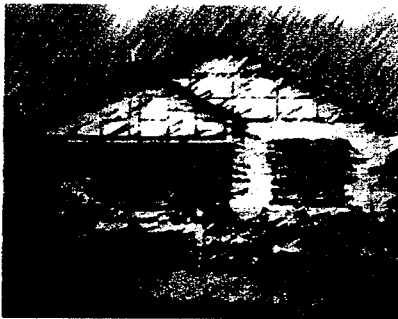
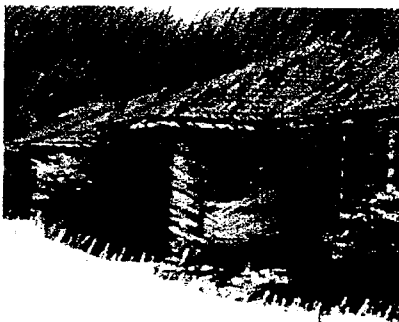


Housing Choice Research Project Pilot Study

Depth Interviews with recent
home purchasers and renters in
Moreland, Boroondara and Brimbank



Volume 1
September 1996



Prepared for:



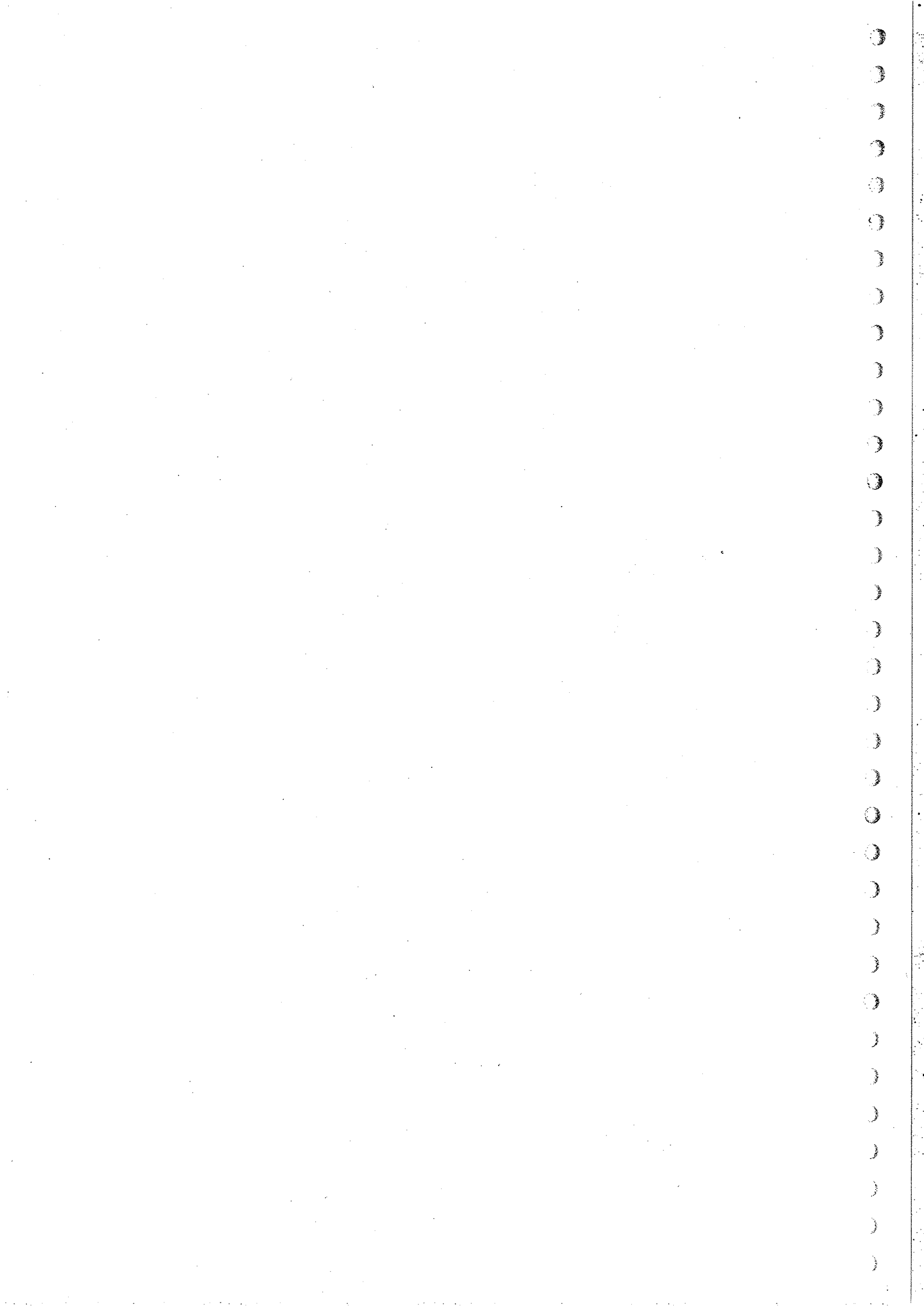
Victorian Planning & Environmental Law Association



By:
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Editor:
Jane Sargeant, Learning Edge

Sponsored by:
Department of Infrastructure,
Office of Planning and Heritage



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Prepared for:

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The respondents of the three municipalities who participated so generously with their time in the collection of the research data which form the basis of this report

The Council staff of Brimbank, Moreland and Boroondara

Alan Wyatt of Ratio Consultants in the production of this report.

Executive Summary

Research Background

Household structures are changing and becoming more diverse. Traditional family households of two parents and two children are no longer the norm. At the same time the population is ageing. Single person and single parent households are now more prevalent in our communities. Households comprised of students and young professionals, childless couples and 'empty nesters' are also more dominant. These changing household types and sizes have resulted in different housing needs and preferences, and requirements for greater diversity and affordability in housing.

In light of these changes, housing needs and preferences, the Victorian Planning and Environmental Law Association (VPELA) believe there is a need to build on the research carried out as part of the National Housing Strategy and other studies. VPELA believes it is now important to find out what problems exist and whether householders' housing needs and satisfaction with the living environment vary between different parts of the metropolitan area and different stages of the family life cycle.

VPELA plans to adopt both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to evaluate householders' perceptions and attitudes to their living environment over time in a number of case study areas. The overall aims of the major research study are:

- To find out to what extent there is a link between the degree of satisfaction, access to different housing forms, the quality of the physical and social infrastructure available and environmental quality.
- To explore to what degree householders' perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour correlate with their level of satisfaction with an area and their quality of life as well as actual crime rates.

Pilot study

The Housing Choice Research Project, the subject of this report, is the first stage or pilot study, and is therefore an important first step in examining the overall aims of the major research study.

In light of the review of VicCode 2 and the *Medium Density Housing Design Guide*, the Department of Infrastructure wanted to identify the importance of the location of medium density housing. In particular, the difficulties people face in gaining access to such housing and why these difficulties arise, at different stages of people's lives when they have different housing requirements. Hence the pilot study focuses on these issues and was sponsored by the Department of Infrastructure, Office of Planning and Heritage. Subsequent stages of the major research study will require ongoing funding by other institutions other than the Department.

In order to manage the project a Steering Committee was established which met regularly to guide the project and review the work which was undertaken in two steps:

- (i) conduct of literature review; and
- (ii) conduct and analysis of depth interviews.

(i) Literature review

A critical component of the pilot study was to define and refine the tasks to be carried out and write a detailed work schedule for the subsequent stages of the research. Because it was considered very important that any ongoing research was meaningful and methodologically sound the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) was commissioned to undertake a literature review which comprised two tasks:

- a literature search; and
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The accompanying AHURI report in Volume 2: Appendices, *Housing Choice in Australia: The Role of Medium Density Housing Forms* outlines the findings from this component of the study process and highlights data gaps and potential directions for future pilot study research and the larger study of residents' perceptions of attitudes to their living environment.

Having discussed this report, the Steering Committee decided that while the literature review revealed a lack of research which focussed on the influence of estate agents, Bodies Corporate and builders in affecting purchasers' decisions, it was more important to focus on the role of location in housing choice. Though the literature review had indicated that location was likely to be a deciding factor when choosing a house; location was also likely to be overlooked by respondents who were questioned about their housing choice.

The main questions that required further study were:

What are the physical characteristics, attributes or extent of social networks of a particular location that make it important to the consumer?

Is there an awareness of options available to prospective buyers?

Is there awareness about the kinds of constraints placed on residents in the decision making process?

Another finding of the report was that:

Medium density forms of housing cannot be treated as a single form of housing, that is, attitudes towards units cannot be assumed to be the same as attitudes to small lot housing.

The report also cautions the use of the term 'medium density housing' at all in consumer research because the general population 'approximately one half' does not really understand what 'medium density housing' refers to.

From these main questions and findings it was decided to find out:

1. Who is living in the different forms of medium density housing and to examine the reasons for choosing the form they did instead of other forms, including a detached house on a larger lot.
2. Why similar households had not selected medium density housing as a preferred housing form.
3. Whether there is a relationship between variables concerning life style changes, income, socio-economic status, tenure classes and preferences for specific design features of dwellings.
4. The perceived affordability of the different forms of medium density housing relative to low density housing options.

Defining medium density housing

The following definition of medium density housing is taken from *'The Good Design Guide For Medium Density Housing'* produced by the Department of Planning and Development, Victoria, July, 1995:

Two or more dwellings on a site, other than moveable dwellings on a site or high-rise apartments; one dwelling on a lot of less than 300m²; residential buildings such as boarding houses; and extensions of the above.

However, *one dwelling on a lot size of less than 300m²* if built prior to 1960s, such as terrace houses have been included as low density housing.

(ii) Conduct and analysis of depth interviews

To test the locational factors and define the importance of location from the consumers' perspective the Steering Committee decided to conduct depth interviews in three contrasting case study areas in the east, north and west of the Melbourne metropolitan area, in the municipalities of Brimbank, Moreland and Boroondara.

Via the conduct of depth interviews this report specifically examines the locational and demographic differences between three Local Government Areas, Brimbank, Moreland and Boroondara and how these differences influence residents in their housing choice.

The specific aims of the interviews were to find out:

- whether the consumer had been constrained in locational and/or housing choice when considering purchasing a home;
- whether suitable accommodation was available for the consumer in the preferred location;
- what trade offs were made to find the appropriate accommodation in the preferred location;
- which forms of medium density housing are preferred by which group of people at different stages of the life cycle, of different socio-economic status and of different status;
- whether there is a relationship between variables concerning life changes, income, socio-economic status, tenure class and preferences for specific design features of dwellings (for example, privacy, separate dining rooms, etc).

The process

This report contains the findings from 30 depth interviews held in each of the three selected municipalities with 15 households who have moved into medium density housing in the last year and with 15 households who have moved into low density housing in the twelve months ending in January 1996. A total of 90 interviews were conducted.

The underlying aim of the qualitative approach to depth interviews was not to reach numerically based measurements of opinion, but more to understand the logic of consumer thought and attitudes which may underpin behaviour. An open-ended or non-directive approach to the interview was taken using a topic guide rather than a structured questionnaire format.

Conclusions

As a result of this study the conclusion was that consumers in Brimbank, Moreland and Boroondara, whether they be in low density or medium density housing forms, were constrained in location and housing choice when considering to purchase a home because :

- Consumers were not always able to find suitable accommodation in their preferred location within their time frame. This suggests that people may not have been aware of different housing options and that suitable options were simply not available in some areas.
- Across the three municipalities, medium density housing opened up the choice of housing options available to respondents. There were however some limitations to complete acceptance. Consumers' perceptions about medium density housing was sometimes limited. Medium density housing also did not meet the respondents' choice criteria, especially those of affordability and some negative design aspects. Body Corporates were also generally seen in an unfavourable light.
- The housing choice criteria and trade offs varied across different stages of the family life cycle and there were differences in the three study areas. Consumers across the different stages of the family life cycle were more likely to make the following trade offs:
 - In the earlier stages of the family life cycle, respondents were more likely to trade off location because this group preferred the inner city areas. Finding affordable housing was of great concern to this group with many trading off both their preferred location and their preferred form of housing.
 - During the middle stages of the family life cycle this group was more likely to trade off the condition of housing as well as budget considerations.
 - Towards the later stages in the family life cycle respondents consistently traded off financial considerations. Some spent more money than they planned on housing to secure a new, appealing, low maintenance home close to services.
- Medium density housing was being taken up by and provided a greater choice for respondents across all the different stages of the life cycle. There remained however issues of how aware people were of medium density housing options, people's need for internal and external space and privacy as well as issues of affordability.
- In Moreland more respondents traded off location in order to secure their preferred type of housing.
- In Boroondara more respondents traded off their preferred type of housing and budget considerations in order to be in a preferred location.
- Traditionally medium density housing was perhaps more likely to be considered by people in the earlier and later stages of the family life cycle. Older medium density housing, in larger groups or clusters was usually selected by this younger group because they found it affordable.
- Respondents in the later stages of the family life cycle preferred newer medium density housing. As well as being low maintenance, a new medium density house quite often seemed to compensate for the loss of giving up the old family home.
- Characteristics which helped to distinguish differences and preferences for housing design were household structure, ethnic background and pet ownership. The location of the previous residence or where a respondent's work was located were also influencing factors though not as strong as those above.

Findings

The conclusions are based on these fundamental findings highlighted in the following chapters of the report.

The decision to move (see Chapter 5)

- Younger singles who were mainly first home buyers had chosen medium density housing.
- Most younger singles saw their current home as the start of something bigger and better in the future.
- Older singles moved for similar reasons however their priorities were for privacy and control of their living space and for this reason were very committed to finding low density housing.
- Most younger couples chose low density housing. With two incomes this group had more money to spend on housing and were also more conscious of their future housing requirements.
- Younger couples with children preferred low density housing mainly because they required more space.
- For middle couples with children their choice was not quite so clear. Some chose medium density housing in anticipation of their children leaving home while others chose low density housing.
- Nearly all 'empty nesters' chose medium density housing with seventy five per cent choosing new medium density housing mainly in the form of smaller groups of units (less than six) and dual occupancies. Some 'empty nesters' who were still in the original family home were potentially seeking to buy appropriate medium density housing but were finding it too expensive.
- Most separated people and sole parents were living in medium density housing.

Influences on the search process and the housing choice process (see Chapter 7)

- Respondents were most influenced by family members and real estate agents.
- Bodies Corporate were not perceived favourably and many respondents sought smaller groups of units to avoid any involvement with them.

Housing choice criteria and trade offs (see Chapter 8)

- Respondents' choice criteria were, in order of importance, location, housing and financial.
- Location was most often traded off, with many choosing housing further out from the CBD than preferred. There were notable differences in the degree to which the three criteria were traded off between the three municipalities.
- Housing criteria were also frequently traded off (number of rooms, condition, housing form) with many respondents trading off aspects of both housing and location.
- Financial considerations were less frequently traded off compared to location and housing considerations. This was because there was a tendency to purchase at or near the upper limit of a respondent's price range.

- The sample profile in each area contributed to these differences. Age and stage in the family life cycle was the most useful consumer characteristic in explaining differences in consumer preferences and choices in housing in the three local government areas.
- During each stage of the family life cycle, different housing choice criteria were traded off when consumers chose a particular residence. Younger respondents, for example, were more likely to trade off location. During the middle stages of life, a desired aspect of a house was more likely to be sacrificed. Older respondents usually paid more to get the new medium density house they wanted without trading off location.

Preferred housing forms and housing forms selected (see Chapter 9)

- Respondents often considered medium density housing in the forms of flats, dual occupancies, town houses and units in small clusters within their preferred location.
- If medium density housing was rejected it was usually because of one or a combination of the following reasons:
 - Medium density housing, in the forms of newer units and townhouses, was considered **relatively expensive** in comparison to other housing forms.
 - Respondents were not prepared to trade-off their priorities for **space and privacy** for medium density housing.
 - Beliefs and attitudes about medium density housing prevented some people from considering this option. Very common in the market, dual occupancy housing did seem to unfavourably influence perceptions about medium density housing generally.
 - Perceived problems with Bodies Corporate and having to comply with its rules.
- For many respondents, the location of their medium density residence, for instance a dual occupancy or a unit within a small cluster, was not in their first choice area, particularly in **Moreland**.
- A common theme for many respondents was to compromise on location further from the inner city/CBD area. Often, specific location was very much determined by what people could afford.
- Respondents tended to adjust and rationalise their location choice once they had an idea of the areas they could afford and the type of home they wanted.
- Many respondents stumbled on an affordable area they hadn't considered before and settled on their choice by revealing the area's more attractive aspects.
- In the supply of housing stock there were clear differences between the municipalities:
 - **Moreland** was perceived to have a good supply available of affordable, low density housing.
 - **Brimbank** was perceived as having more new housing stock but not well served by public transport.
 - **Boroondara** was perceived as very attractive, well serviced and consequently a more expensive area.

Location factors influencing housing choice (see Chapter 10)

- Choosing a house was a quite different experience in each of the municipalities (**Moreland, Boroondara** and **Brimbank**). This is due partly to the different sample profile in each area. The sample profiles noted differences in the proportion of respondents in each stage of the family life cycle.

- Other important differences in the sample profile were ethnic background, household income and occupation, the location of the previous residence, proximity to relatives, current employment and respondents' previous experiences and attitudes to medium density housing. All these variables worked in different combinations and in different ways in each municipality.

Satisfaction with housing and post-purchase rationalisation of house selected (see Chapter 11)

- In comparison with other areas the overall satisfaction with the choice of housing of Brimbank respondents was higher. A greater variety of housing, including a mix of new and old housing, as well as some less and some more expensive options contributed to this situation.
- Compared to the other municipalities, more respondents in Moreland were not satisfied with the housing choice available. This view was influenced by a group of respondents who preferred affordable housing in inner locations in the east and south eastern suburbs. Among this group the available housing choice was not considered satisfactory.
- Although there were favourable comments about the variety and supply of both low and medium density housing in Boroondara, nevertheless a substantial group of respondents were dissatisfied with the choice of housing. Their dissatisfaction seemed to be related to the cost of relatively expensive housing in Boroondara, one of the most appealing areas in Melbourne. The housing aspirations of respondents living in this area were higher than those in the other two municipalities.
- Many respondents traded off a preferred residential location for a home with enough space.

Awareness and perceptions of medium density housing forms (see Chapter 12)

- Many medium density housing options allowed respondents to meet their various criteria particularly in the earlier and late stages of the life cycle. For respondents in the earlier stages of the life cycle this was usually an older, affordable unit within a larger group. For those in the later stages of the life cycle this was usually a low maintenance unit in a small cluster, in a preferred location and close to services.
- The major location perceptions of medium density housing were:
 - in **Boroondara** there was a more than adequate supply of medium density housing and may even be changing the neighbourhood character;
 - **Moreland** had a limited supply of expensive medium density housing (relative to the existing low density housing stock);
 - in **Moreland** there was a shortage of medium density housing with three or more bedrooms;
 - in **Brimbank** the variety was limited although the supply of medium density housing was perceived as adequate.
- Affordability and the perceived value for money of newer medium density housing was the major constraint of older respondents selecting medium density housing as their preferred option relative to other housing options.
- Awareness of and respondents' perceptions or misconceptions of the housing form also appeared to be a factor constraining preferences for this form of housing.

Perceived affordability of different housing forms (see Chapter 13)

A major finding in this research was the trend amongst 'empty nesters' to look for a smaller house and consolidate their financial position as they got older. By paying out a small mortgage on the old property and buying a smaller one, ideally a lump sum was left over as a 'nest egg.' This group strongly preferred new medium density housing, usually a new unit in a block of less than 6. After selling their home for a smaller one however, a respondent's resulting financial position was often not as sound as anticipated.

