



Vantage

Women's Planning Network June 2006 Update

What does work-life balance mean to you?

WPN has been focusing on the issue of work-life balance recently, particularly as our committee members all grapple with this issue on a daily basis. How do you balance work / kids / community work / family / sport? In May we held a fantastic discussion at the North Fitzroy Star Hotel, talking with women who have managed to deal with many responsibilities all at the same time, and how to manage this and still ensure you have time for yourselves! No-one provided all the answers, but it was a lively discussion that's for sure.

Shannon Lea, committee member and mum-to-be reflects on the following page on how she's been grappling with work and impending motherhood ... and as we go to print, we can report that she has given birth to a beautiful baby girl, Sophie. Congratulations to Shannon and her partner Jon from us all.

Work-Life balance will be a continuing discussion topic for the Network, so if you have any thoughts on the topic, keep us posted!

Recent Events



April Urban Design Walk

We had a fantastic turn-out for our urban design walk in April, on a perfect night down at Station Pier in Port Melbourne.

Janet Bolitho, Mayor of Port Phillip City Council, and Jim Holdsworth, planning consultant and former PPCC Urban Designer led a fascinating walk along the foreshore and through the redeveloped areas of Port Melbourne. Janet provided some interesting insights into the history of the area, and Jim also indicated how negotiation on design issues with developers on redevelopment in the area has led to some excellent outcomes.

We look forward to another exciting and informative urban design walk next year!

What's happening with WPN?

As with most people, WPN members go into a hibernation of sorts over these cold winter months - it's always hard to drag yourself away from the hot chocolate in front of the open fire! But rest assured, we are still working hard and finding interesting ways to escape the winter chills:

WPN Research Project - A Tool kit for Affordable Housing for Women

After completing the Scoping Paper last year into possible research that would be of value to assisting policy making with regard to affordable housing, WPN commissioned research into developing a tool kit for providing affordable housing for women. The research is near completion, and is aimed at providing practical guidelines for Councils, planners, housing providers and users in assisting the provision of affordable housing. We are excited about the research, and will be releasing it shortly... in London!

WPN Committee members off to London!

It's not every day you get invited to speak at a conference in London - so how could we say no! The London Women and Planning Forum are holding a conference in London on 21st June - International Perspectives of Women in Planning. We were invited to contribute. So, never to miss an opportunity for networking (and a bit of travel), Bron Hamilton, Lecki Ord and Melinda Wealands are off to London to present to the conference our research, and also to inform them about the WPN. We can't wait to be able to bring you some feedback from the conference in the next edition of Vantage....and also at our next event...

Our London Debrief on Wednesday 26th July - details coming soon!



Members enjoying a mild autumn evening in Port Melbourne

Reflections on starting a family and having a career 'time-out'

Today is my first day of 12 months maternity leave. Bubs is due in 5 weeks and I'm hoping for at least a few weeks of relaxation and getting organised. We'll see if that eventuates or not! Despite my fears of boredom and becoming 'obsolete' I'm now glad to be on leave. I have no idea how some women work until a few weeks up until their due date, or how women with other children to look after do it either. I've been told that you just 'do'.

I also now realise how fortunate I am that financially we're able for me to finish work now. Not everyone can afford to do this, particularly when, like my work place (which shall remain nameless), paid maternity leave is not offered. The number of women I have told this to are amazed. Most are under the impression that paid maternity leave is mandatory – it isn't. All your employer is legally required to do is keep an equivalent job available to you for a maximum of 12 months. When I commenced work with my current employer after 5 years in local government, my new employer's maternity leave policy was not something I considered – it was three years ago and just wasn't on my agenda at the time. Having now heard the paid leave options available in local government I'm extremely jealous – it seems a minimum of 6 weeks paid leave is the 'norm'. Whilst I'm very happy with my current employer and have no career ambition to return to local government, this does give you food for thought when considering another child. My mother received 6 weeks paid maternity leave 30 years ago – nice to see we've made progress since then...

Other than this issue, the support of my employer has been invaluable during my pregnancy. Allowances have been made for me to work from home as required, providing me with a work car space during my last trimester and being incredibly flexible on the timing of my return to work. All of these have helped in attempting to achieve an appropriate work/life balance through my pregnancy:

- Working from home a day a week is possible with a work lap top and mobile – clients don't even know you're not in the office!
- Whilst I'm a strong public transport advocate the work car space became necessary as my stomach grew, making it near impossible to squeeze onto packed morning trains and trams which left me exhausted, emotional and unproductive! My space has now been passed onto another pregnant colleague.
- Even though I don't intend on returning to work full-time my group managers have continued to support my career aspirations in a financial and progressive sense. I'm to call them whenever I'm ready to come back to work whether that be a day a week at home or three days in the office. It's nice to feel wanted!

Whilst it frustrated me enormously my manager and team made the decision to not allocate me any new work after Christmas, largely because many of our new jobs are long term. As Murphy's Law would have it, during the past five months some of our most exciting projects in recent times have commenced – all with me looking on and wishing to be part of it. At times this frustrated me enormously, though during the end of my working time the benefits became clear – my current work list was able to be tidied up and the transition for the rest of my team was inherently easier, and I didn't take the stress home with me. My input was still sought as required, I just didn't have the project management tasks to deal with at a time when I was possibly not at my most focused to take on – suddenly I had more important priorities!

Feeling vulnerable in my work place was not something I expected to have to deal with. Holding a senior position, vulnerability was not something I had personally experienced before – career wise I'd always been confident and self-assured. Making the decision to take 12 months maternity leave wasn't difficult for my partner and I – it is what we wanted to do as parents – but for me realising my changing role in life, and the realisation that work would 'go on without me' was not something I was prepared for. It is very confronting realising that you can be replaced, and that your clients will continue with another manager. I'm not sure how I overcame this feeling, it probably still lingers today when I think of when I'll go back to work – in the past few weeks I've realised that this decision is not mine alone, it will depend on how we as a family are going. Reality check!

In terms of what sort of work/life balance we want in the future, time will only tell. I've been up front in telling my employer that I only want to work three days a week, preferably one at home, when I return. I believe this is important in ensuring there is no mis-communication on the issue, and so that your employer can make alternative plans. With another close colleague of mine expecting her first child in late August, my employer has made the decision to employ a new person to 'replace' us. My colleague and I are likely to job share at least initially upon our return.

Unfortunately a major factor in how I do return to work will be the availability of childcare. Family support for day long childcare a couple of times a week will be difficult, and I'm sure we're all aware of the recent media regarding childcare vacancies and costs. The girls in my work place have offered to look after bubs whilst I work, but I'm not sure that this will work out...

I'll be sure to provide an update on how it all goes!