



# Developing a plan for Virginia Hill Estate

Phase 1 Community Engagement Report  
April 2020

**capire**

Prepared by Capire Consulting Group on behalf of  
Department of Health and Human Services

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#### Disclaimer

Unless otherwise stated, all feedback documented by Capire Consulting Group and any persons(s) acting on our behalf is written and or recorded during the engagement.

Capire staff take great care transcribing participant feedback but unfortunately cannot guarantee complete accuracy. We are confident that we have captured the full range of ideas, concerns and views expressed during our consultation activities.

Unless otherwise noted, the views expressed in our work represent those of the participants and not those of our consultants or the Department of Health and Human Services.

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# Executive summary

An important part of developing a masterplan for Virginia Hill Estate is community engagement. In late 2019, Department of Health and Human Services (the department) undertook early engagement with the Virginia Hill Estate community. Participants shared what they ‘like’ about Virginia Hill Estate and what they ‘want to see improved’. This feedback was a key input in drafting a set of proposed Key Directions that will inform the development of a masterplan for Virginia Hill Estate.

Between 5 March to 2 April 2020, the Phase 1 engagement period was held, where the community was invited to learn about what was heard during the early engagement and provide feedback on the proposed Key Directions.

Approximately 81 people participated in the engagement by attending a community event, completing an online or telephone survey, or attending a workshop. Participants represented a mix of Virginia Hill Estate residents, residents of the surrounding community and broader residents of Eaglehawk and Bendigo.

The outcomes of the engagement showed overall agreement with the previously identified issues for Virginia Hill Estate. Concerns around safety, maintenance and design of fences, and pedestrian crossings and paths were additional issues raised by participants.

Overall, participants supported the five proposed Key Directions.

## An average of 65% of participants agreed with each of the Key Directions.

	1. Explore opportunities to change the Virginia Hill Estate layout	66% agree
	2. Explore the introduction of community and private housing	67% agree
	3. Better connect the Estate with the surrounding areas	63% agree
	4. New housing should add variety, including housing for single people, couples and families	69% agree
	5. Consider social services and facility needs of the community	62% agree

Participants were more likely to select ‘could be improved’ than disagree entirely with the proposed Key Direction. Many of the participant comments identified opportunities or concerns around implementing the proposed Key Directions. Some of the opportunities included better use of public spaces; connecting to surrounding areas; and improved community cohesion by integrating public and private houses. Concerns included how to attract private home buyers; addressing social issues, both real and perceived; and balancing people’s desire for privacy while making public spaces feel open and safe.

The outcomes of the engagement are a critical input into developing the masterplan which will also be informed by technical studies. The community will have the chance to review a draft masterplan for Virginia Hill Estate in the second half of 2020.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Project background

The Victorian Government is committed to improving public housing across Victoria with funding of \$30 million for regional estates. This commitment includes \$10 million to improve Virginia Hill Estate.

To make the best use of the funds, the department, assisted by a team of specialists in planning, development, urban design, architecture and community engagement, is developing a masterplan to guide improvements.

Consultation is at the heart of the planning process. The department is committed to consulting with stakeholders and the community throughout the project to understand their needs and to make sure that the masterplan delivers the best possible outcomes for the community.

Virginia Hill Estate is in the suburb of Eaglehawk, approximately six kilometres from central Bendigo. Virginia Hill Estate was built in 1984. It contains 65 public housing dwellings and a small community room.

## 1.2 Overview of phase one engagement

In late 2019 early engagement was undertaken to introduce the project to the community. Participants shared what they like about Virginia Hill Estate and what they want to see improved. The community feedback was used to develop a set of proposed Key Directions<sup>1</sup>.

Phase one engagement was delivered between 5 March to 2 April 2020. The purpose of the engagement was to provide an opportunity for the community to confirm what they like about Virginia Hill Estate and what issues they want improved. Participants reviewed and helped refine the proposed Key Directions.