Housing design preferences (see Chapter 14)

Major consumer preferences influencing design considerations were that medium density housing:

- was located near services (shops, public transport);
- addressed internal and external space and privacy considerations;
- was preferably in a smaller group or cluster of units or in a dual occupancy where both dwellings were new. A new unit built in the backyard of an older home was considered less attractive;
- had a variety of living space configurations (ie an extra bedroom, a living area, an outdoor area and a garage or workshop).

The notion of 'space' was considered to be very important by respondents. Space can either be described as internal or external. Internal space refers to the 'feel' of a living area and could mean for instance, having a window or door in the 'right' location which could prevent someone feeling 'boxed in'. External space on the other hand, can mean, as well as a large back yard, a small space which provides a sense of privacy even though a dwelling is one of several in a housing development. The notion of external space is one which gives residents a sense of control over their living environment. In contrast, communal space, which everybody has access to, does not offer the same sense of privacy or control over one's environment. 'Space' was considered more important to members of Australian born families.

The rental market (see Chapter 15)

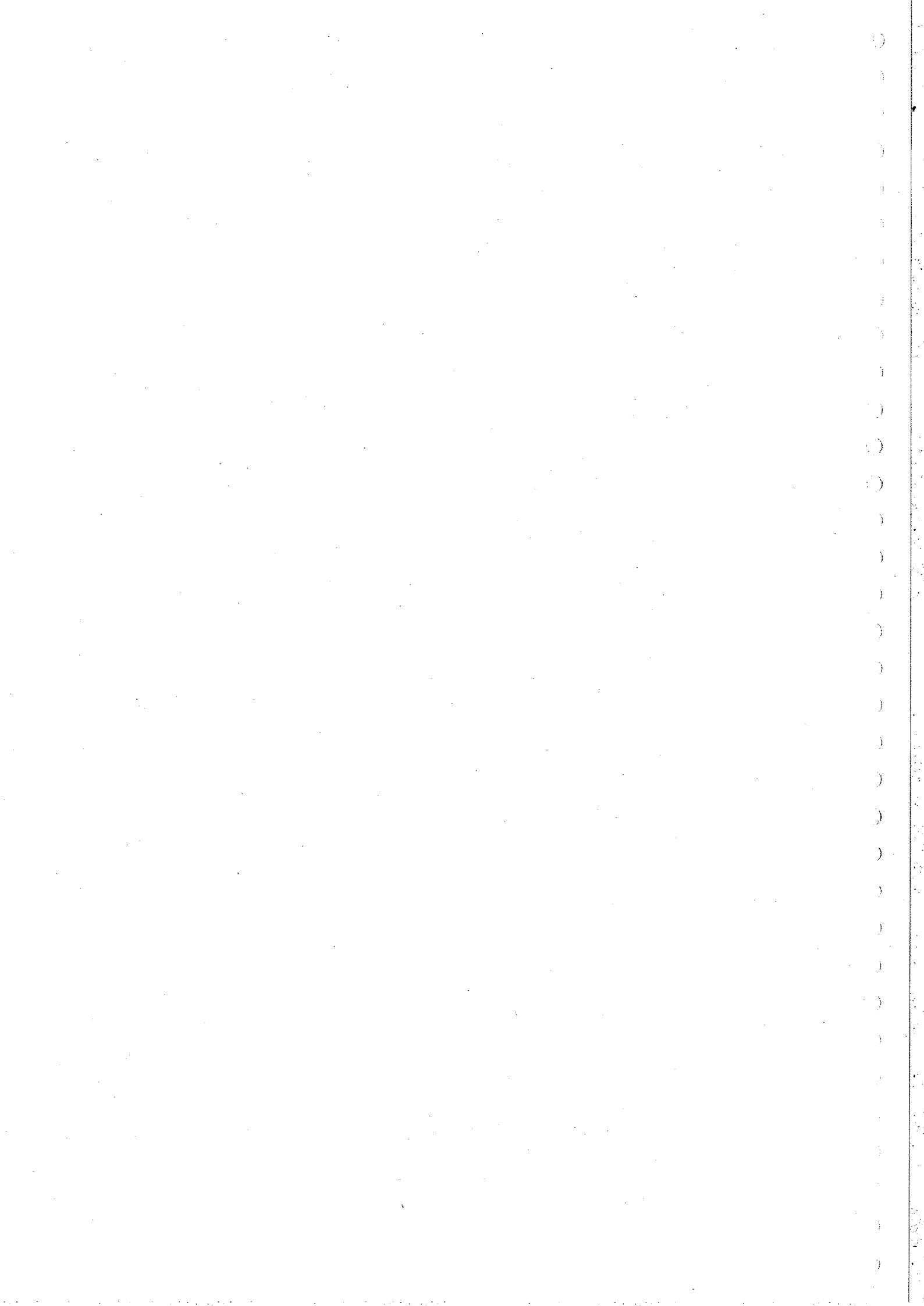
Respondents in rental accommodation (more likely to be in medium density housing) were only a small part of the sample - six in total, with two in each municipality. Clean, comfortable and affordable rental accommodation was considered difficult to find by all respondents.

Implications for the expansion of the medium density housing market

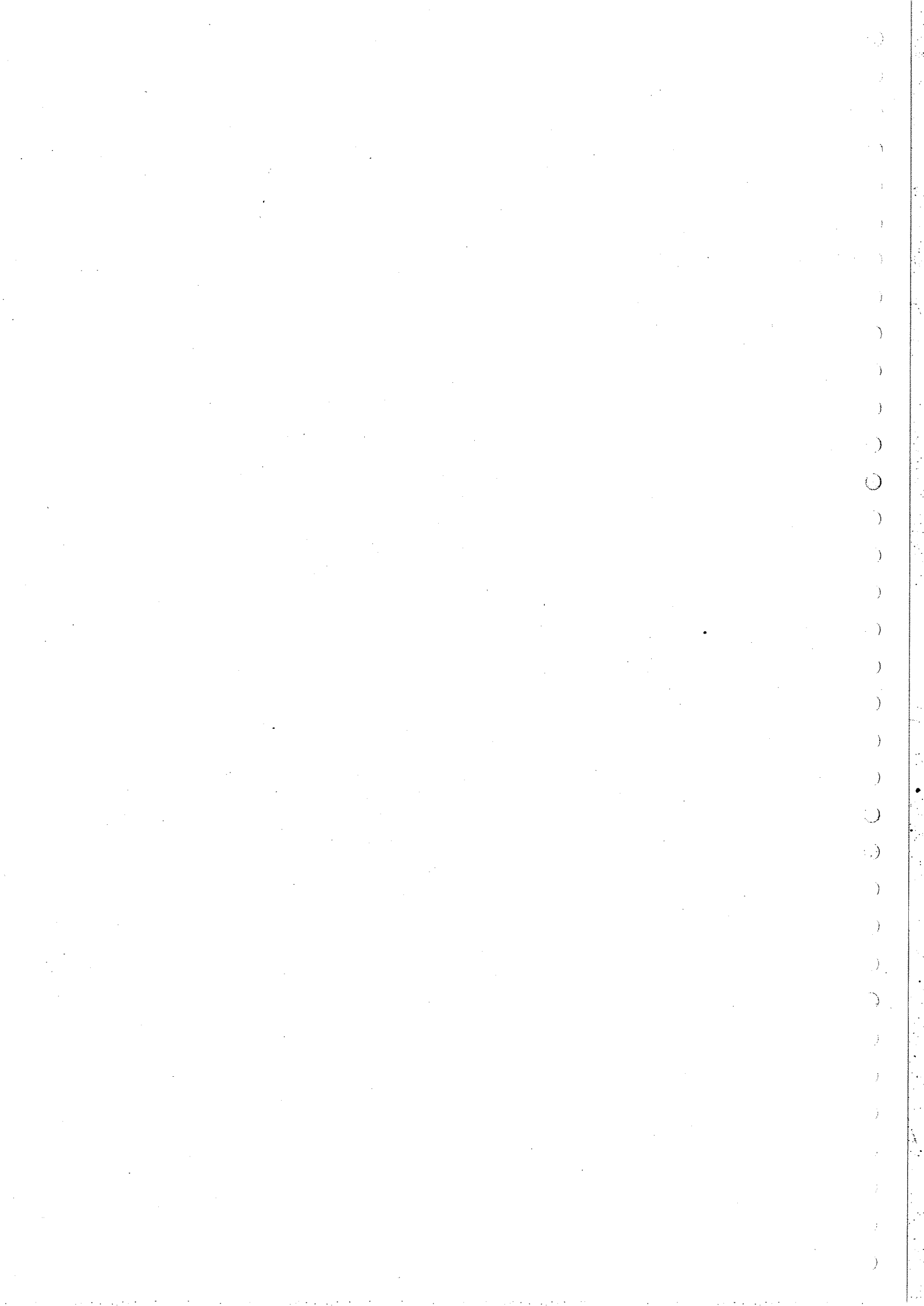
Because there is a perceived shortage of supply of older style medium density housing options, older residents are currently staying in the family home instead of moving to more expensive medium density housing options. A supply of this type of medium density housing would satisfy this group's need as well as expanding the housing market in general.

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1

Introduction

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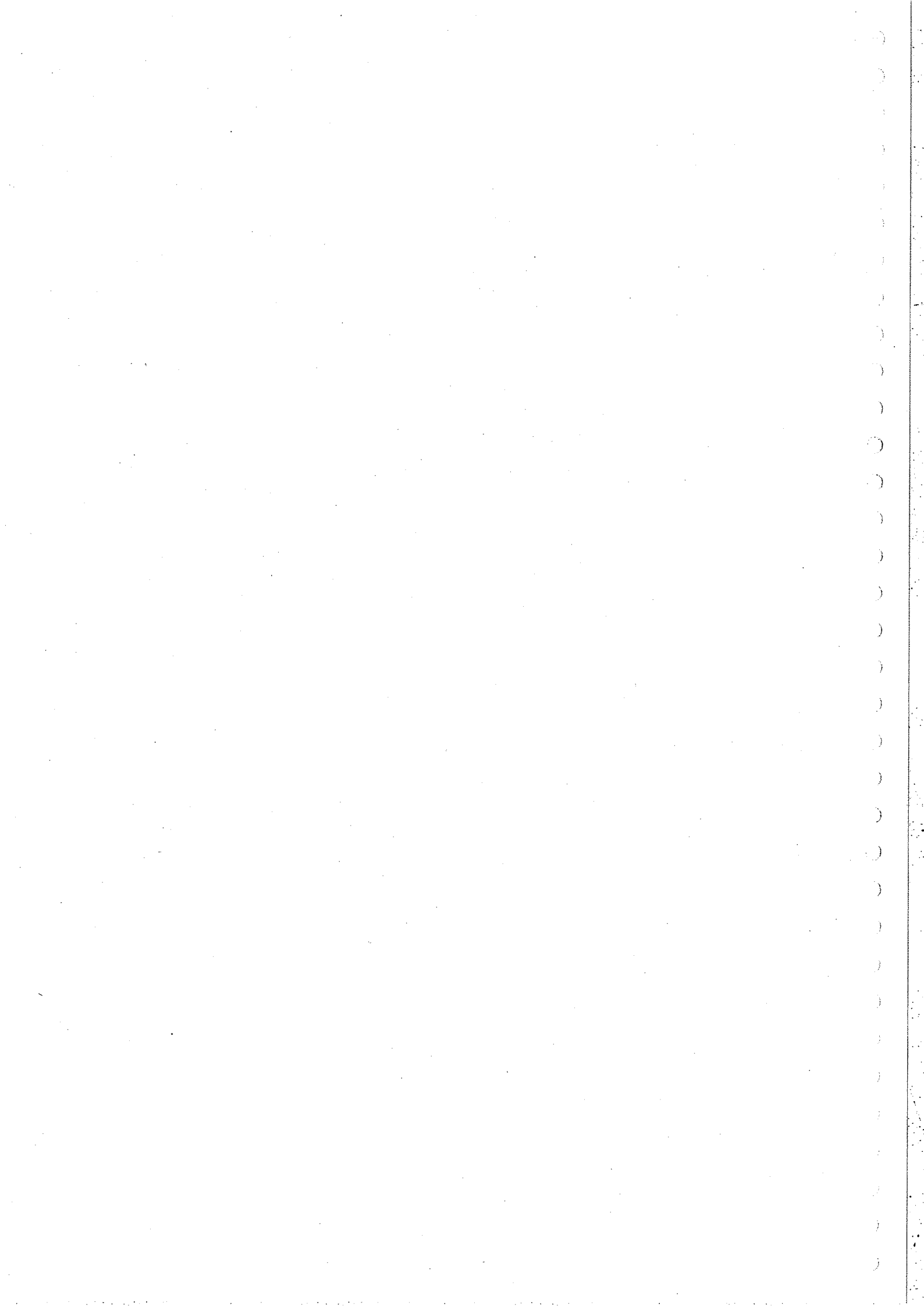
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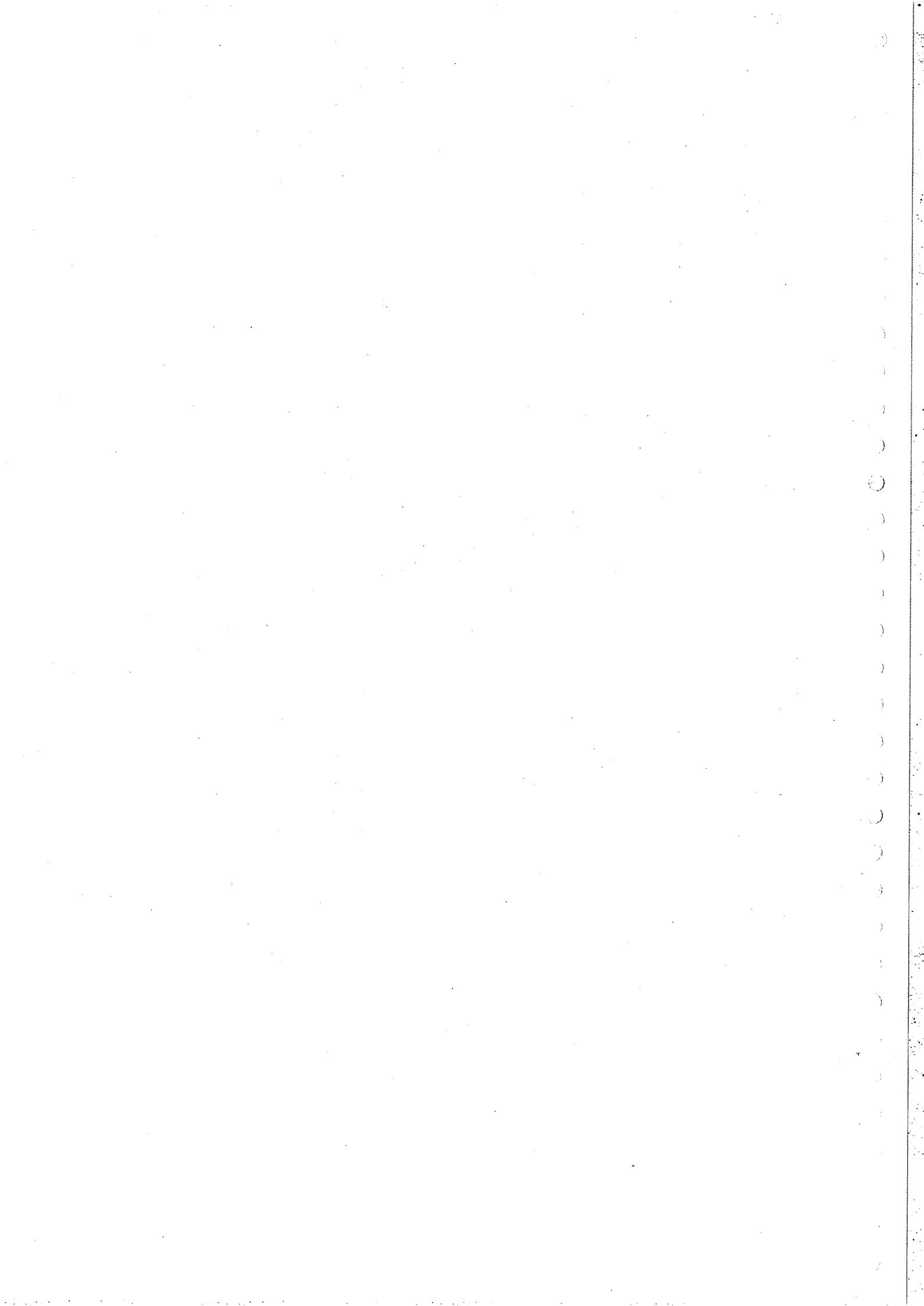


2

Research objectives

The specific aims of the interviews were:

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 - *Is suitable accommodation available for the consumer in the preferred location?*
 - *What trade offs are made to find the appropriate accommodation in the preferred location?*
- *To identify which forms of medium density housing are preferred by which group of people at different stages in the life cycle, of different socio-economic status and of different tenure status.*
- *To establish whether there is a relationship between variables concerning life changes, income, socio-economic status, tenure class and preferences for specific design features of dwellings (for example, privacy, separate dining rooms etc).*



3

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to explore in detail, the decision making process of choosing a house. This entailed identifying consumer's motivations, their awareness of relevant issues as well as their opinions and behaviours relating to their housing needs and personal circumstances.

3.1 Research methodology

A 'consumer' is defined as someone purchasing or renting a residence for their own occupation in the twelve months to January 1996.

Depth interviewing was the qualitative technique selected as the most appropriate method of data collection. This technique enabled the interviewer to explore issues with individuals in greater detail and in confidence.

In total ninety depth interviews were conducted, thirty in each of the three municipalities, Moreland, Boroondara and Brimbank. About half the interviews in each area were with people choosing low density and the other half choosing medium density housing. Interviews were conducted in respondents' homes and where possible with the individuals or couples who had been involved in the decision making process of choosing a house.

On average three or four interviews were conducted each day which was the recommended maximum. Over half the interviews were scheduled in the evenings or on Saturdays because people were working during the week. Interviews ranged in duration from forty minutes to over two hours.

Where possible interviews were conducted with those involved in the choice process, whether they were individuals or couples. People disagreed on aspects of their experiences when choosing a home and this generated some interesting debate.

All interviews were taped and transcripts made. The editing process aimed to ensure 'readability' of the transcript without altering the content or context. Full transcripts of interviews are in Volume 3 of this report.

Defining medium density housing

Because the definition of housing forms has changed over the past few decades, it is no longer possible to define density in terms of structure alone. Small lot housing as a more recent form of medium density housing has meant that detached dwellings may be classified as medium density or low density depending on the size of the lot.

The following definition of medium density housing is taken from *'The Good Design Guide For Medium Density Housing'* produced by the Department of Planning and Development, Victoria, July, 1995:

Two or more dwellings on a site, other than moveable dwellings on a site or high-rise apartments; one dwelling on a lot of less than 300m²; residential buildings such as boarding houses; and extensions of the above.

However, *one dwelling on a lot size of less than 300m²* if built prior to 1960's, such as terrace houses have been included as low density housing.

While this definition of medium density housing has meaning for those educated about housing issues, it is interesting to note that most respondents did not know that they were living in a housing form described as medium density.

Research technique

The underlying aim of this qualitative approach to depth interviews was not to reach numerically based measurements of opinion but more to understand the logic of consumer thought and attitudes which may underpin behaviour. An open-ended or don-directive approach to the interview was taken using a topic guide rather than a structured questionnaire format.

