

Arguments to support the use of Vol. 206149, Fol. 1 to build a residential dwelling

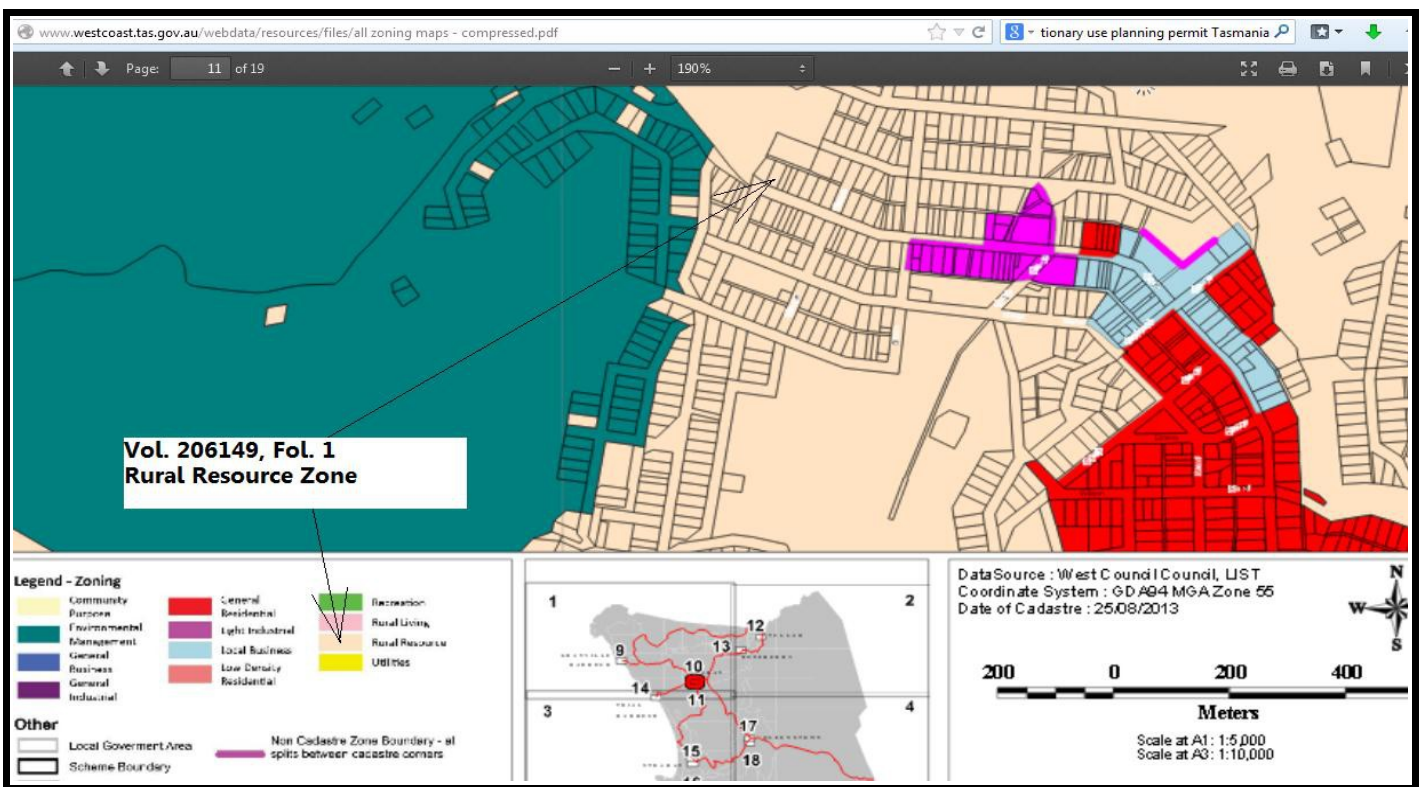
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16th March 2014

The West Coast Interim Planning Scheme 2013¹ [accessed 16/3/2014] states that it has an objective to establish permit requirements that “permit use or development without need for a permit if it conforms to zone purpose and is in accordance with prescribed compliance standards” [See 3.0 (e) (ii)].

The following arguments aim to demonstrate that my residential building proposal for the 961sqm lot at Vol. 206149, Fol.1, which is within the “Rural Resource” zone, conforms to the zone purpose and is in accordance with compliance standards.

1. **Image 1** indicates the lot is zoned “Rural Resources”. An arrow points to the block.



