

Blue-collar boom town

Matt Johnston

city reporter

IT may not have Luna Park or a beach, but blue-collar Footscray is being dubbed our "next St Kilda" as Melbourne's population continues to surge.

VicUrban chief executive Pru Sanderson said Footscray was as close to the CBD as tourist hotspot St Kilda and boasted the right mix of multicultural activity and prime development opportunities to become one of the most happening places in Melbourne.

Maribyrnong Mayor Michael Clarke backed the traditionally working-class suburb's prime place in Melbourne but said its heritage and poorer population had to be protected.

Ms Sanderson, who heads VicUrban, the State Government's sustainable urban development agency, told the *Herald Sun* that in a few decades Melbourne could house seven million people, which would effectively make Werribee the "heart of the west".

Footscray's future as 'St Kilda of the west'

Footscray would then become the edge of the CBD.

"You could say (Footscray) is the St Kilda of the west, and it will have more and more business attracted to it," Ms Sanderson said.

"The challenge is to get more business activities while nurturing multicultural and mixed-use activities to make sure it doesn't lose that.

"It has got so many strengths: it has a fantastic market and a university, and

it is ripe for this addition to its character. At five to seven million people (in Melbourne), the west is inevitably going to be an area of great expansion."

Ms Sanderson said planners were continually realigning the role of the west as the population continued to soar.

"The way St Kilda Rd connects the CBD with St Kilda with a higher density of use, so could Footscray be connected to the CBD," she said.

"If you look at Melbourne at 2060, I think we could well be looking at a city where there is quite a continuity of development between Geelong and Melbourne."

Cr Clarke said that the western suburbs would feature prominently as planners looked as far ahead as the time when Melbourne might be home to 10 million people.

Cr Clarke said a challenge for the council and developers would be to fit a booming

population with traditional western suburbs families, and protect artistic and cultural heritage.

"We will work overtime to maintain the artsy, edgy atmosphere," Cr Clarke said.

"So too with our level of cultural diversity (where) you can eat Indian or Vietnamese, dance with the Africans, or do tai chi with our Chinese friends."

He said there was already a buzz spreading about Footscray.

"House prices have gone up 22 per cent in one quarter. We are so under-priced here," Cr Clarke said.