Topics were explored in free flowing discussion as they arose or were raised for discussion with respondents as issues for possible comment and reaction. In other words, the respondent(s) were given maximum freedom to respond how they chose to ensure that the data emerging were a richer portrayal of attitudes and thought processes than would otherwise be collected in the less intense interviewing processes. Interviews were tape recorded, then the findings were analysed and summarised. Care has been taken to preserve confidentiality. Respondent names have not been used in the reporting and any specific information which may identify the respondents has not been included in the discussion.

At the beginning of each interview, the interviewer informed respondents about the purpose and nature of the interviews as well as the relevant bodies supporting the project; VPELA, Department of Infrastructure and local Councils.

The interviewer explained to the respondent how they were identified and selected for interview. Respondents were also assured of confidentiality and the anonymity of their information.

Respondents were encouraged to talk about their past housing experiences, what they required when choosing a home and their aspirations for choosing a home in the future.

Because of the lack of understanding of the term 'medium density' by the general population as stated in the AHURI report (see Volume 2 of this report), these words were not generally used during the interview. To elicit reactions to the different forms of housing the interviewer and/or the respondent described the different housing forms.

Interviews were conducted along the following lines of enquiry:

- Previous situations and reasons for moving:-
 - historical data about residential movement patterns;
 - previous addresses, housing types, length of residency, tenure patterns;
 - reasons for moving.
- Preferred residential locations and housing type:-
 - locations preferred when looking for a house and why;
 - housing availability, medium density and detached housing options in the preferred locations;
 - housing at an affordable price, medium density housing and detached housing in the preferred locations;

- The search process:-
 - housing forms looked at and in what locations as part of the search process;
 - housing forms and locations rejected as part of the search process and why;
 - role of estate agents, display homes and other advisers;
 - influence of Bodies Corporate.
- Decision making rationale:-
 - reasons for selecting a particular housing form in a particular location compared with elsewhere: price, design, lifestyle, etc;
 - availability of finance;
 - compromises made in housing decision, that is, preferred choice versus actual choice.
- Level of satisfaction with housing choice:-
 - satisfaction with existing location and housing form in terms of design, for example size and number of rooms, the relationships between the internal spaces, the size of the external space, use of the spaces, number of car spaces, etc;
- Housing aspirations:-
 - likely length of stay in residence, that is, short term or long term housing options and reason for such;
 - housing forms and locations preferred in future and why.
- Household characteristics:-
 - number and age of household members;
 - ethnic origin;
 - occupational status;
 - number of vehicles;
 - tenure status.

3.2 Sample methodology

The sample was drawn from council *Valuations Listing* and *Rates Records* and *Telstra New Telephone Listings*. Selecting the sample and recruiting respondents however, took longer than expected. The *Valuations Listing* provided the address, sale price and type of residential property purchased in the last twelve months. *Rates Records* provided the name of the resident and the residential status of the property, that is whether it was owner occupied or rented. *Telstra New Telephone Listings* was used to obtain telephone numbers for those who had just moved into their homes.

The *Valuations Listing*, which is a full list of residential properties purchased over a twelve month period 1995-1996 was provided by both Moreland and Brimbank Councils. Boroondara declined to make this information available.

As part of on-going research members of VPELA will analyse the data provided in these listings to provide further background to the research. Details on the number, type and price range of these properties will be compiled and compared across the three municipalities.

To get 30 interviews, a list of 120-150 names, addresses and where possible phone numbers were compiled for each area. Care was taken to ensure the sample included a spread of interviews across suburbs within each municipalities. On average about two thirds of these residential properties were owner-occupied. The rate was lower for units. Of those owner-occupied, a little over half had listed telephone numbers.

Letters on VPELA letterhead were mailed to prospective respondents, explaining the purpose and nature of the interviews and asking for their participation. Where possible these letters were followed by a phone call, usually made in the early evening, within the week of the letter arriving. If necessary several attempts were made contact prospective respondents. This approach achieved about a 70% positive response rate from the letters and follow-up telephone calls.

A small number of letters addressed to 'The Resident' were mailed to those properties understood to be occupied by renters. The resident was asked to telephone a central telephone number if interested in taking part in this study. This approach was not successful and an alternative method was used to recruit renters. Purchasers interviewed were asked if they knew anyone renting in the area who might be prepared to be interviewed. Renters however were only a small group in the sample (six out of ninety).

Approximately half the interviews were conducted with respondents in medium density housing forms (1 in 2) and half with respondents in low density housing. To achieve this sample composition, respondents in medium density housing have been over sampled and are therefore over represented in the sample population.

However, it should be noted that the incidence of respondents selecting medium density housing forms in the general population is estimated to be closer to 20%, or 1 in 5.

3.3 Qualitative research - strengths and limitations

The aim of implementing qualitative research at this stage of the pilot study was to gain insight into the subject and the range of issues involved to assist in the design of subsequent stages of research. This technique enables the interviewer to explore issues with individual respondents in greater detail and in confidence than would otherwise be possible in a structured interview. The beliefs, opinions, and motivation of individual respondents were explored using this method and enabled comparisons to be made between the three locations. The large sample size notwithstanding, the larger number of depth interviews (90) also enabled influences to be analysed for the responses to the major issues explored and gave some indication as to how dominant the feelings and attitudes were with respect to particular issues.

Limitations associated with the methodology include:

- The findings are not quantitative, and therefore are not necessarily representative of all groups in the market.
- The findings do not show the degree to which these views are held by the various segments of the total group.

4

Characteristics of respondent households

This chapter presents the main consumer characteristics recorded in the interviews and identifies the ones most useful in identifying patterns and differences in consumers' housing preferences and choices between the three municipalities.

Of the many consumer characteristics, the respondents' stage in the life cycle was the most relevant and helpful indication in understanding differences in consumers' preferences and choices of housing. A respondent's stage in the life cycle is the basis of much of the analysis of this report. Consumers' preferences and choices are evident in all municipalities and are linked to life cycle stages. Younger singles for example usually chose medium density housing. Attitudes and behaviour in the different stages however, varied in the three municipalities.

Other characteristics influencing consumer preferences included:

- form of the chosen housing;
- whether the home was newly built;
- housing form of the previous residence.

Information was recorded for each respondent and ranked by their stage in the life cycle. In this way multiple characteristics were analysed for each respondent.

Other consumer characteristics such as:

- family location;
- residential histories;
- employment related issues;
- first or subsequent home buyer status

were recorded but not analysed in detail in this report.

The following is a summary of the main consumer characteristics.

4.1 Stage in the life cycle

Young singles

The ten respondents interviewed were all living in medium density housing in the forms of units in small groups, dual occupancies and flats.

Older singles or peers together

Of the nine respondents interviewed in this group just under half were living in low density housing. The remainder were living in medium density housing forms which ranged from units in small groups to one dual occupancy.

Younger couples

Of the sixteen respondents interviewed in this group, the majority were living in low density housing. The remainder were living in medium density housing forms which ranged from dual occupancies and units in smaller groups.

Younger couples with children

Of the seventeen respondents interviewed in this group just under half were living in low density housing. The remainder were living in medium density housing forms which ranged from units in small and larger groups, to dual occupancies as well as a house on a medium density estate.

Middle couples with children

Of the seventeen respondents interviewed in this group, over half were living in low density housing. The remainder were living in medium density housing forms which ranged from units in both small and larger groups and dual occupancies, two of which were new.

'Empty nesters'

Eighteen of the twenty-one respondents interviewed in this group were all living in medium density housing forms. These ranged from a house on a reduced block, dual occupancies, units in small and larger groups, to one unit in a very large group of sixty eight.

4.2 Ethnic background

The proportion of Australian born respondents was higher in Moreland and Boroondara than in Brimbank.

Moreland:	Australian born	- 26
	Non - Australian born	- 4
Boroondara:	Australian born	- 26
	Non - Australian born	- 4
Brimbank:	Australian born	- 13
	Non - Australian born	- 17

The sample drawn from Moreland and Boroondara included the same proportion of Australian and non-Australian born respondents. However within these areas, the ethnic backgrounds of respondents were quite different. In Moreland, the countries of origin for non-Australian born individuals included China, Italy and Greece. In Boroondara all those born outside Australia were from the United Kingdom. In Moreland the parents of many second generation non-Australians came mainly from Italy and Greece.

The ethnic backgrounds of respondents in Brimbank were quite different from the other two areas. Over half the respondents (17 out of 30) were immigrants to Australia. Their main countries of origin included the old Yugoslavia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malta.

Stories of how new immigrants came to choose a particular area to live in were similar. New arrivals tended to stay with family or friends, then rent nearby or eventually buy a house. In most cases they would continue to live close to family members. Most respondents in Brimbank identified *being close to family* as important when choosing their house. In Brimbank this criterion was more important than the others and indicates how new immigrants tend to settle together in the same areas.

Brimbank's migrant population impacted on many aspects of the findings, making it quite distinct from the other municipalities in terms of housing choice. Many migrants for example, said they would prefer to live in a newly built house although they were not always in a position to afford one. They also considered a back yard a burden to maintain. A few mentioned they were either not interested or wouldn't know how to garden. Interestingly, two younger respondents in Brimbank mentioned they would like a decent sized front yard. One young couple with a child said it was important that they were seen to own a larger block of land.

The preference for a *free-standing house with a backyard*, or low density housing, seems to be stronger in the earlier stages of the life cycle, particularly among Australian born respondents. This preference was mentioned more often by respondents in Moreland and Boroondara.

4.3 Household income

This information was the most difficult to collect from respondents and its accuracy is questionable. Respondents were asked to provide an estimate of their household income to include all income from paid employment, investments, pensions and rent from tenants or boarders. Where this information was not received estimates were made or the information not included. Below is the average household income of respondents for each municipality:

Moreland:	Average household income	- \$60,000
Boroondara:	Average household income	- \$75,000
Brimbank:	Average household income	- \$40,000

The relative average household income is higher in the Boroondara sample due to the larger number of higher income professionals in the sample. The lower average income in Brimbank is linked to the higher number of retired people and the higher number of non-professional and unskilled workers in the sample in that area.

4.4 Number of people, cars and pets per household

People per household

There was little variation in the size of households between the three municipalities. Predictably single person households were, almost without exception, in the early or later stages of the family life cycle. Households with older single people or peers sharing usually contained one, two or, very occasionally, three adults. The largest households were couples with children. The highest number of children in a family was four.

Cars per household

Below is the number of cars owned by households. Numbers varied very little between municipalities.

Moreland:	One or no car households	- 17
	Two or more cars	- 13
Boroondara:	One or no car households	- 13
	Two or more cars	- 17
Brimbank:	One or no car households	- 20
	Two or more cars	- 10

Most households owned at least one car. It was more likely that older people did not own a car. More households owned more than one car in Boroondara and fewer owned more than one car in Brimbank. This is interesting considering the favourable references made by respondents in Boroondara to its services, including public transport. In Brimbank however, where there are fewer multiple car households, many respondents mentioned problems associated with access to public transport.

Pet ownership per household

About one third (27 out of 90) of households in the sample owned dogs. *Space and pets' needs* were often mentioned as important considerations when deciding the important criteria for choosing a house.

The majority of households with pets (19 out of 27) chose low density housing. Households with pets living in medium density housing frequently considered their pets needs when they were looking at medium density housing options and selected houses with enclosed outdoor areas. These respondents were also more likely to be wary of the Body Corporate.

Almost all dog owning households were Australian born (24 out of 27). Dog ownership seems to be linked to cultural background which may have implications for housing choice.

4.5 Location of previous residence

This summary analyses whether a respondent's previous residence was within or outside the municipality.

Moreland:	From outside municipality	- 20
	From within municipality	- 10
Boroondara:	From outside council area	- 20
	From within municipality	- 10
Brimbank:	From outside municipality	- 9
	From within municipality	- 21

In both Moreland and Boroondara, two thirds of respondents (20 out of 30) moved to these areas. In Brimbank only one third (10 out of 30) were from outside the area. This trend in Brimbank was linked to the high proportion of non-Australian born people choosing to remain close to their families.

Younger people looking for affordable low density housing accounted for the larger number of residents who moved to Moreland for the first time.

The large proportion of respondents may have moved to Boroondara because Boroondara was considered by many respondents to be a very desirable location. It has a high social status and is close to services, particularly schools. Respondents who had moved to Boroondara from interstate or overseas were guided towards this area by relocation consultants who perhaps had similar perceptions about the municipality.

4.6 Location of work

Respondents regularly mentioned the location of employment as an influence in their choice of housing location. The following analysis broadly shows the location of work places.

Moreland:	Working in the CBD and surrounds	- 10
	Working outside local government area	- 4
	Working within local government area	- 13
	Not working	- 3
Boroondara:	Working in the CBD and surrounds	- 13
	Working outside local government area	- 3
	Working within local government area	- 9
	Not working	- 5
Brimbank:	Working in the CBD and surrounds	- 7
	Working outside local government area	- 8
	Working within local government area	- 5
	Not working	- 10

More people in Boroondara and Moreland worked in the CBD and surrounding area. This was not surprising because of their closeness to the city. The fact that Brimbank had fewer respondents working within the municipality compared to the other council locations may indicate a shortage of employment opportunities in that municipality.

4.7 Choosing a newly built or an older house

A newly built home was a choice criteria mentioned by many respondents, particularly those in the later stages of the family life cycle. Below is a summary of the number of newly built or older homes occupied by respondents in each of the municipalities.

Moreland:	Newly built home	-	8
	Older home	-	22
Boroondara:	Newly built home	-	9
	Older home	-	21
Brimbank:	Newly built home	-	16
	Older home	-	14

Brimbank had a much higher proportion of respondents selecting newly built homes because:

1. A slightly higher number of respondents were both older and non-Australian born. (Both these groups tended to show a greater preference for newly built housing).
2. Of the higher number of new housing developments available in Brimbank in comparison with the other municipalities. (The variety and design of new medium density housing however, is perceived to be limited).

4.8 Previous situation and current housing form selected

The form of housing respondents lived in previously seemed to have some bearing on housing preferences and choices. Below is a summary of previous and current housing forms selected by respondents in each area.

Moreland:	Previous housing form same as current	-	16
	From low to medium density housing	-	9
	From medium to low density housing	-	5
Boroondara:	Previous housing form same as current	-	14
	From low to medium density housing	-	11
	From medium to low density housing	-	5
Brimbank:	Previous housing form same as current	-	13
	From low to medium density housing	-	14
	From medium to low density housing	-	3

About half of all respondents selected a housing form similar to their previous home.

In Brimbank, more respondents than in either of the other areas (14 out of 30) moved from low to medium density housing forms. This is higher than Boroondara (11 out of 30) and Moreland (9 out of 30). This difference was mainly due to the larger proportion of 'empty nesters' who moved from low to medium density housing options (8 out of 9) in Brimbank. It may also suggest that medium density housing options (other than new medium density housing) are more enticing and accessible in this municipality.

Only a small percentage of the respondents in each area had previously lived in medium density housing and then moved into low density housing. Those who did were mainly younger people.

More older respondents in this municipality moved to medium density housing compared to low density housing.



5

The decision to move

As stated previously the stage in the life cycle is a helpful indicator in understanding consumers' preferences and choice of housing. Respondents were asked about their reasons for moving and motivations to purchase particular housing forms in particular locations. Respondents in all the life cycle stages moved to a particular type of house for a variety of reasons.

5.1 Younger singles

In the earlier stages of the life cycle, 'younger singles' moved because:

- they left the parental home;
- they were more financially secure;
- they were tired of the inconvenience or expense of paying rent.

A common pattern for this group was to secure work, buy a car, possibly travel overseas and then return to home to Australia and buy a house:

It was time for me to get my own place. (Younger single in medium density housing, Brimbank).

I had some money together and had to decide whether to go overseas or get a house. (Younger single in medium density housing, Moreland).

Almost all 'young singles' interviewed were first home buyers and most had chosen medium density housing. They made this choice because they considered that medium density housing:

- was more affordable;
- required less space ;
- required lower maintenance.

Members of this group were more likely to choose slightly older units because they were more affordable.

Most younger singles saw their current home as a *stepping stone* or *something that suited them for the moment* and aspired to something better, usually larger, in the future. These aspirations were often tied into the idea that *if and when they had a family they would need more space or not want to be in this area.*

5.2 Older singles and peers living together

This group included slightly older singles living alone and peers or friends living together. There were more likely to be two adults in this household compared to the younger single group.

Their reasons for moving were quite similar to younger singles, however they wanted privacy and more control of their living space.

For this reason, some members of this group were very committed to finding low density housing. A few older singles, mostly in their forties, had spent many years sharing with others in rental accommodation and were now seeking their own space and privacy.

After 25 years of sharing with people you get to the point where you want some peace. (Older single in low density housing, Moreland).

Two long standing girlfriends for instance, bought a house together because it was the only way they could afford a free standing house. A gay male couple who were committed to their relationship did the same.

This suggested that as people get older, they are attracted to low density housing because they value space and privacy.

Within this group were peers sub-letting their homes, often to a family member or friend to strengthen their financial position:

My cousin is lodging with me, he helps pay the bills. (Peers living together in medium density housing, Boroondara).

We've been friends for quite a long while and we ended up sharing together. We were wasting all this money on rent and couldn't afford to buy separately. (Peers living together in low density housing, Moreland).

5.3 Younger couples

Most of the 'younger couples' interviewed chose low density housing. Their reasons for moving were often similar to the 'younger singles' but with important differences. With two incomes this group was usually in a stronger financial position and more conscious of future housing requirements. Purchasing a home together was often a statement of commitment to the relationship and the recognition of possibly having children in the future:

We decided we wanted to buy a house together. Our relationship was steady and we had been together for three or four years. (Younger couple in low density housing, Moreland).

We wanted to invest in a home. I'm a bit of a home handyman and wanted to fix things up. I thought it was ridiculous fixing someone else's home. (Younger couple in low density housing, Boroondara).

I think I was aware of them (schools in the area, as they considered having children). I remember thinking this place was close to South Brunswick Primary School. I've heard people say it's a good school. (Younger couple in low density housing, Moreland).

5.4 Younger couples with children

'Younger couples with children' more often moved for reasons linked to family living and children. Considerations of extra space, (inside and outside) and schools appeared regularly. The need to own and control their own space was also strong in this group. Low density housing was more widely preferred by this group than by respondents in other life cycle stages:

We'd outgrown the old house. We needed a back garden and second living room. We needed to make the move before the children settled into school. (Boroondara resident living in low density housing).

Some members of this group chose medium density housing, particularly in **Moreland** and **Brimbank**, mainly because it was more affordable and conveniently located.

5.5 Couples at middle stage of life cycle with children

'Middle couples with children' were families with older children. Members of this group moved for various reasons but were more likely to move for reasons relating to children and the quality of family life.

In all three municipalities, this group was not so clear about its choice of housing. Some opted for medium and others low density housing forms.

Some 'middle couples with children' moved to a house with less space. In anticipation of children leaving home, they chose medium density housing. Clearly people were thinking about their future housing needs as children became more independent.

The amount of *space in the home required for family* was less important for this group as other reasons for moving took priority. For instance moving to a more convenient location or improving access to work, secondary schools and university were often considerations:

We need to move before the children settled into school. (Middle family with children living in low density housing, Boroondara).

We didn't like all the travelling. It was eating into our family life. (Couple living in low density housing who had moved from Burwood to Hawthorn).

