in the PIA offices in the Green Building. That arrangement led to some great synergies and opportunities throughout the year. We remain committed to this arrangement.

I consider our key achievements and highlights to be:

1. Engaging Beca Planning to carry out the Research Project
2. Travelling overseas to promote the Women's Planning Network and to contribute, at a London conference, an Australian perspective on housing affordability for women.
3. Holding successful events over the year, which have been informative and challenging and have not only provided networking opportunities for members but have also assisted in enhancing the network's profile.
4. The establishment of the WPN 'Rising Star' scholarship, to be available to third year university students.

To satisfy our own creative urges and quest for knowledge, we have again experimented with a range of events, with the goal of maximizing accessibility for our members, whilst keeping in mind what other networking groups are running, school holidays, inclement weather, work loads and speaker availability. It has been no mean

feat but we have managed to put on an array of events, which the committee hopes you have all thoroughly enjoyed.

To briefly recap:

- November** The Planning Week breakfast, which was held at the beautiful Observatory Café at The Botanic Gardens, with a stimulating presentation by Stephanie Knox on her time in Switzerland at the Walk21 international walking conference.
- December** Christmas Cocktails and Mentoring Program Awards Ceremony at The Phoenix Hotel.
- March** Our annual International Women's Day breakfast, held at Aquum in North Melbourne.
- April** An Urban Design walk of Port Melbourne, led by Cr Janet Bolitho (Mayor of the City of Port Phillip) and Jim Holdsworth (former Manager, Design at the City of Port Phillip and now of Planning Collaborative).
- May** We held a 'work / life balance' discussion at the North Fitzroy Star hotel. Debate and discussion focused on the quotable quote "you can have what you want, just not all at the same time".
- June** We had 3 Committee members in London, speaking at the London Women and Planning Forum, providing an overview of the WPN's current Research Project.
- August** A 'slide and cocktail' hour at Loop Bar, for a post-conference discussion on the Research Project and Lecki, Melinda and Bronwen's London experiences. Followed by a stimulating international discourse and debate about the issues affecting our societies.

## **The Committee**

The 2005/2006 committee started out its year comprising of:

- Melinda Wealands as Vice President
- Cindy Bedgood as Administration Assistant until April of this year and Ruth Miller as book keeper. Cindy was replaced by Jode Cowie in May of this year and Jode has also taken over Ruth's book keeping responsibilities.
- Lecki Ord as Treasurer;
- Natalia Walker, Denise Payne, Shannon Lea, Gilda Di Vincenzo and Bron Hamilton as committee members, with Claire Merlo joining the committee in May;
- And myself as President.

New members to this year's committee were Gilda Di Vincenzo and Claire Merlo; we farewelled Natalia Walker who has recently given birth to a son, Max and we also temporarily farewelled Shannon, who gave birth to her daughter Sophie. Shannon is experimenting with approaches to her work / life balance and has remained part of the committee since Sophie's birth. While we appreciate that nothing is forever, we hope that this arrangement remains workable for Shannon into the future.

As a committee I feel we have brought together a broad range of skills, knowledge and ideas, as well as a huge amount of enthusiasm and a desire to do things and to offer great events and information to the WPN's members.

It is not always easy to find the time to attend meetings, make phone calls, meet with potential speakers and basically add more things to over-capacity 'to do' lists – perhaps more so this year with the Research Project requiring attention from time to time.

I do feel though that the combination of the committee members and our excellent administration staff has ensured the WPN continues to operate as a well-oiled, albeit, little, machine.

In acknowledging and thanking the committee members, I would like to briefly mention their special contributions, which were made over and above the typical monthly activities and which may not be apparent to our wider member group:

**Lecki** has been instrumental in keeping the books balanced and in forging the beginnings of what we hope will be a new and improved relationship with the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

**Denise** has continued her involvement in the Research Project and has become our 'editor in chief' of information we produce.

**Melinda** has been the vanguard of design and execution when it has come to the production of Vantage.

**Natalia**, while still on the committee, was tireless in her work on the Research Project sub-committee.

**Shannon** has been involved with the organisation of events, including the all-important job of taking the photos, as well as contributing to the reviews of the Research Project documents.

**Gilda** has been instrumental in the design and on-going development of the WPN's new website.

**Claire** has brought new ideas and enthusiasm to the committee and brings opportunities for new linkages with other planning and environmental groups and organisations.

And finally, **Bron** on top of being our networking guru, has lead the WPN's review and responses to the Research Project, ensuring that the project has developed and progressed in ways that the WPN wants it to.

I commend the committee for all of their work and for supporting me as the President.

## **Administration**

As I have already outlined, we have undergone some further change with respect to our administration assistance. Jode has already proven herself to be invaluable to the Network and we are very happy that she will now undertake administrative and book keeping tasks.

Like Cindy and Lucy before her, Jode is employed by PIA and the WPN purchases her time from that organisation. We feel it is a cost and time-effective way of managing the human resource aspects of employing an assistant.