## 1.3 Report purpose

This report summarises the approach and outcomes of phase one engagement. It includes an analysis of the feedback received on the issues for Virginia Hill Estate and the proposed Key Directions.

This report, alongside the technical Issues and Key Directions background report, will inform the preparation of Virginia Hill Estate Masterplan.

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<sup>1</sup> A Key Direction is a key opportunity, concept and/or value to be explored through the masterplanning process.

## 2 Overview of activities

Engagement activities were selected and designed to be accessible and inclusive for all members of the community. A summary of how the engagement was promoted, the engagement activities, and who participated is provided below.

### Promotion of engagement

Letter box drop	Emails to stakeholders	Facebook adverts	Door knocking	Text messaging tenants
Project Update flyer sent to each Virginia Hill Estate resident.	Project Update emails to share with their networks.	One paid advertisement and then shared on popular local pages. <sup>2</sup>	A doorknock was conducted while the Community BBQ took place to encourage residents to attend.	A text message was sent to each tenant to promote the online survey.

### Engagement activities and participation

Approximately 81 people joined in the engagement across different activities. Each engagement activity asked the same questions.

Online survey	Community event	Telephone surveys	Community workshop
Thirty-eight online surveys were completed. The survey was hosted on the project webpage. The webpage had 194 unique visits during this phase.	Around thirty attended the Eaglehawk Community BBQ hosted on 11 March 2020, from 12pm to 2pm.	A hotline provided support to people to complete the survey over the phone. Three surveys were completed over the phone.	A workshop was held with the Consultative Committee <sup>3</sup> on 11 March 2020. A total of 10 people attended the workshop.

### Overview of participants

Of those participants that provided demographic data<sup>4</sup>, the analysis showed that:

- participants were aged between 18 and 84 years and older, with a higher representation from people aged 35 to 49 years
- the majority lived (21 participants) or worked (35 participants) in Eaglehawk and 10 identified as tenants of Virginia Hill Estate.

Participants who attended the Community BBQ did not provide their demographic information. Through conversation, it was recorded that most participants were tenants of Virginia Hill Estate.

#### How we adapted our approach to respond to COVID-19?

Due to risks associated with COVID-19, the second community event planned as part of the Dahlia and Arts Festival was cancelled. Our adjusted approach included increasing social media promotion to direct people to complete the survey. Through the duration of the social media promotion there was a spike in the daily online surveys completed.

It also included increased communication with tenants to support them to complete the survey either over the phone or online.

<sup>2</sup> A total of 3,183 people viewed the Facebook ad and 89 people engaged with the post through either liking, commenting or sharing the post.

<sup>3</sup> The Consultative Committee was established as part of the project launch. The Committee is made up of representatives from key community organisations, City of Greater Bendigo and Virginia Hill Estate tenants.

<sup>4</sup> Participants were not required to provide demographic information.