5.6 'Empty nesters'

'Empty nesters' were older couples or singles without children at home. Their reasons for moving and choice of housing forms were quite defined. They moved because their housing needs changed as they aged and issues of health and mobility became more important. Members of this group moved because they wanted:

- a smaller house and garden that required less maintenance;
- to be closer to their family (children and grandchildren);
- a more convenient location;
- a house without stairs.

Some older people moved and planned to consolidate their financial situations by selling a larger property in order to move to a smaller, less costly house that was cheaper to maintain. Some found this strategy did not in fact strengthen their financial position as they had planned. New medium density housing turned out to be more expensive than they expected:

We found when we sold our old house, we didn't have as much to spend on a unit. There's not much difference in price between a house and a unit. ('Empty nester' in medium density housing, Boroondara).

I wanted to buy outright which is what I did ... I didn't have any money left over... which was a bit of a concern. ('Empty nester' in medium density housing, Brimbank).

In all but two cases, 'empty nesters' chose medium density housing. Three quarters of them chose brand new medium density housing usually in the form of units in smaller clusters or groups. However the available choice of housing was not necessarily broad nor was choosing a house an easy task.

Some 'empty nesters' who had recently moved, referred to those who aspired to new housing, but had not moved, because they couldn't afford it. Consequently these aspirants stayed put in family homes that were too large and difficult to maintain. These 'stay puts' may represent a group of potential buyers who are seeking appropriately priced, conveniently located and well designed homes. New medium density rental accommodation might be an alternative for this group.

5.7 Separated people and sole parents

Fourteen of the ninety respondents previously lived with their partners and were now separated. The distribution of these respondents across the family life cycle and housing form selected is shown in Table 5.7.1.

Table 5.7.1: Separated people and housing form chosen

Stage in family life cycle	Moreland	Boroondara	Brimbank
Younger separated singles, 3	1 Medium unit (1 of 3)	1 Medium dual occ.	1 Medium unit (1 of 9)
Older separated singles and peers together 3	1 Low house - new	1 Medium unit (1 of 32)	1 Low house - new
Younger separated singles or sole parents 4	1 Medium unit (1 of 6) - renting	1 Medium unit (1 of 3)	1 Low house - new 1 Medium dual/ occ. - new
Middle separated singles or sole parents 2	1 Medium dual occ. - new	-	1 Low house - renting
'Empty nesters' 2		1 Medium unit (1 of 66) - new	1 Medium dual occ.

Most of the separated people were living in some form of medium density housing. The three separated people living in low density housing were all living with 'peers' or other adults. Most separated respondents had moved away after the financial settlement. Their previous residence had either been the marital home or rental accommodation.

5.8 Location variations in reasons for moving and housing form selected for each life cycle stage

Brimbank

Younger singles

Of the three respondents interviewed, aged in their thirties, all were living in medium density housing forms which ranged from a flat in a block of nine to two units, one in a group of three, the other in a group of nine. They had moved for the following reasons:

- moved out of the parental home and were ready to purchase a home;
- returned from working overseas;
- separated from their spouse and were selling the marital home.

Older singles or peers together

Of the three respondents interviewed in this group, aged from their late twenties to fifties, one was living in medium density housing in the form of a dual occupancy. Two were living in low density housing. Respondents had moved for the following reasons:

- separated from their spouse and were selling the marital home;
- moved house to share with a friend;
- returned from working interstate.

Younger couples

Of the three respondents interviewed in this group, aged in their twenties to thirties, two were living in medium density housing in the form of new dual occupancies. One was living in low density housing. Respondents had moved for the following reasons:

- had got married and were ready to buy a home;
- had got married and not wanting to live with their parents, had initially rented and then; purchased a home.

Younger couples with children

Of the six respondents interviewed in this group, aged in their twenties to thirties, three were living in medium density housing in the form of two dual occupancies. Four were living in low density housing. Respondents had moved for the following reasons:

- wanted more space for the family and something better than a rental property;
- followed their family who had moved to area because new houses were cheaper there;
- had separated from spouse and were selling the marital home;
- planned to have children and were looking for something bigger.

Middle couples with children

Of the six respondents interviewed in this group, aged in their forties to fifties, three were living in medium density housing in the form of two units, both in a group of six and one dual occupancy. Three were living in low density housing. Respondents had moved for the following reasons:

- moved because of work commitments;
- wanted to improve address and have a bigger better home;
- rent was more affordable;
- wanted something smaller and less maintenance;
- had saved enough money and a new home was better than renting;
- were renting but wanted to have a paid off home by the time they retired.

'Empty nesters'

Of the nine respondents interviewed in this group, all were mature singles and couples over fifty. Eight respondents were living in medium density housing in the form of units in small groups and a dual occupancy. One respondent was living in low density housing. Respondents had moved for the following reasons:

- had enough of maintaining an old house with a large garden;
- husband had died recently in the family home, wanted to leave unhappy memories behind;
- moved away from unpleasant neighbourhood in Footscray;
- wanted a smaller home that was easy to maintain;
- retired to Queensland but missed family so returned to Melbourne.

Moreland

Younger singles

Of the three respondents interviewed, all were living in medium density housing in the forms of a unit in a group of five and two dual occupancies. Respondents had moved for the following reasons:

- got a new job and moved out of the parental home;
- believed it was time to invest in property and was sick of paying rent;
- separated from partner and sold the marital home.

Older singles or peers

Of the four respondents interviewed, aged in their thirties and forties, all were living in low density housing and had moved for the following reasons:

- had enough of the hassle of renting 'I get sick of having people all around and want some privacy';
- had a steady relationship and thought it was time to buy together;
- had enough of renting and could now afford to buy something larger.

Younger couples

Of the eight couples interviewed all aged in their twenties and thirties, six were living in low density housing. Two were living in medium density housing in the forms of a dual occupancy and a unit in a group of six. Respondents moved for the following reasons:

- a redundancy package had provided the opportunity to buy their own home (low density home owner);
- wanted a larger house closer to work (low density home owner);
- got married;
- saved some money and believed it was time to buy a home;
- were expecting a child and required a house with more than one bedroom;
- was renting and the lease on the previous flat had expired

Younger couples with children

Of the six couples interviewed, all aged in their thirties and forties, two were living in low density housing. Four were living in medium density housing in the form of a dual occupancy, a unit in a group of six, a house in a new medium density estate and a new townhouse in a group of six. Respondents had moved for the following reasons:

- one couple had returned from work overseas;
- had moved from a flat to a place with more space for the children;
- couple had separated and had sold marital home and were renting;
- wanted to move to a more convenient location close to schools and work.

In **Moreland** more people in the earlier stages of the family life cycle chose low density housing. Many respondents in this group were attracted by the affordable low density housing in the **Moreland** areas.

Middle couples with children

Of the five couples interviewed, all aged in their forties and fifties, three were living in low density housing. Two were living in medium density housing in the form of two dual occupancies one of which was new. Respondents moved for the following reasons:

- needed more space for family and children;
- wanted something cheaper;
- didn't want to spend any more money on rent and wanted to buy a house when the lease ran out;
- wanted to be closer to work and university.

'Empty nesters'

Of the four respondents interviewed, all mature couples and singles in their fifties and sixties, all were living in medium density housing in the form of units in groups of five to seven, a new dual occupancy and a house on a reduced block. Respondents moved for the following reasons:

- children had left home and they wanted a smaller home closer to work;
- husband was ill and needed a home with no stairs and closer to services;
- wanted a smaller house to retire to in a few years;
- had separated from partner and wanted to move closer to an aged father.

A few 'couples with children' chose medium density housing because it was affordable and convenient. The four respondents in the 'empty nesters' group in **Moreland** chose medium density housing.

Boroondara

In **Boroondara**, all younger respondents chose medium density housing. All the units they purchased were slightly older, although a few had been refurbished. Newly built units, while not a preferred choice, were in most cases too expensive. A number of younger and older families relocated from interstate or overseas and had moved to **Boroondara** on the recommendation of relocation consultants.

Relatively more 'families with children' sought family homes and schools in this area.

'Empty nesters' who were looking for a smaller house wanted to either stay in or move to the area to be near family or closer to services.

Younger singles

Of the four younger singles interviewed, aged in their thirties, all were living in medium density forms which ranged from a dual occupancy to three units, all in groups of three to nine. Respondents had moved for the following reasons:

- had a steady relationship and were sick of paying rent;
- wanted to be closer to the city as they were starting a business venture;
- lease had ended on the rental property.

Older singles or peers together

Of the two respondents interviewed in this group, aged from their late twenties to fifties, both were living in medium density housing in the form of units, one in group of three the other in a group of twenty-eight. Respondents had moved for the following reasons:

- moved because of work commitments.

Younger couples

Of the five respondents interviewed in this group, aged in their twenties to thirties, all were living in low density housing. Respondents had moved for the following reasons:

- moved because of work commitments;
- it was time to invest in a property;
- were in a committed relationship and had returned from overseas.

Younger couples with children

Of the five respondents interviewed in this group, aged in their twenties to thirties, one was living in medium density housing in the form of a unit in a group of three. Four were living in low density housing. Respondents had moved for the following reasons:

- expecting a baby and were looking for a family home;
- family had outgrown the old house;
- moved because of work commitments;
- had separated from partner and maintaining the marital home was too expensive.

Middle couples with children

Of the six respondents interviewed in this group, aged in their forties to fifties, three were living in medium density housing in the form of two units one in a group of four and the other in a group of nine and one new dual occupancy. Three were living in low density housing. Respondents had moved for the following reasons:

- moved because of work commitments;
- wanted a more central location, close to services and schools;
- preferred something smaller with less maintenance and closer to the city.

'Empty nesters'

Of the eight respondents interviewed in this group, all were mature singles and couples over fifty. Six respondents were living in medium density housing in the form units in small groups, one unit in a group of sixty-eight, a dual occupancy and a house in a medium density estate. Two respondents were living in low density housing. Respondents had moved for the following reasons:

- wanted a smaller garden;
- wanted to get away from Body Corporate;
- cost and inconvenience of maintaining an old house was too high;
- wanted to move to a community, not a retirement village.

5.9 Implications

Based on the above, it cannot be assumed that particular households or life cycle groups select particular housing forms. While there is a tendency for young singles or 'empty nesters' to choose some form of medium density housing, there is some acceptability or suitability of this housing form for other household groups as well. The question is, are these genuine housing choices and can the market for medium density housing grow? This is discussed further in the subsequent chapters.

6

The time and involvement taken to choose a house

6.1 Motivation and recognition of needs

Respondents were usually confronted with a housing dilemma. Commonly there were discrepancies between what respondents wanted and what they actually had to choose from. Events leading to a move usually involved a change in household circumstances:

We got married and didn't want to live with either of our parents. (Younger couple in medium density housing, Brimbank).

We were transferred interstate with work. (Middle couple with children in low density housing, Boroondara).

The children are older now they don't need as much space. (Middle couple in low density housing, Boroondara).

Changes occurred quickly or over a longer time. Clarifying their needs led individuals and families to:

- specify their reasons for moving;
- establish their new criteria when choosing alternative housing.

6.2 How long it took to choose a house

Respondents searched for and chose their homes over an extremely broad time frame. The time it took indicated the consumers' level of involvement or amount of research and effort put into the purchase of a home.

Some respondents looked at only one or two housing options and made their choice within a week or two. A number of respondents however, took up to two years to make their choice. One couple in **Boroondara** took five years to purchase their family home. They were prepared to wait longer and had confined their search to five particular streets. How long it took to choose a house was very much affected by the consumer's needs. If for example, a family urgently required accommodation, the amount of time available to choose a house was limited.

One young family returning from overseas sought rental accommodation so that they could look for a house to buy. Within two weeks of their return they bought a home in Brunswick because they couldn't find anything suitable to rent.

Many respondents qualified their comments about the choice of housing available to them by saying:

We only had a limited time. (Younger couple with children in low density housing, Moreland).

I was looking at a bad time. (Older single in low density housing, Moreland).

I was prepared to wait longer until the right thing came along. (Younger couple with children in low density housing, Boroondara).

Limited time constrained some respondents when they were looking for a house which affected the number of housing choices available and therefore satisfaction with their ultimate choice. Other factors restricting the housing choice process were:

- Mobility - a number of respondents found it difficult to physically search for a new house either because of ill health or not having access to transport.
- Access - a few respondents found it difficult to search for a house either because of work commitments or they were moving from country Victoria, interstate or overseas.

6.3 Implications

Housing choice is not only affected by the range of housing available in a particular location but also the time involved in the search process. This can limit choices and result in discrepancies between what purchasers want and what they actually choose.

7

Influences on the search process and the housing choice process

The search process involved respondents investigating areas or suburbs for available housing. This process was an important part of defining, modifying and redefining choice criteria..

A young couple who were first home buyers described their search as follows:

First we had to find out what the market was like. We didn't know what we were going to get for our money. We thought we might like Hawthorn and just found we were getting nowhere. And then we pretty much travelled all the way from Mont Albert in a westerly direction. We looked at Fitzroy and Carlton and then finally Brunswick. Yarraville was too far.

Once we had some idea of which areas we could afford, we got out there and started looking at some places (Younger couple in low density housing, Moreland).

Respondents were asked about the search process and what role family, friends, real estate agents and others played in that process. It was found that when choosing a house, respondents were influenced by family, friends, lending institutions, real estate agents and the media, (advertising in particular). Family members and real estate agents however, influenced them the most.

Family influence was strongest on respondents from **Brimbank**. Many respondents were either migrants or the children of migrants. Being *near* or *close to family* was most important to them. Some family members actually chose the new home for respondents, particularly for older, less mobile respondents who found it more difficult to look for a house.

Some parents of first home buyers both chose the house and paid the deposit. Two respondents said they weren't comfortable with their parents' choice. One younger woman actually attributed the breakdown of her marriage to family involvement:

My husband's family was a strong influence on us moving there (Greensborough). His parents helped us to buy the house that they wanted, not for us. (Younger single in medium density housing, Moreland).

A family member's experience could influence a respondent's attitude to different types of housing. For example a potential buyer of a unit said he would reconsider if a family member living in a unit had been bothered by noise or experienced difficulty with a Body Corporate:

His mother had a bad experience with a Body Corporate, so we'd never buy a unit. (Younger couple in low density housing, Moreland).

7.1 Real estate agents

Although some were described as helpful, real estate agents were not highly regarded by respondents who added comments about their perceived *dishonesty* and *duplicity*. Many felt their search would have been simpler had agents listened to their housing needs and assisted by showing them properties that met these criteria:

The most frustrating thing was that real estate agents did not seem to understand what we wanted. They were not on the same wavelength in their description of houses.

The agent will tell you anything.

Agents tended to just show us what they had on their books at the time.

Misleading pricing information given by agents was frequently cited as a problem for intending purchasers.

They would underquote the prices by as much as 30%. That made it very hard for us. It was very nerve racking.

We got an architect in to look at one place that we were led to believe (by a real estate agent) we could afford. But we didn't do it any more after that because we never knew what we could afford and it would have kept costing us time and money each time.

7.2 Builders

Respondents occasionally mentioned the role that builders played in their search and choice processes. Some remarked that after developing a block of units a builder might then have difficulty selling individual units.

At least three respondents purchased particular properties because they knew the builder personally or had heard favourable reports of their work:

We just wanted something that was well built....we had heard good things about the builder...so we made an appointment to come and look at this unit. ('Empty nester' in dual occupancy, Moreland).

7.3 Bodies Corporate

Bodies Corporate were not favourably perceived by respondents. Table 7.3.1 highlights the number of favourable and unfavourable comments made about Bodies Corporate by respondents in both medium and low density housing forms.

Table 7.3.1 - The number of unfavourable/favourable comments about Bodies Corporate

	Unfavourable	Neutral/ No Opinion Recorded	Favourable
Moreland			
Medium	6	7	2
Low	3	12	-
Boroondara			
Medium	5	9	2
Low	4	9	1
Brimbank			
Medium	10	9	-
Low	3	7	1

Three to four times as many unfavourable than favourable comments were made about Bodies Corporate by respondents, particularly by those living in medium density housing.

Many respondents who had selected medium density housing were looking for smaller groups of units. They wanted privacy and to avoid involvement with a Body Corporate. Respondents didn't want to *pay out money* or *negotiate with others to get things done*. In fact preferring not to *negotiate with others over aspects of their home* was their main reason for avoiding Bodies Corporate. Negotiating with others was considered a great *intrusion* on their privacy and a *hassle* and respondents felt exposed to potential *conflict*.

Bodies Corporate were rarely seen in a positive way. Generally a Body Corporate was perceived as a negative aspect of medium density housing. Two people had moved to *escape* a Body Corporate. Many respondents indicated they would not consider properties that required involvement in a Body Corporate:

I don't like Bodies Corporate. You have to pay out money, other people have warned me about this. (Younger couple in dual occupancy Moreland).

I wanted to avoid a Body Corporate if I could, mainly because a chap at work is selling to get away from his. ('Empty nester' in dual occupancy, Moreland).

When we lived in flats we soon learnt about Bodies Corporate. You can't make your own decisions, you always have to worry about others. (Younger couple in low density housing, Moreland).

The Bodies Corporate secretary was a bit nasty, nothing suited him. He was always dictating to us. So we decided we had enough and sold. ('Empty nester' in house in medium density housing estate, Boroondara).

A lot of Bodies Corporate won't allow dogs, cats or small children. ('Empty nester' in dual occupancy, Brimbank).



A house owned by an 'empty nester' couple in Booroondara with small external space in a medium density estate, came much closer to meeting their choice criteria

There were some, however, who saw the advantages of a Body Corporate:

The Body Corporate is good. It's no trouble and the fees are low. (Young single in small group of units, Moreland)

I didn't really like the idea of paying body corporate fees but from a practical point of view it's good. ('Empty nester' in large group of units).

\$500 for someone to look after your garden would be OK. We are not very handy in the garden or at fixing things. (Younger couple in dual occupancy, Moreland).

7.4 Implications

If the negative aspects of Bodies Corporate - perceived or otherwise - were overcome, there would be a greater inclination for a prospective purchaser to consider some form of medium density housing.

8

Housing choice criteria and trade offs

During the interviews respondents listed in detail some 700 different housing choice criteria and trade offs which were then summarised into the following three major groups. Clearly people have identified very specific criteria that they apply to their housing search.

8.1 Location, housing and financial considerations

The three main housing choice criteria were location, housing and financial considerations which are listed in order of importance.

Location considerations

In their choice of housing location respondents preferred:

- a particular suburb;
- a quiet residential area, green areas, trees, to be away from busy roads, railway lines and commercial areas;
- a familiar neighbourhood or location;
- access to:
 - work
 - shops, schools and medical services
 - family
 - public transport
 - access to recreational facilities such as shops, cafes/ restaurants, markets, parks, bike tracks, video shops, libraries and public swimming pools
 - access to city living.

Access to community facilities such as doctors, childcare services or facilities for older people was given a lower priority. Respondents seemed to assume these facilities existed regardless of their choice of location. Long term housing needs (say beyond three years) were not considered except in **Boroondara** where 'access to schools' was frequently cited as important to families moving to or within the area.

Housing considerations

Respondents required the following housing criteria:

- a number of bedrooms/number of living areas /separate toilet (inside) to bathroom;
- to own or have control of their own internal and external living space;
- off-street parking (even though the car may be parked in the street);
- outdoor space for children, pets or recreation (garden/entertaining);
- smaller house easier to maintain, particularly the garden;
- wanting a building of a particular era or style such as Victorian/Edwardian or modern;
- design considerations (particularly floor plan/north facing aspect);
- a home without stairs.

