

**Occasional Address**  
**Royal Exhibition Building, Monday 11 December 2017, 5.00pm**

**Laura Murray**

*Victorian President of the Planning Institute of Australia  
Associate Director, Ethos Urban*

Good evening, before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are meeting. I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and the Elders from other communities who may be here today. I would like to extend my thanks to the University of Melbourne for giving me this opportunity to speak to you this evening and congratulations to every one of you who have made it to this point. I'm sure most of you in this room will agree that being a university student is/was one of the best times of your life. And now, the world most definitely is your oyster. Your career is what you make of it, as I have found through my own journey so far.

You may have already realised that I have an accent, hopefully not too difficult for most to understand. Originally from Glasgow, Scotland, I moved to Melbourne 10 years ago and for me, Melbourne is now home.

Interestingly, now being a qualified and accredited town planner, I realise that my path to town planning actually began at a young age. I grew up in an Ebenezer Howard inspired new town just outside of Glasgow called Cumbernauld. It was one of those towns designed in the 1950s after World War 2 to relieve the pressure on the inner-city slums in Glasgow and give people the opportunity for a new life in the countryside, to be away from the smog and own a nice home with a garden. I remember the adverts on the tv promoting the town "What's it called, Cumbernauld – the Town for Tomorrow" this slogan which still resonates with many, even today. Originally planned for a target population of 70,000 people, Cumbernauld now sits at 52,000 people as of the last census completed in 2011.

Originally planned around the concept of walkability with the intention that all residents could walk to the central town centre, the town now consists of a vast number of roads and roundabouts. Although public transport exists, its not great, and with all established towns, although it is still a sought-after area to live, that does not come without the health and social problems that emerge from living in a car-dependent town. It also now has the stigma of being voted the most dismal town in the UK a few years ago.

Without knowing what town planning really was, I chose to study environmental planning at Strathclyde University in Glasgow, as I had a real interest in politics, architecture and how towns and cities evolved and grew (or not, as is the case in Cumbernauld). I loved the course. I loved the group work we did, the building models we made and the field trips we had – to Amsterdam on my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, which was awesome. During this time when I was pondering what I wanted to do with my life, I always remember my dad saying, you don't want to be one of those people that assesses and approves house extensions for a living and, funnily, that turned out to be my first full-time job when I graduated! And so my career as a town planner began, working as a statutory planner within a suburban Council approving house extensions and dealing with narky neighbours, later in life I would realise that this was my first introduction to NIMBYISM. As I look back, this job provided the best opportunity for me to really learn the ropes in terms of legislation, policy, politics and

decision making and, as I progressed within Council, I was then given the responsibility for approving more complex developments. Slowly, slowly.

One of the things that had attracted me to studying town planning was the possibilities of living and working overseas. I was aware that with the qualification I had, my skills were easily transferrable, and not that I encourage any of you to now leave Melbourne (on the contrary, as we continue to have a shortage of town planners in our state), I was excited to embark on my own adventure down under. For any town planning geek, I was overwhelmed with the opportunity to be involved in the long term strategic planning of existing places and the future planning of entire new towns similar to where I grew up. I believe both my personal and professional overseas experience has allowed me to visualise both positive and negative outcomes of town planning and this is something I fully utilize in my day to day career.

Having now worked in local Government, and several multi-disciplinary companies over the years, including planning teams within engineering, architectural and project management firms, I believe I have an all-round perspective of the built environment industry and a good understanding of the impact such strategic plans and early planning policy can have on the ground. As a town planner, many describe us as generalists, we need to know a little bit of everything to make a professional assessment of any policy or proposed development.

In my spare time I have been re-elected as the Victorian President of the Planning Institute of Australia, also known as PIA. I have been on the committee for 4 years, and assist in the preparation submissions to Government through our Policy and Advocacy Sub-Committee. In addition, I also wore the hat of Convenor for the Women's Planning Network. Being a chartered member of the Royal Town Planning Institute in the UK and being a female in what is perceived to be a male dominated industry, it was important for me to transfer my membership over to PIA and get involved in the Women's Planning Network when I moved to Melbourne. PIA is the national body representing planning and the planning profession. Through education, communication and professional development, PIA is the key organisation serving and guiding thousands of planning professionals in their role of creating better communities and quality planning outcomes.

PIA currently represents approximately 5,300 members nationally and internationally, and connects with more than 7500 planners annually. We also provide different levels of membership including graduate level, so I encourage you all to look into it. It provided the support network I needed moving to a new country and continues to be a great way to meet like-minded planners. Ultimately, our mission at PIA is to champion the role of planning in shaping Australia's future and our vision is to be Australia's trusted voice on Planning.

With our continuous growing population, it is an extremely exciting time to be working within the town planning and built environment industry here in Melbourne however, what we do today will leave a legacy for future generations to come. Let's all make sure we get it right.

## **Vice-Chancellor's Introduction**

*Today we are delighted to welcome as guest speaker the Victorian President of the Planning Institute of Australia and Associate Director at Ethos Urban, Laura Murray. Laura has been a strong voice both for the Planning Institute and for women in the planning profession, as Convenor of the Women's Planning Network. Prior to being a Registered Planner and member of the Planning Institute, Laura was a certified member of the Royal Town Planning Institute in the United Kingdom. She is a consultant town planner with over 13 years' experience in statutory and strategic planning for public and private clients, including several years in local government in the UK. More recently she has worked on major development approvals all over Australia.*

*On behalf of the Planning Institute of Victoria, Laura has been actively involved in State Government Reference and Advisory Groups in a range of important areas such as the Better Apartment Guidelines Reference Group, the Social Housing Renewal Standing Advisory Committee and the Fishermen's Bend Development Industry Engagement Program. It is a pleasure to call on her to speak this afternoon. Please welcome Laura Murray.*