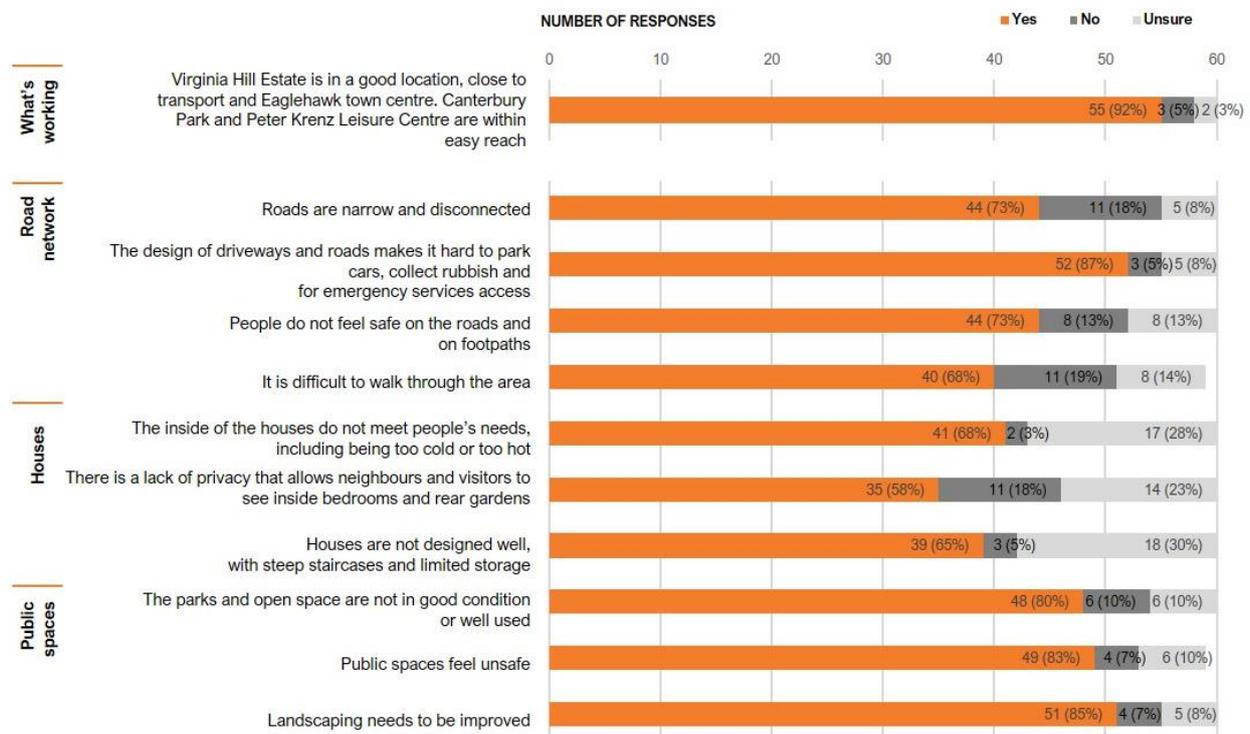
# 3 Engagement findings

The following section summarises the findings from the engagement. It is important to note when reading the feedback that not every participant answered every question, and therefore the total numbers of responses vary between questions.

## 3.1 What people like and what could be improved

Participants reviewed summary statements of what was heard previously and informed by the Issues and Key Directions background research. These statements focused on what people like about Virginia Hill Estate what issues they want to see improved. Participants were asked to identify whether they agree with each statement. Statements were categorised into 'what is working' and 'what could be improved' (i.e. the issues). Three key themes were identified for the issues: the road network; the houses; and the public and open spaces. Figure 1 summarises participant responses for each statement.

Figure 1: Participants' level of agreement with statements about Virginia Hill Estate



Overall, there were high levels of agreement with the statements. A total of 92% (55 participants) agreed Virginia Hill Estate is in a good location, close to transport and Eaglehawk Town Centre; and that Canterbury Park and Peter Krenz Leisure Centre are within easy reach.

Most participants agreed that the road network and public open spaces need to be improved. There were a greater number of 'unsure' responses to the issues linked to housing at Virginia Hill Estate. These responses mostly came from people who do not live in Virginia Hill Estate<sup>5</sup>. All tenants agreed with the statement that the inside of houses do not meet people's needs.

Participant comments on the statements were mostly focused on the 'what needs to be improved'. The comments have been summarised below under the three key themes.

*'Statements are great. I think that the area needs to be redeveloped. Get rid of fences, make more open with clear roads in and out of the area with easy viewing to make it feel safe. Mix public housing with private housing in the area to create a more stable community.'* – Eaglehawk resident

### **Road network**

Most (73%, 44 participants) agreed that the roads are too narrow for cars to turnaround. Participants noted that footpaths are uneven and narrow, and force pedestrians or scooters onto the road which is not safe. Most participants also agreed that it is difficult to walk through the area.

Concerns were raised around parking. Some mentioned the lack of parking for visitors and others felt that the car parking spaces are not big enough.