Financial considerations

Respondents required the following financial criteria:

- affordable housing;
- investment potential;
- the opportunity for financial consolidation (having no mortgage).

The following tables show those main criteria groups from which respondents made trade offs during their choice process because they could not find housing that met all their criteria. Many respondents traded off criteria from more than one of these categories.

Table 8.1.1 - Brimbank: Form of housing selected and perceived criteria group traded off

Stage in Life cycle	Current Residence Housing form	Perceived trade offs		
		Housing	Location	Financial
Younger singles 3	Low 0	-	-	-
	Medium 3	2	3	-
Older singles and peers together 3	Low 2	-	2	-
	Medium 1	-	1	-
Younger couples 3	Low 1	1	1	-
	Medium 2	1	2	1
Younger couples with children 6	Low 4	2	2	-
	Medium 2	-	1	1
Middle couples with children 6	Low 3	1	2	2
	Medium 3	2	1	1
'Empty nesters' 9	Low 1	-	1	-
	Medium 8	3	2	7

In **Brimbank** more respondents traded off *Location* criteria (18 out of 30). This was not so much a preferred suburb but related more to neighbourhood. *Housing* and *Financial* (12 out of 30) considerations were equally traded off in total in this area but were traded off by respondents at different stages in the family life cycle.

There are similarities in the trade offs made by respondents at different stages of the life cycle which are outlined below.

Table 8.1.2: Moreland: Form of housing selected and perceived criteria group traded off

Stage in Life cycle	Current residence Housing Form	Perceived trade offs		
		Housing	Location	Financial
Younger singles 3	Low 0	-	-	-
	Medium 3	2	2	-
Older singles and peers together 4	Low 0	-	-	-
	Medium 4	3	3	2
Younger couples 8	Low 6	4	6	1
	Medium 2	1	1	1
Younger couples with children 6	Low 2	2	2	-
	Medium 4	1	2	1
Middle couples with children 5	Low 3	3	3	2
	Medium 2	1	2	1
'Empty nesters' 4	Low 0	-	-	-
	Medium 4	1	2	2

As in the other two municipalities *Location* in **Moreland** was most often traded off to meet the criteria for low density housing (23 out of 30). It was sacrificed by more respondents in this municipality than either *Housing* (18 out of 30) or *Financial* (10 out of 30) no matter what the housing form selected.

Table 8.1.3: Boroondara: Form of housing selected and perceived criteria group traded off

Stage in Life Cycle	Current Residence Housing Form	Perceived trade offs		
		Housing	Location	Financial
Younger singles 3	Low 0	-	-	-
	Medium 3	2	2	-
Older singles and peers together 3	Low 0	-	-	-
	Medium 3	1	1	-
Younger couples 5	Low 5	2	2	3
	Medium 0	-	-	-
Younger couples with children 5	Low 4	3	2	1
	Medium 1	-	-	1
Middle couples with children 6	Low 3	1	3	1
	Medium 3	-	2	3
'Empty nesters' 8	Low 2	1	1	2
	Medium 6	2	-	4

Financial (15 out of 30) considerations were traded off more often by respondents in **Boroondara** whereas *Housing* (12 out of 30) and *Location* (13 out of 30) were not traded off as much.

8.2 Younger singles

Younger singles were far more likely to trade off location and were usually pushed to the outer edge of a suburb, particularly in **Moreland**. They preferred locations closer to the inner city or work. Being close to the family was important to respondents living in **Brimbank**.

Housing based criteria were also traded off by respondents in the earlier stages of the family life cycle. Respondents in this group usually looked for a house with two bedrooms and low maintenance requirements. A few mentioned a garage which they considered an investment. They also wanted some outdoor space or garden area which was low maintenance:

To entertain or have a barbecue. (Younger couple in low density housing, **Moreland**).

So we can catch some sun. (Younger single in small group of units, **Moreland**).

To hang out the washing in private. (Younger single in small group of units, **Moreland**).

Most of the units or town houses purchased by this group were not new, but slightly older and less expensive.

8.3 Singles or peers living together

This group, like the 'younger singles', chose medium density housing for similar reasons. However in **Moreland** many people in this group strongly preferred low density housing. Although they recognised the advantages of low maintenance and the affordability of medium density housing, they also valued their space and privacy and felt these could be sacrificed if they purchased a unit or town house. This group valued space more than either the location or the condition of the house:

I wanted something low maintenance, two bedrooms, easy to clean...close to work...small yard, I don't like to feel closed in. (Younger single in small group of units, Moreland).

We rented in Kew so we started having a look around there. We did not look in Port Melbourne ... the places there are so expensive ... even though we liked the lifestyle ... I imagined it to be quite a cheapish area, but we found we couldn't even afford that. Then I saw this (in Brunswick). It was close to the border of Northcote. We both liked the house and we could afford it. (Peers living together in low density housing, Moreland).

In **Boroondara**, no members of this group lived in low density housing perhaps because it was relatively more expensive compared to other areas. In **Moreland** low density housing appeared more affordable to this group.

8.4 Younger couples

Younger couples were more attracted to low density housing than the other groups. This group seemed to want larger houses, with three bedrooms, outdoor space, second living areas, a lock-up garage and space for pets. Their main trade offs were location and the condition of the house. A number of respondents in this group lived in houses requiring substantial work:

We wanted a two bedroom house, outdoor space... something with potential. The house is in worse condition than we planned. (Younger couple with children in low density housing, Boroondara).

We decided that side of town (east/south-east) was out of our price range. We liked the idea of being close to the city. I think Brunswick is just a bit far out (located in Brunswick). (Younger couple in low density housing, Moreland).

In both **Moreland** and **Brimbank** members of this group bought medium density housing. They were looking for cheaper housing and some sought a low maintenance house to fit in with a busy lifestyle and work commitments:

We are planning to build a new house. This unit is just for the time being, while we get the capital behind us. (Young couple in medium density housing, Brimbank).

The widely held view that young couples, particularly professionals, were likely to be attracted to medium density housing did not hold true for those interviewed. Younger couples seemed more inclined to choose low density housing and those who moved into units, townhouses and apartments were the exception.

8.5 Couples with children

This group mainly selected low density housing with space being more important than either the location or the condition of the house:

We are further from the shops here. (Younger couple with children in low density housing Boroondara).

We have to spend some more money to finish a few things off. We can't afford to do it yet. (Younger couple with children, Brimbank).

Some interesting choices of medium density housing amongst this group, resulted from trading off living space. A young family in Brunswick bought part of an old tannery which they converted to a townhouse. Well located, it was also close to work, schools, shops and public transport. Although the townhouse had no yard there was a large park two doors away.



A converted warehouse owned by a young family in Moreland. It is a good example of affordable medium density housing with a flexible living area and close to services.

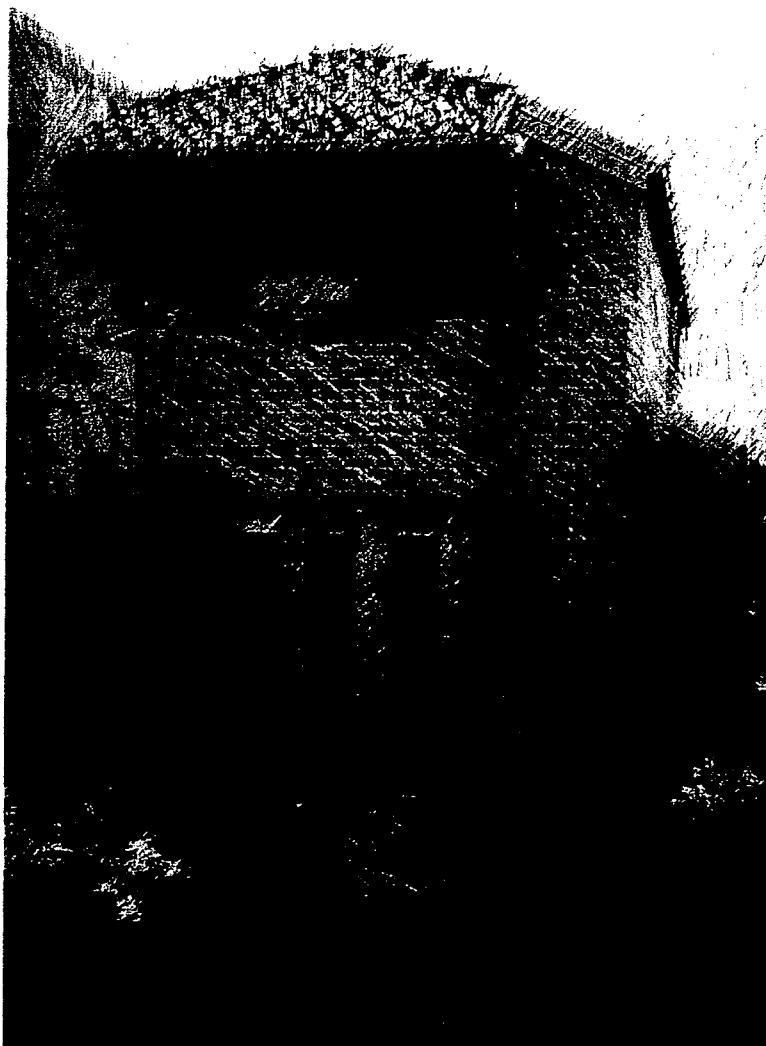
8.6 Middle couples with children

A larger proportion of this group selected low density housing options mainly because they needed more space. However some traded space for medium density housing in preferred locations, particularly close to services. This was more common in **Boroondara**. With slightly older children, space was less important to respondents than was access to schools and public transport:

We wanted three bedrooms...new and low maintenance... close to services particularly public transport. (Middle couple with children in medium density housing, Boroondara).

We had to be in the zone for Balwyn High School. (Single parent in medium density housing, Boroondara).

It's close to trains one way and trams the other. The children love the trams, it gives them such independence. (Middle couple in low density housing, Boroondara).



One of six, this appealing townhouse in Boroondara attracted a family with adult children. With four bedrooms, large open living areas and close to the inner city and services it met most of their criteria despite being more expensive than this family had planned.

8.7 'Empty nesters'

'Empty nesters' traded off their financial criteria to secure new medium density housing in a better location. They remained in their familiar area, but aimed to live closer to services or in more appealing neighbourhoods. This trend was apparent in all municipalities but was strongest in **Boroondara**.

Many in this group expected to buy a 'new' and 'smaller' house after the sale of their old home and still have money left over to invest. This rarely occurred. Some 'broke even' in the sale transactions however most chose to reduce their savings in order to buy what they wanted:

We are financially a little worse off. We found that just because we were moving from a house to a unit we weren't actually going to be able to put money away. ('Empty nesters' in medium density housing, Boroondara).

Members of this group also sacrificed their house location in relation to services:

I wanted somewhere near shops and transport. It (the unit) is alright ... but I have to go on public transport when I want to do some shopping ... It takes a while, it is a bit of a nuisance ('Empty nester' in medium density housing, Boroondara).

This group was very unlikely to trade off the 'new' aspect of their housing. Apart from the aspect of low maintenance, owning a new house brought a sense of well being.

You have to change your life. This unit is much newer...it's much nicer and brighter. ('Empty nester' in medium density housing, Brimbank).

This is a brand new home and there are no concerns about maintenance. ('Empty nester' in medium density housing, Boroondara).

Moving to a smaller house was often difficult especially when people had to part with belongings that wouldn't fit into a smaller space. Moving to a smaller house also usually meant that people were 'getting on in life'. They neither needed nor could they manage a larger house and garden. The problem of garden maintenance was often recognised:

We wanted the same sized house but with less garden. ('Empty nester' in medium density housing, Boroondara).

A few respondents in this group, mainly in **Boroondara**, were looking for a new house similar in size to the one they owned previously, but with a smaller garden. 'Empty nesters' need extra rooms or bedrooms for visiting friends and family, particularly grandchildren. They also wanted extra rooms as an office, a sewing or craft room or to accommodate furniture and belongings accumulated over a lifetime. Garages were required for a variety of reasons including storing furniture or as workshops and craft rooms.

For some having a house without stairs or on flatter land was the main reason for moving. Others wanted a smaller home which required less housework:

We had to move to get away from the stairs. ('Empty nesters' in medium density housing, Moreland).

We wanted a new house, on flat ground, with two bedrooms, security and low maintenance. ('Empty nesters' in medium density housing, Brimbank)

Moving to a smaller house was particularly difficult for men who preferred open and spacious units. Some men sought 'solace' in a shed or a 'place of their own':

It was a really big thing to go from a house to a unit. A lot of units are very small and mentally even a decent height ceiling gives you a sense of space and you don't feel like you are going into a cell...it would be an even bigger step to go into a large unit development with common areas. It would be depressing to feel too closed in and not to have your privacy. ('Empty nesters' in medium density housing, Boroondara).

I would also like a workshop with a long bench. ('Empty nester' in medium density housing, Brimbank).

Older respondents preferred to be independent and stay in their units as long as possible providing they were well serviced. Good home care or extended care services in **Boroondara** and **Brimbank** were available for the elderly. Respondents in **Moreland** did not raise this issue. Access to public transport and shops appeared to be difficult for some, especially in **Brimbank** and **Moreland**.

8.8 Implications

Based on the above, it can be said that there is a relationship between variables concerning life changes and preferences for specific design features of dwellings. If more attention were paid to this, it would appear that medium density housing forms could be more appealing to a wider market. Housing design preferences are discussed in Chapter 14.

9

Preferred housing forms and housing form selected

This chapter examines the particular housing forms respondents preferred and what they actually selected. While respondents were clear about their choice criteria, they seemed to be less aware of the medium density housing options available to them, in some cases not even knowing what the term 'medium density' meant. For this reason respondents were generally less able to translate their selection into an informed choice.

The following tables show the different forms of housing preferred and selected by respondents in each of the municipalities.

The three separate groups of medium density housing are:

- Dual occupancy or medium density house
- Smaller group of units (<6)
- Larger groups of units.

9.1 Brimbank

Table 9.1.1 - Brimbank: Preferred housing form and housing form selected

Stage in Family Life Cycle	Preferred housing form (density)	Housing form selected for residence			
		House	Dual occ.	Smaller group unit	Larger group unit or flat
Younger singles 3	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats			1 1	1
Older singles & peers together 3	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats	2	1		
Younger couples 3	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats	1	1	1	
Younger couples with children 6	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats	4	1 1		
Middle couples with children 6	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats	3	2	1	
'Empty nesters' 9	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats	1	3	5	

In Brimbank, four respondents did not select their preferred housing form.

9.2 Moreland

Table 9.2.1 - Moreland: Preferred housing form and housing form selected

Stage in family life cycle	Preferred housing form (density)	Housing form selected for residence			
		House	Dual occ.	Smaller group unit	Larger group unit or flat
Younger singles 3	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats		1	1	
Older singles & peers together 4	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats	4			
Younger couples 8	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats	6	1	1	
Younger couples with children 6	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats	2	1 2	1	
Middle couples with children 5	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats	3	2		
'Empty nesters' 4	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats		2	1	1

In **Moreland**, seven respondents had not selected their most preferred housing form for their residence.

Of the fifteen respondents who selected medium density forms, about half had said this was their preferred form. The other half preferred low density housing.

9.3 Boroondara

Table 9.3.1- Boroondara: Preferred housing form and housing form selected

Stage in family life cycle	Preferred housing form (density)	Housing form selected for residence			
		House	Dual occ.	Smaller group unit	Larger group unit or flat
Younger singles 3	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats		1	1 1	
Older singles & peers together 3	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats			1 1	1
Younger couples 5	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats	5			
Younger couples with children 5	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats	4		1	
Middle couples with children 6	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats	3	1	1	1
'Empty nesters' 8	House - low density Dual occ or m/d house Smaller group units (<6) Larger group units or flats	2	1 1	1 1	2

In Boroondara, eight respondents did not select their most preferred form of housing.

9.4 Smaller houses on medium density sites

A larger proportion of respondents seemed to be quite unaware of medium density housing options. Predictably these respondents were living in low density housing. As mentioned most respondents were not aware of what the term medium density meant, however, they were aware of specific types of medium density housing such as units, townhouses and dual occupancies. Several families cited the lack of space as a reason for not choosing medium density housing:

We tried a townhouse in Kew and didn't like it. We didn't like the Body Corporate and it didn't have enough space, so we started looking at houses again which was great. We don't have a big garden which suits me. We've got good security and everything is convenient. ('Empty nester' in Balwyn).

We looked at the development in Kew. It seemed very closed in and I didn't like that. Also we needed (access) for four cars so it wouldn't have suited us. I liked the houses, they were nicely done. (Middle couple with two adult children in Kew).

Too many houses crammed in like sardines... Not all houses have allowance for off-street parking ...could get parked in. Concerned about privacy and overlooking. Perhaps they might have left one block as a park for children. (Younger couple with children in Glenroy).

9.5 Dual occupancy

A few people who purchased a dual occupancy house considered they had traded up from a flat or a unit because they had more space and privacy:

This is the best of both worlds - low maintenance and separate. You don't have to watch noise levels or worry about common walls. (Younger single in dual occupancy, Moreland).

A number of people said they would have preferred to see the original house removed and the site redeveloped.

9.6 Smaller groups of units (<6)

Consumers' preferences for smaller groups of units were linked to their preference for privacy and control of their living space:

I like smaller groups of units. Here I've got no one above me and no one below. That's why I bought this. (Younger single, Moreland).

I only wanted a unit in a group of no more than six. I would never have entertained the idea of twelve... There would be too many people and probably a lot of rental properties. People renting properties don't tend to care about them very much... I think you have more control over smaller groups of units. (Younger single, Brimbank).

9.7 Larger groups of units

Only a few respondents chose a residence in a larger group of units because it was a more affordable option. One 'empty nester' in **Boroondara** explained her reasons for preferring to live within a larger group of units:

I feel very safe here. They could leave the place unlocked. I'm making friends here in the community. When I'm sitting outside people come and go and I can say hello. I love the central garden set up. ('Empty nester', Boroondara).



One of 66 units in Boroondara, this unit is owned by an 'empty nester' who found the unit affordable and with a sense of community. She described it as 'the village pump' setting.

There were many examples of less favourable impressions of larger groups of units:

I used to live in a unit that had 20 in the block. It drove me crazy with all the cars driving in and out. The laundry was shared. I would go and hang out my washing and see everyone. There was no privacy and it was so cramped. (Younger single in small group of units, Moreland).

With some respondents it was difficult to identify their preferences, particularly between dual occupancies and very small groups of units (groups of three). However, where this was possible in all municipalities, respondents who preferred medium density housing showed a preference for dual occupancies or smaller groups of units.

9.8 Implications

If consumers understood what the term 'medium density' meant, they could appreciate the benefits of medium density housing as well as the various housing options available. Consumers would then be able to make informed choices from the available medium density housing stock available. Many consumers think that medium density housing refers to dual occupancies which, in their view are usually poorly developed. It is important therefore, that housing industry suppliers educate consumers.

10

Location factors influencing housing choice

Respondents were asked about the locations they had chosen when looking for a house and why they had chosen them. It is noteworthy that in all municipalities some respondents selected housing which was not in their preferred suburb or general location. The following tables illustrate this.

10.1 Location factors influencing choice In Brimbank

Table 10.1.1 - Brimbank: Is current residence in preferred location (suburb)?

