



Heritage Advisory Service

HSPN 04. LANEWAYS IN HERITAGE OVERLAY AREAS

The City of Port Phillip has one of the most extensive networks of existing laneways in Melbourne from the 1800s onwards. On early subdivisional plans, lanes appear as a narrow piece of land set along boundaries and are often labeled 'R.O.W.' or 'right-of-way'. Laneways collectively form part of the heritage fabric and as such are protected under the Port Phillip Heritage Policy Clause 22.04.

1.0 DESCRIPTION OF HISTORIC LANEWAYS AND NARROW STREETS

- Generally lanes were provided for rear access of vehicles and/or night carts;
- Traditionally they are utilitarian locations and frequently attracted workshops and other light industrial uses, often not associated with the dwelling on the balance of the site;
- Commonly lanes will be surfaced wholly or in part with bluestone pavers, will not have footpaths and or kerbs, will have a central or side drainage channels without kerbs;
- The surfacing of lanes exposes much of their history in the nature of their wear, and often express distinctive wheel ruts, diversions of channels around sewer pits, etc.
- Narrow streets will have a more conventional treatment of asphalt surfaces, kerb and channel and footpaths;
- Historically, dwellings were often located in lanes, often ad hoc, with also multiple dwelling developments in response to the pressure for housing stock in the late 19th century and were mostly rather basic in design and quality. Two storey dwellings, sometimes in timber, are occasionally found in even very narrow lanes. Lane dwellings were the target of the slum clearance programs of the early 20th century, but many still survive as important remnants of an important aspect of late 19th and early 20th century development. Subdivisions of deep blocks allowed the entry of Interwar and modern styles to many lanes;
- At present, the character of lanes is under threat from a recent explosion of building activity and a lack of sensitivity to their special attributes.

2.0 HERITAGE LANEWAY TYPES

A number of generic types of residential laneway/narrow streets exist in the City of Port Phillip:-

- Very narrow pedestrian/nightman/sewerage collection access lanes;
- Narrow lanes that have only rears of properties;
- Narrow lanes that have a historic mix of rears and fronts of properties, sometimes, but not always on both sides;
- Very wide rear access lanes that are of small street width, but which have no historic dwelling frontages;
- Very wide laneways/minor streets that have a historic mix of rears and fronts of properties, sometimes, but not always to both sides.

A further variation is the wider street that has frontages on one side only, facing the rears of the properties to the next street. Some of these rear frontages may have been developed both historically and recently.

3.0 ISSUES, CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES.

- The principal concern for the City's laneways is development pressure that threatens their form and character.
- There is a tendency to raise their status and to neglect their utilitarian character with developments seeking greater architectural distinction or a more conventional domestic character more suited to proper streets. The introduction of residential functions brings pressure for a more sophisticated aesthetic that is in contrast with the more basic nature of the context.
- There is a tendency for a greater bulk and scale than the laneways were designed for.
- There is a series of functional problems such as pedestrian accessibility and safety, extra vehicles, servicing,
- While bulky buildings on the frontage are acceptable in principle, excessive bulk will lead to significant impacts such as overshadowing and overwhelming of the public domain.
- Many properties backing onto lanes have large deep rear yards that are under-utilised and therefore available for development.

4.0 OBJECTIVES IN DEALING WITH LANEWAYS AND NARROW STREETS.

- To conserve, enhance and recover the traditional character of laneways and narrow streets.
- To accept development that responds to the historic character of the laneway and to minimise elements that impact adversely on that character.
- To respond to the pressure for the introduction of dwellings into laneway frontages.
- To accept the place of motor vehicles in the contemporary context and to provide for them accordingly, bearing in mind that some lanes have very limited capacity.

5.0 POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT.

- The rear of every site has some potential for development, even if only for a rear gate. The early subdivisions of deep properties and the substantial outbuildings of some early properties is a historically repeating phenomenon. In many cases, significant development is possible and in line with the historic precedents, it may be accommodated. This potential for changes of use and the quantity of development needs to be tempered by rational controls if the character of laneways is to be maintained. Thus the following strategies are proposed:-

6.0 STRATEGIES/GUIDELINES.

- Given that the potential for development on laneways has always existed, even if only partly exploited, contemporary development of approved uses will not generally be opposed in principle;
- The scale of development on laneways should generally be limited to single occupancies except where the site width is sufficient to give separate frontages;
- Where multiple sites are developed together, the width of the original component sites should be expressed in the design;
- Development of two storeys will generally be acceptable subject to the relevant constraints and controls. Upper floors in the form of attics would generally be more acceptable than conventional accommodation. Stepping away of upper storeys may address the issue of bulk;

- Orientation should be a major factor in determining the height of buildings, eg, buildings to the north of a lane with the potential for overshadowing of the public domain should be more limited in height than those to the south;
- To ensure laneways do not lose their functional emphasis, the built form of new development, including residential buildings, should generally respond to the traditional utilitarian building types found on lanes, such as stables, workshops, etc, but not early dwellings, even if they presently exist. This ensures that the unique character of the existing early dwellings is preserved. New buildings should employ pitched roofs such as gables, hips and skillions in compositions reflecting functional types rather than typical dwellings. Gable ends to laneway frontages will be acceptable. Modern expressions of these types may be acceptable on the proviso that the design is of adequate quality;
- Buildings should generally be located on the lane frontage. No setbacks are necessary or desirable, except as below. Buildings should ideally be full width of the frontage;
- Where residential development fronts an existing narrow lane, a setback of the whole lane frontage and incorporation of the setback in the lane width may be considered desirable. This provides for the possibility of future development of a similar kind on adjacent sites and establishes a new width for the lane consistent with a change in functional requirements brought about by the development. The setback will be required only on one side of the lane – the side where the fronting sites are deeper. The setback should be sufficient to allow access for vehicles turning into standard size garages, ie, 6.4m lane width boundary to boundary, allowing access to 3.0m wide garages;
- External materials should be limited to those utilitarian materials common in the early periods of development. These will include:-

6.1 For walls

- Face red brickwork with struck joints;
- Weatherboard (painted);
- Corrugated custom orb galvanised iron, painted or natural (not Colorbond or Zinalume, see HSPN 02.), either vertical or horizontal;
- Rendered surfaces will generally not be acceptable.

6.2 For roofs

- Corrugated custom orb galvanised iron (not Colorbond or Zinalume) for all sites;
- Slate, for all sites;
- Unglazed terra cotta tiles for sites where the main dwelling has a similar roof or the area uses tiles as a predominant roofing material;
- Other materials commonly found in the context.

6.3 Windows and doors

- Timber or metal frames;
- Timber pedestrian doors;
- Timber or metal vehicular doors and gates (see HSPN 2, Garage Doors and Vehicular Gates). Note; Free-standing roller doors will rarely be acceptable. Roller doors are only acceptable if contained in an appropriate building.

6.4 Fences

- Paling;
- Simple vertical corrugated iron;
- Red face brick;
- Fences to be a maximum of 2100 high, although 600 additional height of 50% open trellis will be accepted;
- Rendered fences will generally not be acceptable.

7.0 Further Reading:

Lurking in Laneways: A back fence history of the Lanes and Little Streets of Port Phillip, City of Port Phillip Art and Heritage Collection.