*Image 1: West Coast Interim Planning Scheme Zoning Map (Zeehan extract)*²

2. **Rural Resource Zone** is defined in the West Coast Interim Planning Scheme as having the following two purposes:

26.1.1.1: “To provide for the sustainable use or development of resources for agriculture, aquaculture, forestry, mining and other primary industries, including opportunities for resource processing”

26.1.1.2: “To provide for other use or development that does not constrain or conflict with resource development uses.”³

1 <http://www.westcoast.tas.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/Draft%20Interim%20Planning%20Scheme.pdf>

2 <http://www.westcoast.tas.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/all%20zoning%20maps%20-%20compressed.pdf>

3 <http://www.westcoast.tas.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/Draft%20Interim%20Planning%20Scheme.pdf>

Priorities for land use are listed in the *objectives*, including residential use as follows:

26.1.2 (h): “Residential use and development on rural land is appropriate only if

1. required by a primary industry or a resource based activity; or
2. without permanent loss of land significance for primary industry use and without constraint or interference to existing and potential use of land for primary industry purposes.

3. Zoning use purposes (see 26.1.1.1 above) don't appear suitable use:

1. Agriculture:

The 961sqm lot is too small and the sandy-gravelly, acidic soil is not suitable for most traditional agricultural crops. It would be suitable for agistment of one sheep or one goat, or to house some poultry, but only if the soil nutrient levels were improved. The only animal benefitting from the undeveloped land are feral rabbits.

2. Aquaculture:

The block is too small for processing marine products, involving the disposal of wastes. It is also too far from the sea to be used as a marine processing site.

3. Forestry:

There is no vegetation other than grass and moss onsite. Neighbouring lots are either vacant or covered in gorse.

4. Mining:

The block was sold for \$50 in 2000 by the last person who profitted by the existing mining exploration lease. Clearly its mineral value is pretty low.

5. Other primary industries, including processing:

None of the neighbouring vacant land, crown or privately owned, along the Main St, is being developed for primary industry, or processing. The closest buildings are residential buildings.

6. Development not to constrain or conflict with resource development uses:

There are no neighbouring blocks being developed for resource development, so there is no apparent conflict or constraint. There has been no history of resource development usage for at least fourteen years.

4. **Earliest historical use of the actual block was for residential dwelling.** Zeehan's early settlement along Main St was driven by the pegging out of small mining leases by many individual miners. The legendary length of the Main St in Zeehan is explained by the fact each miner set up his tent next to the next tent, and so it went in a long snaking line along the valley of “Silver Lead Creek”. As the larger mines in the surrounding hills to the north and northwest developed, called Queen Hill and Montana, the smaller mining leases became focussed on residential use within the growing township of Zeehan.

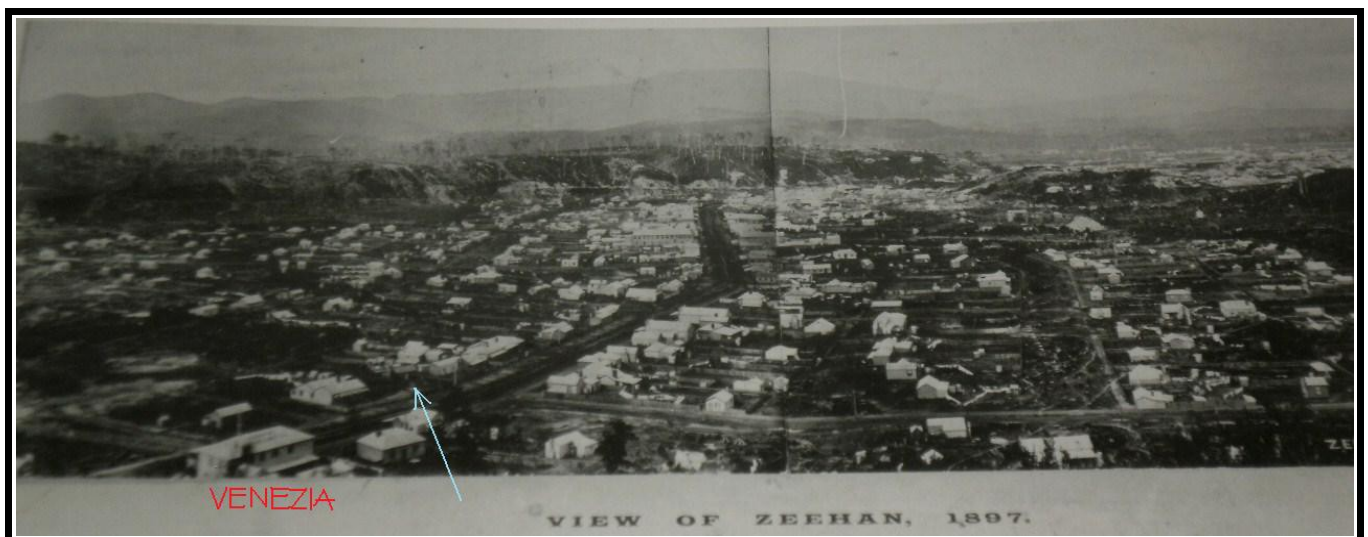


Image 2: West Zeehan in 1897, with blue arrow pointing to the block.