Stage in family life cycle	Current residence housing form		Is housing in preferred suburb?	Number of respondents
Younger singles 3	Low	0	Yes	-
			No	-
	Medium	3	Yes	-
			No	3
Older singles & peers together 3	Low	2	Yes	1
			No	1
	Medium	1	Yes	1
			No	-
Younger couples 3	Low	1	Yes	-
			No	1
	Medium	2	Yes	-
			No	2
Younger couples and children 6	Low	4	Yes	3
			No	1
	Medium	2	Yes	2
			No	-
Middle couples and children 6	Low	3	Yes	2
			No	1
	Medium	3	Yes	3
			No	-
'Empty nesters' 9	Low	1	Yes	1
			No	-
	Medium	8	Yes	6
			No	2

Brimbank respondents showed similar trends to **Boroondara**. Nearly two thirds of respondents (19 out of 30) said their housing choice was in their preferred location.

Those unhappy with their choice of location in **Brimbank**, were from all stages of the family life cycle. All 'younger singles' had not purchased in their preferred location.

Brimbank was perceived to have a population of diverse ethnic background and socio-economic status. About half the respondents interviewed in this area were not born in Australia and since their arrival most of this group had only ever lived in, or close to, the Brimbank area.

Staying close the family was the most often mentioned criterion for a respondent's choice of location. Proximity to family, particularly for new Australians, was a very high priority in many cases.

The range of housing in **Brimbank** was viewed as broad in terms of quality, standard and price, with a reasonable supply of medium density housing available. Housing was, however, considered expensive, particularly in preferred locations.

Although available, the supply of medium density housing was perceived to lack diversity and variety. A few respondents mentioned the need for more variety in this type of medium density housing:

There seemed to be plenty of units around on the market but a lot were the same. There didn't seem to be a lot of variety. I could have shopped around for a while longer but I don't think I would have found anything else better. There are a lot of units for sale in the area. There are always some for sale regularly. ('Empty nester' in medium density housing, Brimbank).



The variety of available housing in Brimbank was not considered very good. These two townhouses were better examples of medium density housing in the area.

Brimbank also provided examples of couples with children choosing medium density housing because it was more affordable than low density housing:

A house (low density) like this (two bedroom dual occupancy) would be too much for us. (Younger couple in medium a density housing, Brimbank).

Many respondents mentioned poor access to public transport. There were many examples of people living in medium density housing and not having access to services, particularly public transport.

Several respondents in Sydenham mentioned poor access to shops. However most were aware of the new shopping centre to be opened in 1997.

In Brimbank people used garages, particularly in medium density housing, for a variety of purposes such as storage, a craft room, home based business, an extra bedroom or a rumpus room for grandchildren.

10.2 Location factors influencing choice in Moreland

Table 10.2.1 - Moreland: Is current residence in preferred location (suburb)?

Stage in family life cycle	Current residence housing form	Is housing in preferred suburb?	Number of respondents
Younger singles 3	Low 0	Yes No	- -
	Medium 3	Yes No	1 2
Older singles & peers together 4	Low 4	Yes No	1 3
	Medium 0	Yes No	- -
Younger couples 8	Low 6	Yes No	2 4
	Medium 2	Yes No	1 1
Younger couples with children 6	Low 2	Yes No	- 2
	Medium 4	Yes No	3 1
Middle couples with children 5	Low 3	Yes No	- 3
	Medium 2	Yes No	- 2
'Empty nesters' 4	Low 0	Yes No	- -
	Medium 4	Yes No	2 2

Two thirds of respondents in Moreland (20 out of 30) chose a house that was not in their preferred location. This trend was similar for those selecting medium and low density housing forms. In Moreland more younger people traded off location.

Moreland was described by many as a multicultural, attractive inner area with a cosmopolitan lifestyle. The area was also described as lacking trees and greenery with too much concrete. Industrial or commercial areas were considered too close to residential areas.

Younger people were trading off location for affordable housing in this area. There was a good supply of affordable low density housing available, though it usually required some maintenance or renovation. Reasonably close to inner city areas, Moreland attracted younger singles, couples and couples with children. The price range of the low density housing purchased by younger people in this area within 10 kilometres of the CBD was between \$88,000 and \$120,000.



This two bedroom weatherboard house which cost around \$100,000 is an example of the good supply of affordable low density housing which attracts younger buyers in Moreland.



In contrast, many of the newer unit developments in Moreland were considered expensive low density options. These new two and three bedroom units were in the \$200,000 price range.

This group was less attracted to medium density housing because of space and privacy needs. Consequently this group traded off location and bought low density housing in a location further away from the CBD than preferred.

A few younger family respondents were concerned about suitable schools in this area. They also perceived a shortage of affordable, new medium density housing located close to services.

Several respondents said that it was difficult to find a three bedroom unit. This is possibly because demand outweighs supply, particularly in Coburg and Pascoe Vale. This group thought that affordable two bedroom units were available although not always in preferred locations. Units were often further than desired from the city (CBD) and services.

Some respondents renting or planning to rent found it difficult to find clean and affordable rental housing. This seemed to be because there was a high demand for rental accommodation in Moreland.

10.3 Location factors influencing choice in Boroondara

Table 10.3.1 - Boroondara: Is current residence in preferred location (suburb)?

Stage in family life cycle	Current residence housing form	Is housing in preferred suburb?	Number of respondents
Younger singles 3	Low 0	Yes No	- -
	Medium 3	Yes No	1 2
Older singles & peers together 3	Low 0	Yes No	- -
	Medium 3	Yes No	2 1
Younger couples 5	Low 5	Yes No	3 2
	Medium 0	Yes No	- -
Younger couples with children 5	Low 4	Yes No	4 -
	Medium 1	Yes No	1 -
Middle couples with children 6	Low 3	Yes No	2 1
	Medium 3	Yes No	3 -
'Empty nesters' 8	Low 2	Yes No	1 1
	Medium 6	Yes No	6 -

Fewer respondents in **Boroondara** (7 out of 20) were trading off location in comparison to the other municipalities. Similar to Moreland, most of those who did were younger. Most commonly those who were dissatisfied with their choice of location thought they were too far out from the city (CBD) or services.

Boroondara is perceived to be an attractive area to live in and described as having *green, leafy attractive streets, nice houses and a good sense of community*. It is also considered central and accessible to other eastern and inner city (CBD) areas.

Respondents thought that **Boroondara** was well serviced by a range of public transport options and had a good range of shops, restaurants, cafes and other services.

Good private schools were an important attraction for families with children. Other good schools also mentioned were Balwyn High School and Greythorn High School.

Some respondents perceived there was a better range of larger Victorian, Federation and Edwardian houses in **Boroondara** particularly in Camberwell and Canterbury than there were in other areas.

Boroondara was perceived to be a conservative area with a high social status.

A large number of **Boroondara** respondents raised the issue of the *mix* or *balance* of older low density and newer medium density housing. They also raised concerns about maintaining the character of the area:

I hate it when they allow new developments near the old houses. This area is unique and once it's gone they won't get it back. Alongside the older houses, the newer building just isn't up to it. (Younger couple with children in low density housing, Boroondara).

There's a wonderful balance of high and low density housing here and a mixture of people. I would be concerned to see that lost. If you go down Power Street towards the river, the balance has been lost. (Middle couple in low density housing, Boroondara)

Most respondents, particularly younger ones, were new residents to the area and had come from the outer eastern or southern suburbs, interstate or overseas.

Many examples of sacrifices made by residents to secure housing in this location included:

- A couple with older children chose a two bedroom unit because they couldn't afford a three bedroom unit in Kew. The two bedroom unit was too cramped for their needs.
- Some respondents paid high prices for houses that required a considerable amount of work before they would be comfortable to live in.
- One young family wanted to buy a house in one of five preferred streets. They were prepared to wait years to buy what they wanted
- Some respondents had attempted to develop their dual occupancies and persevered despite planning and building difficulties.

Boroondara was perceived to offer a good but expensive supply and range of medium density housing. Some respondents suggested the possibility of an oversupply of medium density housing, particularly new medium density developments. For instance:

- Respondents commented on the range of choice available but that some of it was expensive.
- Respondents thought that available vacant units had been on the market for some time.
- Builders were prepared to drop prices substantially on medium density developments.

Some particular references were made to new medium density housing developments in **Boroondara**:

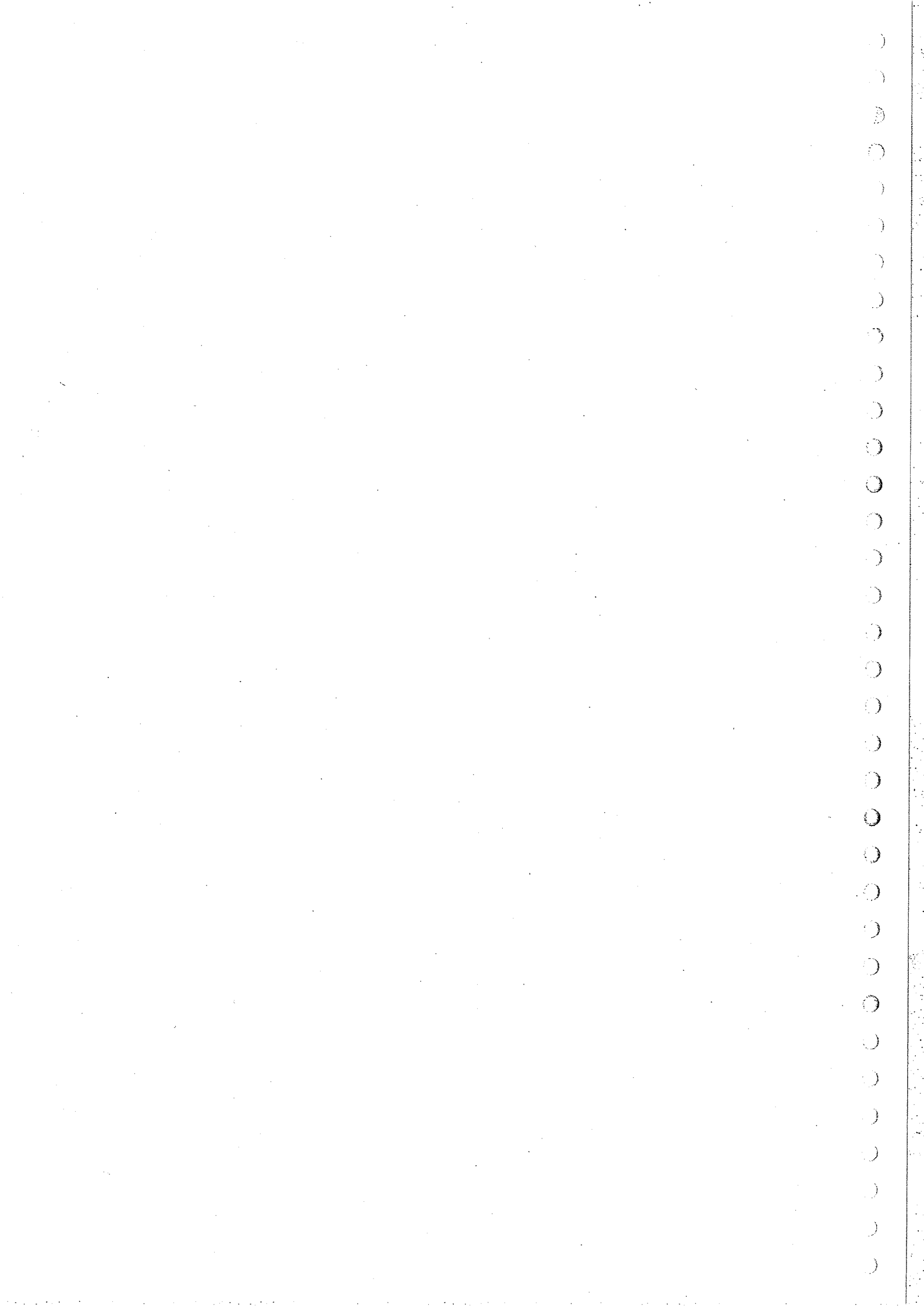
We looked at the new development in Kew... They were good and quite good value but they felt very closed in and we needed four car parks near the house. (Middle couple with children in medium density housing, Boroondara).

The ones on Prospect Hill Road are nice. They look well finished and they've gone to a lot of detail. (Younger couple in low density housing, Boroondara).

I liked the location and the style of living so I decided to give it a try. I love the central garden set-up. (Female 'empty nester' in Balmoral, a 66 unit development on Riversdale Road).

10.4 Implications

Clearly some consumers were constrained in choice of location because in all three municipalities some respondents selected housing that was not in their preferred location. While clear about their preferences for housing location, affordability often dictated the final selection. The narrow perception of medium density housing options may well have limited choice.



11

Satisfaction with housing choice and post-purchase rationalisation of house selected

As discussed previously, respondents talked about their experiences of trying to find their home. They talked about the number of houses they looked at and how long that process took. Moreover, at some point in the interview they would reflect and offer an opinion about their housing choice. The following three tables summarise these findings.

11.1 Brimbank

Table 11.1.1 - Brimbank: Satisfaction with housing choice

Stage in life cycle	Current residence Housing form	Total respondents	Satisfaction with housing choice		
			Satisfied	Neutral/unclear	Not satisfied
Younger singles 3	House - low density	-	-	-	-
	Dual occ. or m/d house	1	-	-	-
	Smaller group units (<6)	2	1	-	1
	Larger group unit of flat	1	-	1	-
Older singles & peers together 3	House - low density	2	2	-	-
	Dual occ. or m/d house	1	-	1	-
	Smaller group units (<6)	-	-	-	-
	Larger group unit of flat	-	-	-	-
Younger couples 3	House - low density	1	-	-	1
	Dual occ. or m/d house	1	-	-	1
	Smaller group units (<6)	1	1	-	-
	Larger group unit of flat	-	-	-	-
Younger couples with children 6	House - low density	4	2	1	1
	Dual occ. or m/d house	2	1	1	-
	Smaller group units (<6)	-	-	-	-
	Larger group unit of flat	-	-	-	-
Middle couples with children 6	House - low density	3	-	2	1
	Dual occ. or m/d house	2	-	1	1
	Smaller group units (<6)	1	-	-	1
	Larger group unit of flat	-	-	-	-
'Empty nesters' 9	House - low density	1	-	-	1
	Dual occ. or m/d house	3	2	1	-
	Smaller group units (<6)	5	-	1	4
	Larger group unit of flat	-	-	-	-

In **Brimbank** less than half the respondents (12 out of 30) were dissatisfied with some aspect of their choice process and the available housing options.

In comparison with the other areas the overall satisfaction with the choice of housing of **Brimbank** respondents was higher. A greater variety of housing, including a mix of new and old housing, as well as some less, and some more expensive options contributed to this situation. However, during the interviews respondents identified a lack of variety in the style or design of medium density housing as well as the need for better access to services.

Respondents in **Brimbank** particularly new immigrants, often seemed to be 'less ambitious' and 'more accepting' of the housing choice available to them.

11.2 Moreland

Table 11.2.1 - Moreland: Satisfaction with choice

Stage in life cycle	Current residence housing form	Total respondents	Satisfaction with housing choice		
			Satisfied	Neutral/unclear	Not satisfied
Younger singles 3	House - low density	-	-	-	-
	Dual occ. or m/d house	1	-	-	1
	Smaller group units (<6)	2	-	-	2
	Larger group unit of flat	-	-	-	-
Older singles & peers together 4	House - low density	4	-	-	4
	Dual occ. or m/d house	-	-	-	-
	Smaller group units (<6)	-	-	-	-
	Larger group unit of flat	-	-	-	-
Younger couples 8	House - low density	6	1	-	5
	Dual occ. or m/d house	1	-	-	1
	Smaller group units (<6)	1	-	-	1
	Larger group unit of flat	-	-	-	-
Younger couples with children 6	House - low density	2	-	-	2
	Dual occ. or m/d house	2	-	1	1
	Smaller group units (<6)	2	-	-	2
	Larger group unit of flat	-	-	-	-
Middle couples with children 5	House - low density	3	-	1	2
	Dual occ. or m/d house	2	1	-	1
	Smaller group units (<6)	-	-	-	-
	Larger group unit of flat	-	-	-	-
'Empty nesters' 4	House - low density	-	-	-	-
	Dual occ. or m/d house	2	1	-	1
	Smaller group units (<6)	1	-	-	1
	Larger group unit of flat	1	-	-	1

The majority of respondents (25 out of 30) in **Moreland** felt dissatisfied with some aspect of their housing choice.

Compared to the other areas, more respondents in **Moreland** were not satisfied with the housing choice available. The view was influenced by a group of respondents who preferred affordable housing in inner city locations particularly in the east and south-eastern suburbs. Among this group the available housing choice was not considered satisfactory.

11.3 Boroondara

Table 11.3.1- Boroondara: Satisfaction with housing choice

Stage in life cycle	Current residence housing form	Total respondents	Satisfaction with housing choice		
			Satisfied	Neutral/unclear	Not satisfied
3 Younger singles	House - low density	-	-	-	-
	Dual occ. or m/d house	1	-	1	-
	Smaller group units (<6)	2	-	1	1
	Larger group unit of flat	-	-	-	-
3 Older singles & peers together	House - low density	-	-	-	-
	Dual occ. or m/d house	-	-	-	-
	Smaller group units (<6)	2	-	1	1
	Larger group unit of flat	1	-	1	-
5 Younger couples	House - low density	5	1	1	3
	Dual occ. or m/d house	-	-	-	-
	Smaller group units (<6)	-	-	-	-
	Larger group unit of flat	-	-	-	-
5 Younger couples with children	House - low density	4	-	2	2
	Dual occ. or m/d house	-	-	-	-
	Smaller group units (<6)	1	-	-	1
	Larger group unit of flat	-	-	-	-
6 Middle couples with children	House - low density	3	-	1	2
	Dual occ. or m/d house	1	-	-	1
	Smaller group units (<6)	1	-	-	1
	Larger group unit of flat	1	-	-	1
8 'Empty nesters'	House - low density	2	1	-	1
	Dual occ. or m/d house	2	1	-	1
	Smaller group units (<6)	2	1	1	-
	Larger group unit of flat	2	1	-	1

In **Boroondara** respondents' satisfaction with the choice of housing options available was slightly better with half feeling dissatisfied with some aspect (16 out of 30).

Although there were favourable comments about the variety and supply of both low and medium density housing in **Boroondara**, nevertheless a substantial group of respondents was dissatisfied with the choice of housing. Their dissatisfaction seemed to be related to the cost of relatively expensive housing in Boroondara, one of the most appealing areas in Melbourne. The housing aspirations of respondents living in this area were higher than those in the other two areas.

11.4 Changing residence - a major life decision

Changing residence is often the largest financial decision a person ever makes which has implications in many other aspects of a person's life. The amount of effort and involvement people put into the decision making process varied greatly. For some it was a major decision requiring considerable research and thought, while for others the decision was made by chance or out of convenience.

A large proportion of respondents were not fully satisfied with the choice of housing available. Most of these respondents gradually learned to accept the less favourable aspects of their choice. Some respondents who had made the wrong selection subsequently sold their homes within a matter of months. For instance:

- a woman living next to the railway line in Pascoe Vale could not cope with the noise from trains and the neighbourhood;
- a family left a two bedroom unit in Kew which was too small;
- a retired man couldn't cope with the Body Corporate and being the only male resident in a block of units;
- a young family moved from Brunswick to Coburg. The young mother sought medical assistance because she was so depressed about moving from Brunswick;
- a mature single man, the only male resident in a group of units, said he couldn't cope with the attention he was getting from the women living there.