We are about to meet with Stuart Worn, PIA's new State Manager and we are looking forward to establishing a good relationship with him, both to explore opportunities for events and programs run by WPN and PIA jointly but also to ensure that our administration arrangements work well for all involved.

## **Communications**

The WPN's communications tend to be last minute productions and we often find ourselves wishing for longer lead times and 'more hands on deck' to help with production. We know this is the nature of a voluntary organization and we are proud of what we have achieved this year:

### ***Vantage***

The key change to Vantage has been its transformation to an e-mag. The feedback on this change has been positive – it means you can read it on screen and keep it in an email folder for future reference.

We have managed to produce 4 issues of Vantage over the past 12 months, which means we achieved our production goal. We hope you have enjoyed reading them and have enjoyed the format changes made over the past 12 months.

We are always looking for contributions and encourage you to submit your articles and pieces for inclusion in future editions.

### ***Website***

Our new website went live in early March. We feel that its strengths are in its simplicity and that it is easy to navigate. We have been grappling with our space requirements and are investigating the prices of web hosts, with the view to cost-effectively increasing our on-line storage capacity.

## ***Email***

Like last year, we find email to be an effective tool for communication and one which hopefully encourages less paper usage in offices. We have struggled though with out of date email addresses and networks which won't accept our emails with PDF attachments. Needless to say, our emails and their content, as well as our email address lists, are evolving to cope with the electronic challenges we face!

## **Conferences**

We attended one conference only this year – with Lecki, Bronwen and Melinda being fortunate to attend the London Women and Planning Forum in June.

You may recall from last year's AGM that the WPN had been approached by the LWPF to present a paper at its one day conference. After my success in Spain the year before, the committee, as a whole, considered the London conference to be an important opportunity to enhance and expand the WPN's international profile and network.

Needless to say, it was a fantastic opportunity and from all accounts the 3 WPN'ers had a great time.

Our capacity to attend the Premier's Women's conference this year was hindered by pre-existing commitments, though we remain committed to contributing to this excellent annual forum.

## **Mentoring Program**

The Mentoring Program had a year of hiatus for the first time this year. Low participation numbers meant that it was not feasible to run the program.

Mentoring is a great medium through which skills, confidence and abilities – both professional and personal – can be developed. It has an important role to play and the success of the WPN and the WPN/PIA program in the past is testament to this.

It seems as though it is a good time to reconsider the structure of the program and we will look to involve Christina Bell, the course facilitator, as well as PIA, VPELA and DSE representatives in this process. Surveying potential and past participants will also be important in understanding what the program needs to offer.

## **Research Project**

Following the committee's consideration of fee proposals for the research at the start of this year, Beca Planning was engaged by the Network to carry out research into the accessibility of affordable housing for women. This research was to build on the findings of the scoping paper produced by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute in 2005.

It has been exciting to see the research and its findings take shape – Bronwen will provide us with an overview shortly.

### **Linkages with other organisations**

Our linkages with other organizations, such as PIA and VPELA have been reasonable, though we feel they could be improved.

Our involvement with the WPILGC has been limited – it has remained in hiatus due to a lack of funding, though our commitment to the organisation remains.

### **Membership**

The Corporate Membership category is proving to be the main provider of the Network's member base – with 13 corporate members registered this year (down from 15 last year). We will continue in our efforts to maintain and expand the membership base in the upcoming year.

However, as you will appreciate, having 13 corporate members, which includes Councils and a range of consultancies, provides the Network with exposure to a broad audience of planners and social and built form professionals, as well as councillors and other staff.

Our challenge is to ensure that all of the women working in our member organizations that would be interested in attending our events, participating in our programs and generally contributing to the WPN, are aware of the Network. We call on all of you to help us make sure our message is getting out to people.

We also have 22 individual members of the WPN, of which we are appreciative.

### **The WPN Annual Award**

The annual WPN award was not awarded last year and remains in hiatus. Like last year, it has not been a specific intention of the committee to not make this award available, rather a result of it being focused towards different priorities.

However, it remains a challenge for the new committee to 'open its eyes' so to speak to the great work that is being done by the WPN's members and to ensure that our members dedication, commitment and effort are well rewarded.

### **Conclusions**


The challenges for 2006/2007 present exciting opportunities for the WPN and the committee and include:

- Completing, launching and publishing our research into the affordability of housing for women.

- Ensuing the on-going security of the Ministerial grant, including improving relations with DSE, particularly to encourage the organisation's and staff involvement in our events and programs.
- Reviewing the Mentoring Program.
- Expanding the WPN Committee.
- Initiating jointly-run events with VPELA and PIA and other related organizations.
- Expanding our membership base, to incorporate a broader cross-section of women working in built-form and related professions.

So as you can see, the next twelve months will be a busy one for the WPN, though it will be one that we hope is just as, if not, more thought provoking, stimulating and rewarding than those of the past 13 years.

On behalf of the committee, thank you for your on-going support and we look forward to sharing the successes and highlights of the upcoming year with you at next year's AGM.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kellie Burns', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Kellie Burns**