Additional issues relating to the road network included:

- There needs to be more pedestrian crossings.
- Footpaths are uneven and they do not connect outside of the estate.

### **Public spaces**

Participants mostly agreed with the statements relating to the public spaces. Many respondents commented on the underuse and poor maintenance of the playground and open spaces. Some participants mentioned safety concerns at night with lack of lighting encouraging undesirable behaviour including using public spaces to enter people's properties. Both male and female responses expressed concerns about safety. A Consultative Committee member raised concern about the condition of the trees with some falling due to unstable soil.

No additional issues were identified for the public spaces theme.

*'We have caught people that don't even live in the area hiding behind our fence and in open areas at night-time. Houses have been broken into and stuff stolen from people getting over fences from open areas at night-time.'*  
– Virginia Hill Estate resident

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<sup>5</sup> 95% of the 'unsure' responses came from non-tenants.

## Housing

Issues relating to the housing in Virginia Hill Estate were the least endorsed statements. As previously noted, the 'unsure' responses came from people who do not live in Virginia Hill Estate. All tenant participants agreed that the inside of houses do not meet people's needs and that the houses are not well designed.

Participants mentioned privacy issues and that the current siting meant houses overlooked other houses. They raised internal issues such as narrow stairwells, poor layout and the need for features that support temperature control such as insulation, heating and air-conditioners.

Additional issues relating to the houses included:

- Tenants found the courtyards in front of their houses costly to maintain.
- Poor condition of fences impacting privacy and security.

Tenants of Virginia Hill Estate were more concerned about improving the fences, while non-tenants talked about the removal of fences.

*'Remove fences or arrange them so fences are not the first thing you see'  
– Consultative Committee member*

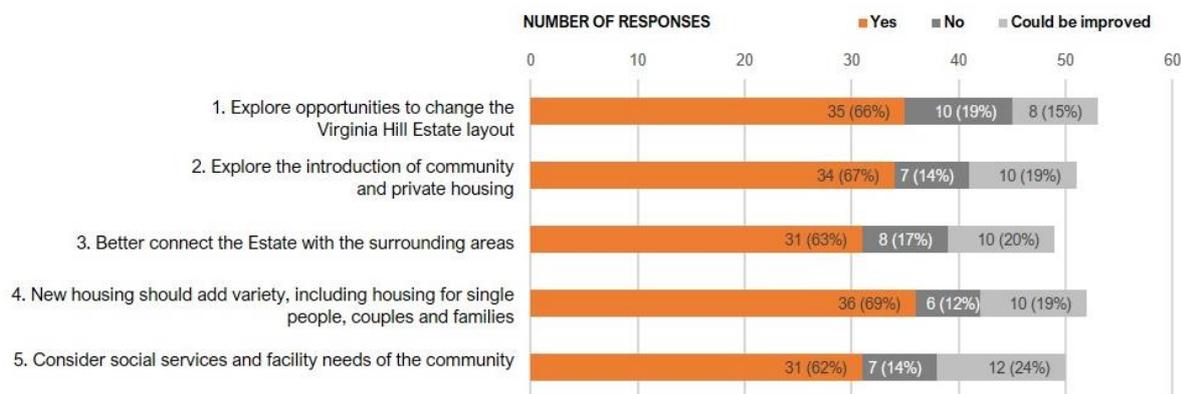
### 3.2 Feedback and proposed Key Directions

Participants reviewed the set of proposed Key Directions designed to guide the development of the masterplan for Virginia Hill Estate. Listed in **Error! Reference source not found.** 2 are the proposed Key Directions. Participants identified whether they agree with each Key Direction and ideas for improvement. Figure 3 illustrates responses. Overall the proposed Key Directions received high levels of support. Many of the comments received were about how the Key Directions could be realised.

Figure 2: Proposed Key Directions for change for Virginia Hill Estate



Figure 3: Participant's level of agreement with each of the proposed Key Directions



The following paragraphs provide a summary of feedback received on each of the proposed Key Directions.