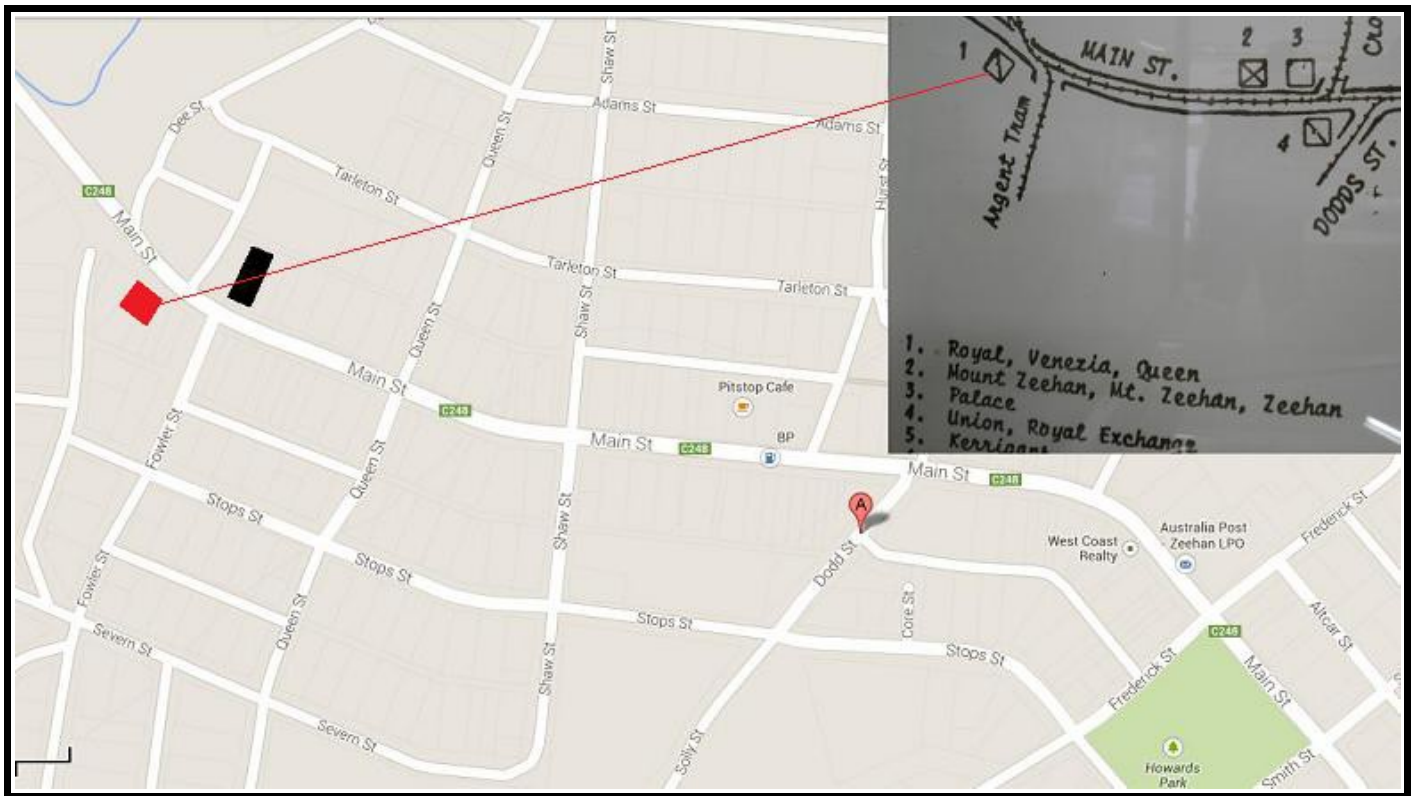


Image 3: Position of the block (black) relative to the position of the Venezia Hotel (red).

