

Downsizing in Nillumbik

Andrew Lemon



DOWNSIZING IN NILLUMBIK

Downsizing in Nillumbik is not an official organisation, or not yet. Call it an idea. Julie Barrington, who's lived locally for decades, wrote an article for *CopperLine News* that struck a chord. It came from personal experience, and the experience of friends and neighbours. She identified a problem no-one had named.

Where do our ageing residents go if the time comes to leave their family home—a home too big, too empty, too many stairs?—but they still want to live in Nillumbik? A lot of people are facing that question right now. Maybe some of you in this room tonight. Nillumbik can't afford to lose you. You are the volunteers. The grandparents. The stirrers. The memory.

Simple question. Difficult to answer. Downsizing in Nillumbik has begun exploring solutions to a local shortage of housing suitable for older people, and to achieve this without spoiling the area we love.

Policy planners parrot the phrase 'Ageing in Place'. The box is ticked: a good idea—and they move on. Council has a Positive Ageing Committee. What could be more positive than keeping our elderly healthy, happy—and living *here*? But where?

'Ageing in Place' means independence. Dividends are in health and community well-being. And the economy. It doesn't have to mean staying in the same house. Family houses can be turned over to younger families, mixed age households. 'Ageing in Place' *does* mean staying in your neighbourhood.

What are the options? A single storey home on a smaller block? The problem is the old one of supply and demand. Ask the estate agents. There are too few suitable residences.

Two decades ago the Shire of Eltham opened the way for unit development in the town centre and along Main Road. Developers increasingly preferred two or three storey townhouses, squeezing as many onto a block as they could manage.

First impression of the new housing strategy of the State government is a green light for higher density living. Perversely, higher density in designated activity centres will quicken the trend to demolish the remaining small houses in that locality that are suitable for the would-be downsizer. If that's the

future, let's hope it can be achieved with intelligent design, respecting neighbourhood character. Just possibly such developments could include ground floor apartments purposely designed for the elderly. Upper level apartment living is not what most Nillumbik downsizers would be dreaming of. Ready access to the natural world outside is what drew us to this area in the first place.

Not everyone sees their future in retirement villages or aged-care homes. Unfortunately, for those who do, there are few choices in Nillumbik. We're not advocating broad acre commercial development. We should think about innovative solutions such as rebuilding Judge Book village—with its feet out of water—or co-operative community precincts, small enclaves for retirement or mixed-generation living. There are examples in Warrandyte and Eltham. And there is a need, a demand. Surely there's a role for council leadership here.

Downsizing in Nillumbik will explore ideas. Council has been drafting a new housing strategy, soon for public comment. We aim to convene a public meeting to discuss. Please contact us if you want to contribute. Remember our acronym: Downsizing In Nillumbik. DIN. We'll make a noise in our quest to stay here. And you'll understand why we chose not to call our group Downsizing in Eltham!

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On behalf of 'Downsizing in Nillumbik'
Nillumbik Community Showcase
27 March 2024*