### 1. Explore opportunities to change the Virginia Hill Estate layout

Most participants (66%, 35 participants) agreed with this proposed Key Direction. Many agreed that the current layout did not allow access for emergency services, deliveries and garbage trucks. Participants noted that the estate had a lot of dead spaces and underused public spaces that were dark and unsafe. Some were concerned about having a road through the estate as it would invite more cars and outsiders in. The Consultative Committee members discussed ways of slowing down vehicles such as using chicanes or speedhumps.

*‘Lots of open spaces not utilised; bring in pedestrian crossings and speedhumps; and connect properties with pathway for easier access  
– Consultative Committee member*

### 2. Explore the introduction of community and private housing

Most participants (67%, 34 participants) agreed with this proposed Key Direction. Comments demonstrated some division amongst participants. Those who supported the proposed Key Direction discussed the benefits of integrating private and public housing. The Consultative Committee discussed the challenges of attracting private ownership due to a strong perception of Virginia Hill Estate as a public housing estate. Consultative Committee members suggested focusing on affordable housing. Other members that opposed the proposed Key Direction did not think the estate would be able to attract private investors. Some participants did not support integrating public and private housing due to the social issues they associate with public housing tenants.

*‘Getting private ownership will be a challenge due to perceptions of public housing and low capital growth. Consider affordable housing with social housing.’  
– Consultative Committee member*

### **3. Better connect the Estate with the surrounding areas**

Most participants (63%, 31 participants) agreed with this proposed Key Direction. Many agreed that Virginia Hill Estate is currently an isolated, 'gated' community and welcomed the idea to better connect the estate with the surrounding areas. Some suggested that the houses should face outwards to the road and back fences should be redesigned to improve security. Many agreed that it was important to redesign the footpaths and improve wayfinding. One comment suggested improving disability access as parts of the estate are currently inaccessible for those with mobility issues.

*'Open up the estate. Make through roads, give privacy to residents, and remove some of the houses to achieve more open public access.'* – Eaglehawk resident

### **4. New housing should add variety, including housing for single people, couples and families**

This proposed Key Direction received the highest level of support (69%, 36 participants). Many agreed with providing a variety of unit sizes. Some commented that there will still be a need for three and four bedroom houses. Some participants raised concern about the diversity of residents linking anti-social behaviours (such as drug use) to certain groups. Some participants were concerned that Virginia Hill Estate is already 'crowded' so had concerns about additional housing.

*'More units would be ideal, but where you're going to put them, I have no idea.'* – Virginia Hill Estate resident

### **5. Consider social services and facility need of the community**

Most participants (62%, 31 participants) agreed with this proposed Key Direction. Many suggested providing services that support tenants to improve their current circumstances including job training and health services. Others suggested that Virginia Hill Estate is close to social services and tenants with low-income or disability had difficulty getting to them. The Consultative Committee discussed looking into better promotion of existing services and improving public transport. Some participants suggested inviting surrounding services to come to the estate to support tenants.

## 4 Next steps

On behalf of the Department of Health and Human Services and the project team, we would like to thank the community members and members of the Consultative Committee for their time and consideration of the work completed to date. The outputs of this phase of engagement are an important piece of the work being undertaken to prepare the masterplan for Virginia Hill Estate.

Other work and considerations that will feed into the development of the masterplan and subsequent implementation plan include:

- housing yield and typology assessments;
- review of community services and facility needs;
- transport and connectivity assessments;
- public realm and urban design assessments;
- utility and services infrastructure supply and capacity assessments;
- statutory planning assessments;
- development cost, feasibility and implementation assessments; and
- identification of project partners and further funding opportunities to support larger-scale changes.

It is important to note that not all the issues and desired improvements identified through the engagement are within the direct control of the department, such as public transport. However, the community feedback will be valuable in advocating the relevant stakeholders or potential future project partners.

The community will have the chance to review the draft masterplan and provide feedback in the second half of 2020.