Many respondents appeared to rationalise some aspect of their purchase decision. Sometimes the importance of an unmet criterion was lessened or else some other feature of the property made more important.

I paid too much for the unit but that doesn't matter because I'm happy here. ('Empty nester' in medium density housing, Brimbank).

We are further out (from the CBD) but it's only two more stops by train. (Peers living together in low density housing, Brimbank).

We'd never really considered Coburg, until we'd had a look and discovered how much it had to offer. (Younger couple in low density housing, Moreland).

You can't get houses as big as this in Hawthorn. (Preferred location but purchased in Camberwell).

11.5 Implications

Many respondents seemed to rationalise some aspect of their decision to buy. Buying a house is a major life decision and respondents put varying degrees of effort into the process. Having made the decision it makes sense to endorse that decision, at least in the short term, so that living in the house is an enjoyable experience. If consumers were more educated about the availability and benefits of medium density housing options perhaps their decisions would be more informed.

12

Awareness and perceptions of medium density housing forms

In this report, the term 'medium density' covers a wide variety of housing types, from small units or flats, townhouses (new and older), to new quite large houses built on smaller size blocks. However, because most respondents had a limited awareness and perception of medium density housing they assumed their options were either small units or townhouses, with very little or no yard:

I'd prefer a townhouse to a unit because you'd have a bit more space. Outdoor space is important. (Younger couple in low density housing, Moreland).

I do like some units but I would have to have a garden. (Peers living together in low density housing, Moreland).

I think units are too small and their backyards are too small. (Single person in low density housing, Moreland).

Respondents had a range of views about medium density housing in comparison to other alternatives. What follows are their views about privacy, space, maintenance, location, and the quality of construction.

12.1 Privacy

Privacy appears to be a very important consideration and widely viewed as sacrificed in some medium density housing options. Exposed common areas particularly where 'anybody can go past your window' are negatively associated with medium density housing by people living in both forms of housing. Respondents living in both medium and low density housing emphasised the importance of individual privacy and how privacy is compromised in some medium density housing:

I lived in a unit alongside twenty others. It drove me crazy, all the cars driving in and out. I would go out and hang out my washing and see everybody. The laundry was shared. There was no privacy and it was cramped. (Younger single in small group of units, Moreland).

It's to do with privacy. I like to have space around me. I like to be neighbourly, but not all the time. (Middle couple with children in low density housing, Boroondara).

I wanted something like a little terrace on our own piece of land. ('Empty nester' in medium density housing, Moreland).

We like to do our own thing, we just like our privacy. ('Empty nesters' in low density housing, Moreland).

12.2 Space

Space was often expressed as the number of bedrooms and/or living areas required. Respondents also described some houses as having a 'sense of space'. Like privacy, space was sacrificed to some degree in medium density housing options:

I selected this one because its bigger, had more backyard and an extra bedroom. (Empty nester' in low density housing, Boroondara)

Some units were just like boxes with no outlook. (Younger couple in low density housing, Moreland)

The townhouse we looked at was similar in price but offered less space. (Couple in low density housing, Moreland).

12.3 Low maintenance

Medium density housing was perceived as requiring lower maintenance than low density housing and was a positive feature with all respondents:

Low maintenance was important A small yard would be nice but I don't want a lawn to mow. (Younger single in medium density housing, Boroondara).

I'm really busy with work, I don't have the time to look after a house. (Younger single in medium density housing, Moreland).

Units offer greater security and no garden to worry about. (Empty nester' in medium density housing, Brimbank)

We didn't want the costs of maintaining an older home. (Empty nester' in medium density housing, Brimbank)

12.4 Location

Many respondents were aware that medium density housing should be a more affordable option in a more preferable location. However medium density housing in a preferable location was in most cases more expensive than expected. When buying or renting medium density housing, respondents either spent more money on a better location or accepted a less desirable one:

If you spend that much on a unit, it should be in a really good location.

I think I would have happily bought one in Carlton, we would have been happy because of the advantages of being close. (too expensive) (Younger couple in low density housing, Moreland)

12.5 Quality of construction

A few respondents had experience of new houses that were either badly built or poorly finished. This situation seemed to apply to newer medium density housing. Those who had seen new, badly finished units tended to think this applied to all medium density housing forms:

They were cramped and displayed poor workmanship. (Younger couple in low density housing, Moreland).

Good quality finishes and workmanship would make them (medium density) more attractive. ('Empty nester' in low density housing, Moreland)

12.6 Security and sense of community

Many female 'empty nesters' were attracted by the security of medium density housing in larger groups of units or flats as well as a sense of community that medium density housing offers:

It's more secure being in a group of units. ('Empty nester' in medium density housing, Brimbank).

I love my unit and I love the type of living this place offers. It's like the village pump and I love the central garden set up. I can sit here in my garden, people come and go and I can say hello. ('Empty nester' in medium density housing, Boroondara).

A few younger singles mentioned these aspects:

Both my neighbours are retired and they keep an eye on my place when I'm away with work. (Younger single in medium density housing, Boroondara)

There are quite a few young people here. It's a bit of a "Melrose Place". (Younger single in medium density housing, Brimbank).

12.7 Understanding the purpose and benefits of medium density housing

There was a lack of understanding among a number of respondents about the purpose or benefits to be gained from some forms of medium density housing. A young family with children bought a two bedroom house in a medium density housing estate in Glenroy. The house which met their choice criteria of design, space and affordability was located close to school, shops and public transport.

Having moved to their new home, they found the estate was not as they expected. The roads were narrow and they had problems with parking and traffic congestion. Their next door neighbours overlooked their backyard and they were worried that when their children were noisy it would bother their neighbours. In their view there were too many houses too close together and they thought the house had been 'done on the cheap.' Their rationale for the design and layout of the estate was that 'the council was trying to make extra money.' Residents were distrustful, particularly of local government and they thought 'the council was taking money under the table from developers.' These respondents said that their views were held by others in the development. What this family really wanted was a low density free-standing home with a yard. However, unable to afford such a dwelling it was difficult for them to settle for something similar but smaller.

How medium density housing was perceived in each municipality

Brimbank

- Was perceived to have more of a range of new and older housing stock but not well serviced by public transport.
- Was perceived to have a better price range in the medium density housing stock as well as a range of new and older medium density housing.
- Was perceived to have a lack of variety in style in the new medium density housing being built.
- As in Boroondara and Moreland, new medium density housing was perceived to be more expensive than expected.

Moreland

- Was considered to have a good supply of affordable low density housing relative to medium density housing, which had a short supply of three bedroom units in the outer areas of Moreland.
- Attracted a number of respondents trading off location to find affordable low density housing in the inner city area.
- New medium density housing however, was considered expensive relative to the other available housing options in the area.
- In the outer areas of Moreland there was a perceived shortage of three bedroom medium density housing amongst the few respondents who were looking.

Boroondara

- Was perceived to be very attractive, well located, well serviced and consequently expensive. Some respondents found medium density more expensive than they had expected, however most buyers were prepared to pay more for housing in this municipality.
- Respondents considered Boroondara to have an adequate supply and range of medium density housing.
- Some respondents were concerned that the neighbourhood character was being damaged by too many larger, 'non-sympathetic' developments.

12.8 Respondents views on low density and medium density housing

Respondents who chose low density housing options, rejected medium density housing for a number of reasons. The most common being the need for space and privacy. Often perceptions of medium density living were not based on first hand experiences:

With a fully detached house you end up with so much more space. You don't have to worry about common walls. It is more private and secure. (Younger couple in low density housing, Moreland).

The negatives of a unit would be being close to your neighbours. The inside and outside space would not be as good. (Older single in low density housing, Moreland).

We didn't like the common areas and the lack of privacy because privacy is important. (Younger couple in low density housing, Boroondara).

Units, town houses or dual occupancies - heaven forbid! They're just like concrete boxes. They're poky and you feel like you're living in a shoe box. (Older single in low density housing, Moreland).

I find in a lot of units you can still hear noise from the neighbours and there is not enough greenery. You might have a little courtyard but everything is very compact to make the most of space. (Couple with children in medium density housing, Brimbank).

Children and pets were common reasons for respondents not considering medium density housing:

I wanted more space than that for the children. (Couple with children, Boroondara).

We didn't consider a unit because we have two dogs. (Couple in low density housing, Boroondara).

Not suitable for a baby. I would be concerned that other people would hear him cry. (Couple with children in low density housing, Brimbank).

We looked at a few units, we couldn't really see a family going into those spaces. (Middle couple with children in low density housing, Boroondara).

Some respondents held beliefs or values that prevented them from considering medium density as an option for themselves:

I really yearn a bit for the lifestyle of the baby boomers - the big backyard, picnics, the neighbours. In our own back yard our child is safe and contained. (Couple with children in low density housing, Moreland).

I think there are a lot of good philosophical reasons for living in that sort of environment (medium density) but it does not attract us. (Couple in low density housing, Boroondara).

We were conscious of how other people's property affects yours if it's too close. If you get two properties on the one piece of land, you're not getting your own property. I think I'd rather have the house blocks subdivided smaller. (Couple in low density housing, Moreland).

We really wanted a house. My parents, his parents and my sister all have houses. (A unit) might have been a good idea (for us), perhaps less work but we really wanted a house. (Couple in low density housing, Boroondara).

Less enthusiastic comments about medium density housing from this group outweighed the more favourable ones. Positive comments were about newness, low maintenance, better location and affordability:

I like the idea of a new unit development because they would not require as much work. (Couple in low density housing, Boroondara).

A unit would be good because there would be more security. ('Empty nester' in low density housing, Moreland).

When I'm older, I think a unit with a low maintenance garden would be very appealing, then I could live in an area I prefer. (Peers living together in low density housing, Boroondara).

We would have looked at units if we hadn't found a house we could afford. (Couple in low density housing, Boroondara).

Even though medium density housing is still predominantly attracting 'younger singles' and 'empty nesters'. To reiterate, there are examples of mid-life respondents enthusiastically moving into this type of housing. This group is attracted by low maintenance homes in a better location. If affordability were not an issue, this trend could be stronger.

12.9 Who do respondents think medium density housing is attracting?

While it is not necessarily the case, medium density housing is perceived by respondents as most suitable for:

- younger single people with busy lifestyles who are often not at home;
- older people, whose families have left home and want less space and maintenance.

These groups are most attracted to medium density housing along with a smaller number in the middle stages of the life cycle.

Many respondents suggested younger professional couples would move to medium density housing because of their busy lifestyles and double incomes, however, there was only one example of this in the total sample. Most young professional couples selected low density housing options.

Younger professional couples, who work long hours, who are not at home a lot or don't have time to look after a big home and garden. These people are a bit more up market with two incomes. (Couple in low density housing, Boroondara).

Brimbank

Impressions from respondents in Brimbank of who chooses medium density housing:

*Younger and older singles, including single mums.
Extended family buying two units in a block together.
Someone who can't afford a house.
Single parents.*

Moreland

Impressions from respondents in **Moreland** of who chooses medium density housing:

*Single women looking for greater security.
Mainly renters.
More expensive ones are more likely to be owner occupied.
Professional working families rather than families.
Mixture of younger singles and older couples and singles.
People who don't want to look after a garden.
People who have higher incomes.*

Boroondara

Impressions from respondents in **Boroondara** of who chooses medium density housing:

Females on their own.

First home buyers.

Good for busy people, low maintenance and good security.

Professional couples, quite a lot from Asian backgrounds.

Families with young children.

Up-market people, not really for us (young working couple).

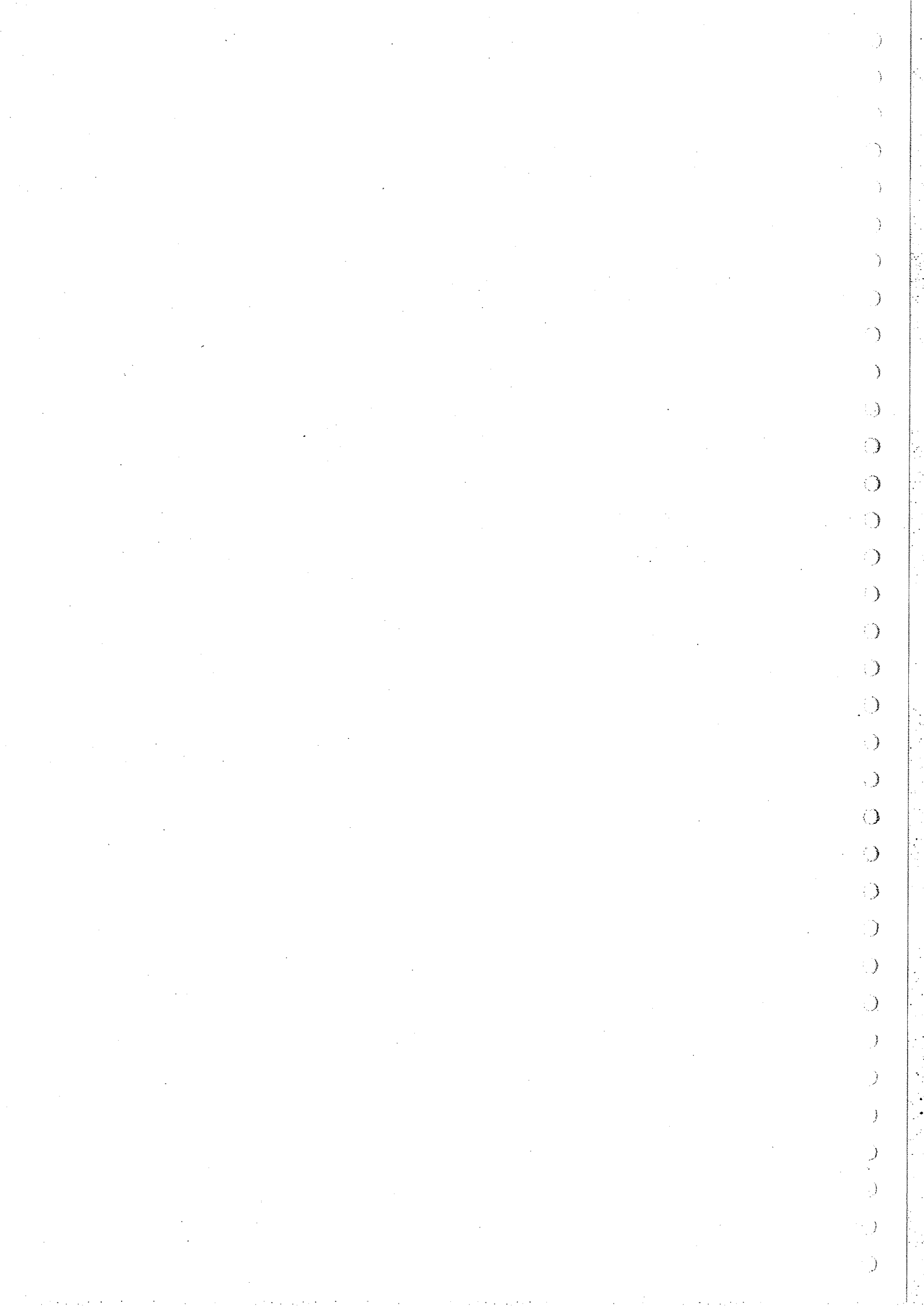
Larger groups of units are better for single people.

People who want to be closer to the city.

Medium density is not suitable for families.

12.10 Implications

If the awareness and perception issues are the same for both low and medium density housing options this makes a mockery of planning initiatives and poses the question whether or not to target medium density housing options if the community doesn't differentiate between the two. Educating the community about the suitability of medium density housing options is also an important consideration.



13

Perceived affordability of different housing forms

As noted previously newer medium density housing was perceived by many respondents to be *expensive* and not as *good value for money*. Table 13.1.1 shows the number of respondents in each area, in different housing forms and the comments made about the affordability of medium density housing in each municipality.

13.1 Affordability of medium density housing

Table 13.1.1 - Affordability of medium density housing

	Expensive	Same/neutral/ no opinion recorded	Affordable
Brimbank			
Medium	11	6	2
Low	5	4	2
Moreland			
Medium	10	-	5
Low	10	4	1
Boroondara			
Medium	7	4	4
Low	4	7	4

The majority of respondents perceived medium density housing to be expensive. This perception was stronger in **Moreland** and **Brimbank**.

Many respondents place a high dollar value on *ownership of space*. They believe less space should mean less expense even though the house is new and doesn't need improving. Some commented that the quality of newer buildings was not as good as older ones:

I would happily move into one except for the money. They're expensive. (Couple in low density housing, Moreland).

They had less space in the house for the same amount of money. If units were a bit cheaper, I probably would have bought one. (Single person in low density housing, Moreland).

We didn't look at anything modern because they were out of our price range. (Single person in medium density housing, Moreland).

Two respondents had purchased new units 'off the plan' because they wanted to reduce costs. In both cases they were satisfied with the savings made but were disturbed by the building delay which occurred. Another respondent mentioned they would never buy 'off the plan' because of the time delays:

I would never buy off the plan. People who do that have to wait months to get their home. (Single person in medium density housing, Boroondara).

I bought off the plan which was a real saving but the whole thing ran terribly late. ('Empty nester' in medium density housing, Boroondara)

13.2 Price ranges of low and medium density housing

Table 13.2.1 is a summary of price ranges for medium and low density housing purchased by respondents in each area.

Table 13.2.1 - Purchase price ranges paid by respondents for housing

Stage in family life cycle		Moreland	Boroondara	Brimbank
Younger singles	ML	\$88,000-\$105,000 -	\$160,000-\$200,000 -	\$33,000 - \$126,000 -
Single or peers together	ML	- \$87,000-\$148,000	\$170,000-\$190,000 -	\$88,000 \$107,000
Younger couples	ML	\$141,000 \$110,000-\$199,000	- \$160,000-\$230,000	\$65,000 - \$93,000 \$120,000
Younger couples with children	ML	\$90,000-\$163,000 \$102,000-\$147,000	\$190,000 \$320,000-\$500,000	\$88,000 - \$100,000 \$75,000 - \$133,000
Middle couples with children	ML	\$115,000-\$130,000 \$89,000-\$124,000	\$140,000-\$350,000 \$340,000-\$380,000	\$86,000 - \$141,000 \$123,000 - \$208,000
'Empty nesters'	ML	\$115,000-\$130,000 -	\$195,000-\$380,000 \$200,000-\$350,000	\$62,000 - \$106,000 \$147,000
Older 'empty nesters' usually female	ML	\$128,000 -	\$280,000-\$290,000 -	\$90,000 - \$130,000 -

Respondents gave examples of newer unit developments being more expensive than older freestanding houses, particularly in **Moreland** and **Brimbank**:

There are units there (Brunswick) going for \$200,000. They look so badly built, compared to the construction of a house like this (Victorian weatherboard) and the quality here is better. (Younger couple in low density housing, Moreland).

There appeared to be a sizeable pool of relatively inexpensive, low density housing in **Moreland** particularly in Coburg (prices ranged from \$70,000 to \$100,000). Existing buildings often required improvement but were considered better value than a new unit in the same price range. Older low density homes also offered scope for future enlargement or renovation.

Other comments about the cost of medium density housing in **Moreland** included:

In Brunswick they (new units) were quite expensive \$150,000-\$170,000. And then you still have the cost of things like carpet and curtains. ('Empty nesters').

They look terrific but cost a fortune. It was like you were being conned a bit. I think things had been done a bit on the cheap. (Couple).

In **Boroondara** most people considered that medium density housing was expensive. They were often surprised by the prices of units in the area, even older units and townhouses:

We thought we could comfortably afford a three bedroom unit for around \$130,000 (purchased two bedroom unit for \$140,000). (Middle couple in medium density housing, Boroondara).

Newer units were about 20% more expensive than the older ones and out of the range of first home buyers. (Single person in medium density housing, Boroondara).

Newer two to three bedroom units were between \$200,000 - \$300,000. I adjusted my sights to look for something modern but not new. (Single person in medium density housing, Boroondara).

Wide ranging. You could get a flat for \$100,000 and some of the units cost \$400,000. (Couple in low density housing, Boroondara).

There appeared to be more new and larger medium density homes in **Boroondara** in a higher price range.

Brimbank

There was more variation in housing prices however medium density was still considered expensive:

Units were more expensive in Keilor and Essendon so we didn't look. (Couple in medium density housing, Brimbank).

I looked at heaps (of units) but they were all expensive. My friend got a unit in Essendon which cost \$140,000 but you could get a house in Altona for that. ('Empty nester' in medium density housing, Brimbank).

I paid more for this (new unit) than what I sold my house for. ('Empty nester' in medium density housing, Brimbank).

There were also examples of less expensive medium density housing. About one quarter of respondents said that if less expensive units were available they would consider them an option.

Most single first home buyers in the sample bought older medium density housing because they could afford them:

Some of the older units are around \$110,000 - \$115,000. That's not bad compared to a house. (Couple in medium density housing, Brunswick).

We ended up with some money after we bought this unit (in King's Park). We might have bought a bit closer to Keilor but units were expensive there. ('Empty nesters' in medium density housing, Brimbank).

You can get a flat in Hawthorn for \$100,000. (Couple in low density housing, Moreland).

Of those who examined the investment potential of their home purchase, medium density housing particularly units, were not expected to hold market value as well as single dwellings on larger lots:

New units don't hold their value. I lost a lot of money when I sold mine (a new unit in St Albans). (Older single in medium density housing, Brimbank).

We know and people kept telling us that the resale value of units later on wasn't as good as houses. (Brimbank).

As noted previously, a number of respondents referred to a perceived oversupply of units in **Boroondara**. They believed this could have affect the resale value of their properties in the future. This was also mentioned in **Brimbank**:

There do tend to be a lot of townhouses/units on the market in this area. (Boroondara).

The bottom has dropped right out, there is a glut on the market (Boroondara).

The prices of the units were quite high but the builder came down a lot in price. (Brimbank).

14

Housing design preferences

Both affordability, as discussed in the previous chapter, and housing design preferences were important considerations in the acceptability of medium density housing. Australians are used to a high standard of housing with quality and space standards very high. It is not surprising therefore, that nearly all of the design preferences involved the notion of space which could mean room to move (inside or outside), or just a place to store things or work in. Preferences included:

- open plan living areas;
- an extra room, spare bedroom or second living area or study. These extra rooms were used for storage, activities or sleeping;
- space and designs allowing for pets, especially dogs for younger couples, older couples or singles. Couples without children who owned pets often required low density housing;
- larger kitchens and separate dining room and a second, sometimes more formal lounge room. Mentioned by people in mid-life this preference perhaps indicates an intention to entertain more at home;
- large secure lock-up garage, used as a bedroom, craft room, rumpus room, office, (activities ranged from the clothing industry, commercial laundry, electrical repairs, and a massage room). This was particularly so in Brimbank.
- a workshop for men. *Somewhere to tinker where your things won't be touched;*
- higher ceilings. A tall man complained that in one house, he bumped into light fittings. Another said: *so you don't feel like you are going into a cell;*
- a north facing aspect was only mentioned by a few respondents as important when they were looking for a house;
- second wash basin in the bathroom for working couples;
- two respondents mentioned they would like to see someone publish a *good renovators guide for period homes* to encourage people to renovate older homes and keep their architectural features.

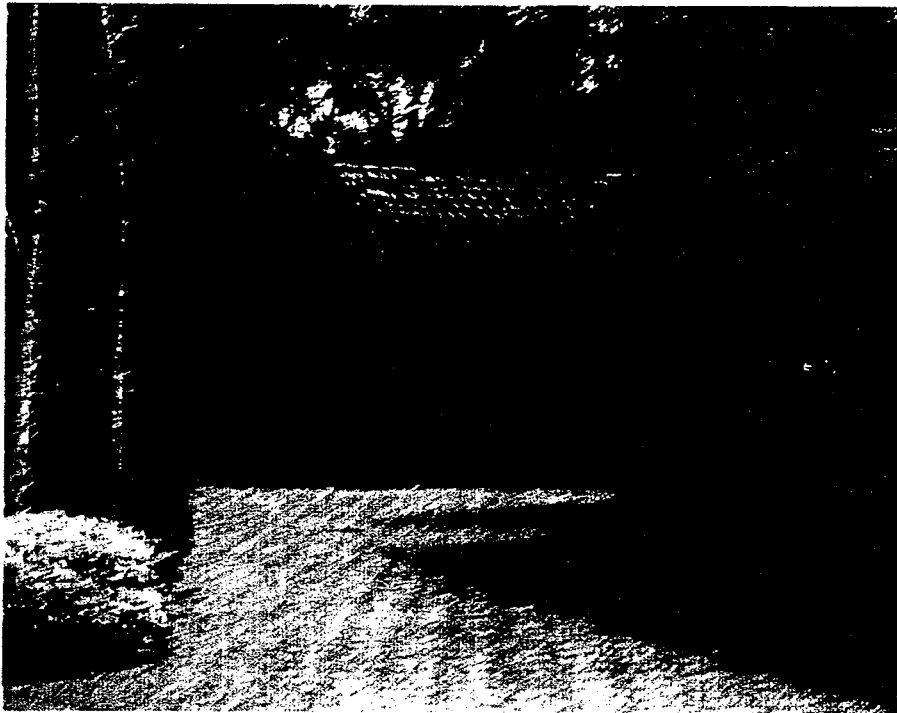
14.1 Design preferences for medium density housing

Design preferences for medium density housing included:

- design aspects which optimised feelings of space and privacy such as open plan living areas, high ceilings and spacious private outdoor areas and views;
- sitings of smaller groups of unit is to ensure privacy in private areas;
- no Body Corporate (ie a preference for separate titles);
- two or three bedrooms. Also important for people living alone who use bedrooms as craft rooms, storerooms and studies etc;
- newer units were particularly attractive to 'empty nesters' in all three municipalities.
- their newness and brightness were appealing features of a newer home which required less expense and maintenance;
- unit developments designed in sympathy with the streetscape but not necessarily replicas of the existing houses;
- units on a separate piece of land with a private entrance and small garden similar to a row of terrace houses.



Consideration of space and privacy in design makes a considerable difference to the appeal of medium density housing. In this house the living rooms and main bedrooms look out on to a large concrete driveway.



In contrast the driveway of this house occupies less space and windows look onto gardens.

These comments illustrated respondents design preferences:

The lounge was open plan which I like.

We would like to see more options for people to do their own thing with medium density (family living in converted warehouse)

It would take a good architect to create the right feeling of space and privacy.

I liked the ones that were two or three together and no body corporate.

This unit is well built and designed a bit like a small house.

It's a very big thing to go from a house to a unit...even to have decent size rooms gives you a feeling of space. It would be depressing to feel too closed in and not to have your privacy.

I really wanted my own piece of land, I'd never shared before but there are advantages of being in a group because you get to meet people.

They were too much like concrete jungles. Not enough greenery.

Some of them look so hard, they need to be softened up with more trees and interesting architectural features.

Respondents wanted to see a greater variety or range in medium density housing options particularly in **Moreland** and **Brimbank**. Those looking for a three bedroom seemed to find it more difficult, particularly in **Moreland**.

14.2 Cultural influences on housing preferences which affect housing design

A number of respondents mentioned design considerations that were linked to their personal or cultural backgrounds. Some of these included:

- a person of Chinese background preferred a separate kitchen because of their cooking style;
- a person of Indian background wanted a bathroom with more space and a better colour scheme for bathing and meditation;
- a person of Croatian background preferred a separate kitchen;
- people of Italian, Greek and Lebanese background preferred large kitchens for family gatherings;
- non-Australian respondents preferred newly built houses which they said were better value;
- two respondents from the Philippines were uncomfortable living where someone else had lived because of the *spirits* the previous tenants may have left behind.

14.3 Design considerations for neighbourhoods

The following considerations were variously described as desirable:

- a mixture of ages and types of households in the neighbourhood;
- more trees and parks particularly in **Brunswick** and **Coburg**;
- many younger respondents expressed a preference for inner city areas because; *there were things happening there* or they liked *the cosmopolitan lifestyle*;
- older people want access to services, familiar areas with no hills, close to where they have lived before and with a mix of young and older people;
- medium density estates should have with wider streets, so people *don't feel blocked in*;
- for singles, the need to maintain privacy and a sense of community;
- feeling safe and secure. Courts or cul-de-sacs were mentioned as quieter and safer streets. Friendly neighbours about during the day also made people feel safer;
- in **Brimbank** more respondents were concerned about the safety of their neighbourhood;
- getting the right balance in an area of medium and low density housing which included a mix of people while maintaining a street's character. Respondents in **Boroondara** raised this issue as a potential problem.

Examples of medium density housing which met respondents' criteria

The following are some examples of medium density housing which met respondents criteria:

Brimbank

One of a new pair of townhouses in Keilor bought for \$126,000 this house was quite different from other medium density housing in Brimbank. This home was chosen by a young single mother who was looking for an affordable home with external space. She specifically wanted a house that was different from the more traditional styles in the area.

Moreland

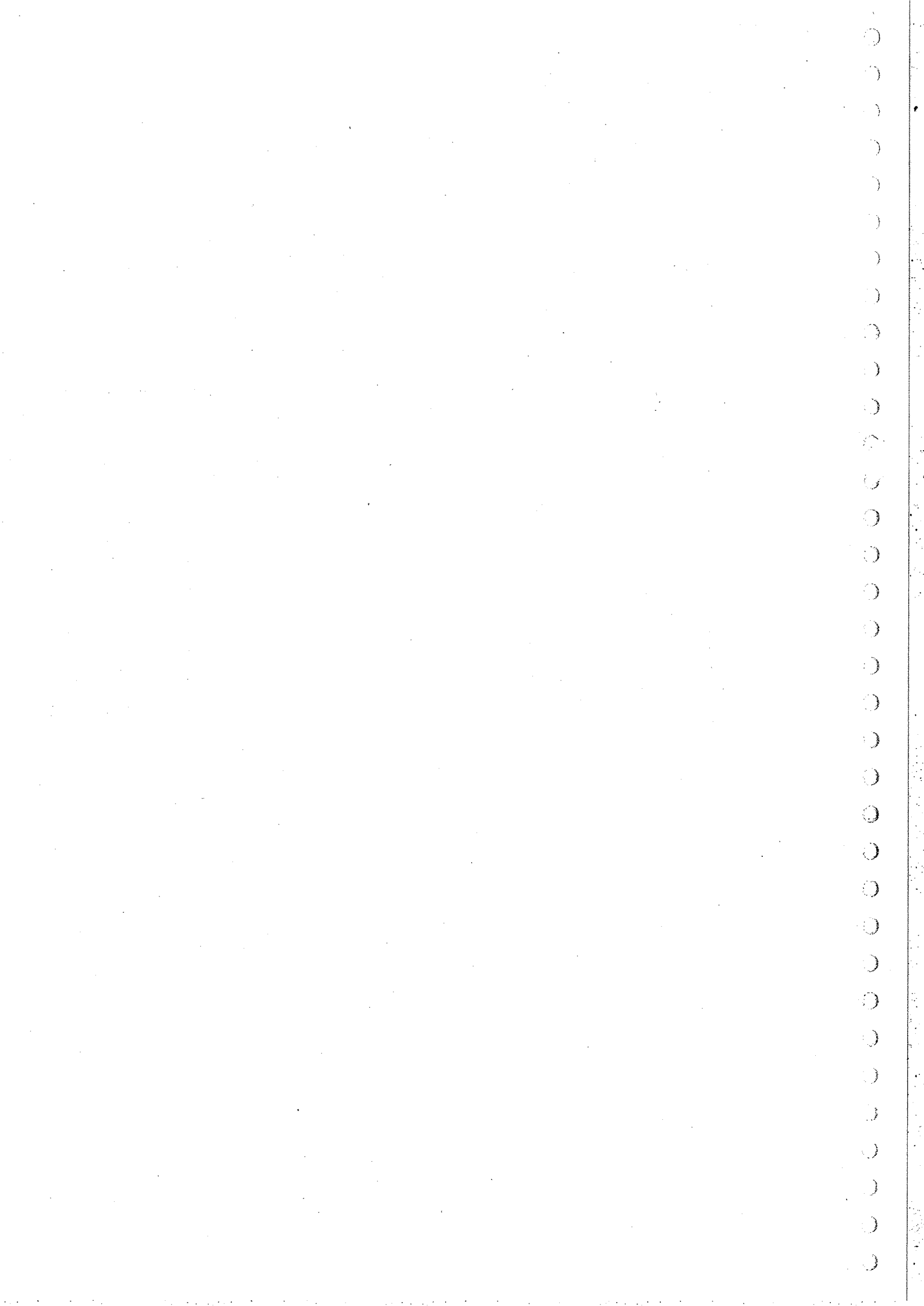
A group of six townhouses in Brunswick was built in the shell of an old warehouse. One townhouse accommodated a family with three children who wanted to be close to the city and reduce commuting time. They also wanted to be closer to schools and services.

Boroondara

A townhouse in Kew, close to services, was one of six which housed a family with two children. The respondents had attempted to develop a dual occupancy on their old family home site but experienced difficulties with planning procedure. This purchase in Kew was ideal because of its unique design. While it was more expensive than they had expected the house had separate street frontage, a small courtyard at the front, a large internal living space and no common areas.

14.4 Implications

To reiterate, design features play an important part in the appeal of medium density housing forms. In light of this, designers and builders should become better informed.



15

Rental market

Respondents in rental accommodation were a small part of the sample with six in total, two in each municipality. Their main reasons for choosing rental accommodation were:

- they could not afford to buy or else had other priorities for savings such as buying car or overseas travel;
- rental property was temporary accommodation which gave prospective buyers time to look for a house to buy.

Renters were looking for accommodation which was:

- affordable;
- easy to live in, clean, comfortable, with low heating costs;
- close to work;
- had access to facilities;
- a development with a smaller number of units ;
- an area where others were renting.

The choice of rental accommodation among renters was perceived as unsatisfactory (this usually related to the condition of the housing). Other respondents with recent experience of the rental market also found the choice of housing unsatisfactory. Some respondents bought a property because there were unable to find acceptable rental accommodation.

15.1 Brimbank

Both respondents were paying about \$75 each for a room in a friend's house. Respondents living in rental accommodation in **Brimbank** were happy about the choices available to them. Above all people wanted affordable accommodation.

One respondent, a single mother and two teenage children moved into the home of a single male friend. She worked as housekeeper to subsidise her rent.

The second respondent was a younger single woman living with friends in Sydenham. Saving to buy her own home in the inner city area, she was happy to be paying a low rent.

15.2 Moreland

The price range of rental accommodation in **Moreland** was between \$140 per week for a two bedroom unit and \$180 for a three bedroom house in Brunswick.

There is a perceived shortage of affordable, clean and comfortable rental housing stock in **Moreland**. A few respondents who had bought a house commented that they had rented or planned to rent, but weren't able to find suitable accommodation. Once they had saved the deposit they found it was cheaper to buy a property.

An older single woman for example, was looking for rental accommodation. She planned to sell her recently bought unit because she was unhappy with the location.

15.3 Boroondara

Rental accommodation in Boroondara ranged from \$90 for a room in a two bedroom townhouse to \$220 per week for a three bedroom terrace house. These prices are only slightly more expensive than in **Moreland** even though property values (and purchase prices) are substantially higher in **Boroondara**.

Renters experiences in **Boroondara** were more positive. Both respondents were younger and had chosen a house in Hawthorn. A young single woman who had moved to the area to share a townhouse with a friend wanted accommodation that was within her budget and in a convenient inner city location. Renting allowed her to experience a new area without the commitment and stress of buying a property.

A young couple was keen to move away from the very busy inner city area of Fitzroy where they had been renting. They wanted house with a workshop or a garden shed that was close to the city. They felt they had more choice in Hawthorn because fewer people were looking for rental accommodation in that area.

16

Rationale for further study

This report has examined the three municipalities in light of householders' needs and level of satisfaction with their housing. It has also provided information about the difficulties people face in gaining access to such housing and why these difficulties arise, at different stages of people's lives when they have different housing requirements.

Moreover, the findings have shown quite clearly that:

- consumers have been constrained in location and/or housing choice when considering purchasing a home;
- all life cycle groups live in medium density housing;
- specific design features of medium density dwellings are required;
- there is potential to expand the medium density housing market.

In light of this information there are a number of research possibilities:

1. Quantitative research study

Quantify the extent to which the perceptions identified in this pilot stage of the research are held in the overall marketplace. Based on a representative sample, information on respondents' choice criteria and trade offs could be collected. Also respondents' satisfaction levels relating to aspects of their housing choice could be measured.

A method of multi-variate analysis could be considered to look at any patterns or groupings that may occur within specific groups of consumers and for their choice criteria. Appropriate methods might be factor or cluster analysis.

2. Analysis of the actual housing purchases of consumers in each municipality

Statistics have been compiled from local government records on residential properties purchased over a recent twelve month period. Analysis of this data would provide some information about the form of housing purchased in different locations. Some additional information is also available such as price paid and size of block.

3. Pricing study

Affordability of new medium density housing has been identified as an issue, and in a number of cases, a barrier to its selection. The transcripts could be used as the basis for further analysis of the pricing issue, to identify what is, or is not, acceptable to consumers in terms of the pricing of new medium density housing forms, by stage in the family life cycle and by municipality.

4. Exploration of design issues in more detail with individuals or groups of consumers

Workshops or focus groups could be conducted to help identify the most important and acceptable design features preferred for medium density housing. Groups could be conducted with consumers in each stage of the life cycle. The findings of the research could then form part of an education or awareness raising program of the design issues and specific features for medium density housing forms among designers and builders.

5. Use of existing research base to assist planning strategy

Another possibility could be to use the existing research base for the development of a more holistic planning strategy to co-ordinate and integrate housing, infrastructure and support services as well as some aspects of environmental quality.

The pilot study has gained comprehensive information from 90 depth interviews about the qualitative differences in the perceptions and preferences which exist among various groups of people, from the three different residential backgrounds. It may be appropriate to interview the same 90 respondents in 12 months time as part of the longitudinal study originally proposed by the VPELA. Such a study could give a more complete picture and would combine qualitative or quantitative research tasks. The objectives of further study would be:

- To collect and compile relevant information on the existing community facilities and services, including transport networks, with regard to location, usage and adequacy and compare with the qualitative information on people's usage patterns, perceptions of accessibility and adequacy and level of satisfaction.
- To collect and compile information on reported crime in the area and compare with the qualitative information on people's understanding of crime and anti-social behaviour in the area, and perception of overall safety.
- To identify locational issues, including what difficulties people face in gaining access to services, and why these difficulties arise, at different stages of the life cycle and different stages of residency.
- To design a monitoring process which documents the 'before' and 'after' affects of changes in the physical design and the introduction of other measures or strategies - the provision of social and physical infrastructure - to enhance the total living environment.

All or some of the above research tasks are recommended if the consumer is to be better understood, if medium density housing choices are to be provided and there is to be a higher real satisfaction with the living environments being created.