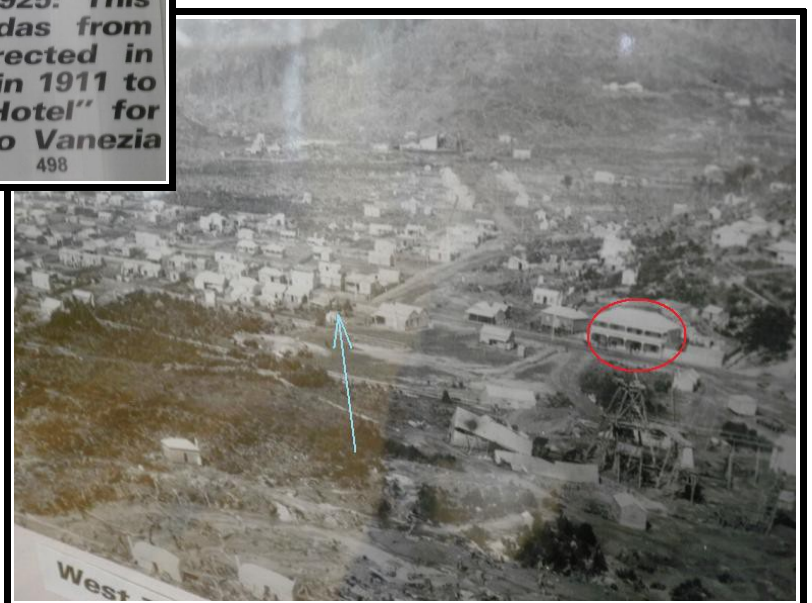


Image 4: (above left) Venezia Hotel in 1911. *Image 5:* (below right) Blue arrow pointing to the block, and the Venezia Hotel circled in red. Montana Mine is in the lower right corner.



Image 8: Silver Queen No. 1 Mine, showing the Venezia Hotel circled in red, and a light-blue arrow to the block and miners cottage situated on it in around 1900. The Silver Queen mining lease was immediately to the north-east of the Montana Mine lease.

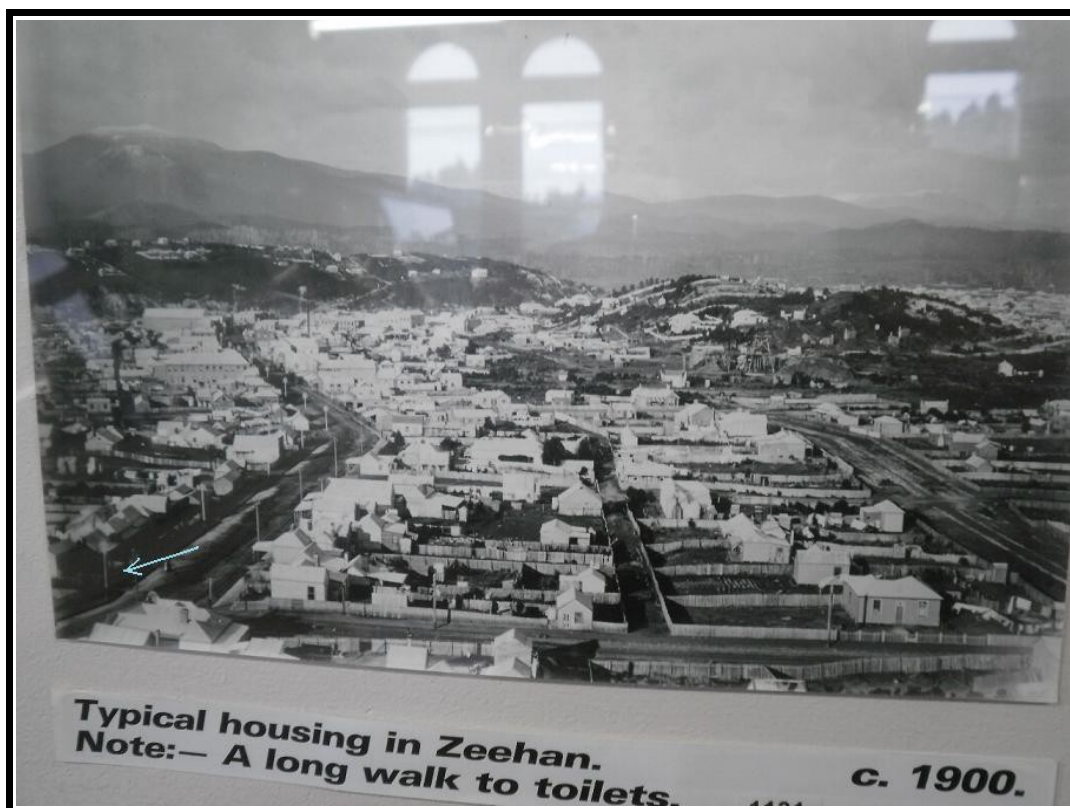


Image 9: Another photograph of West Zeehan around 1900. A light-blue arrow points to the lot opposite Fowler St. The regularity of 961sqm cadastral parcels are obviously intended as residential sites.



Image 10: Detail of image 9, showing the mining cottage at left, around 1900.

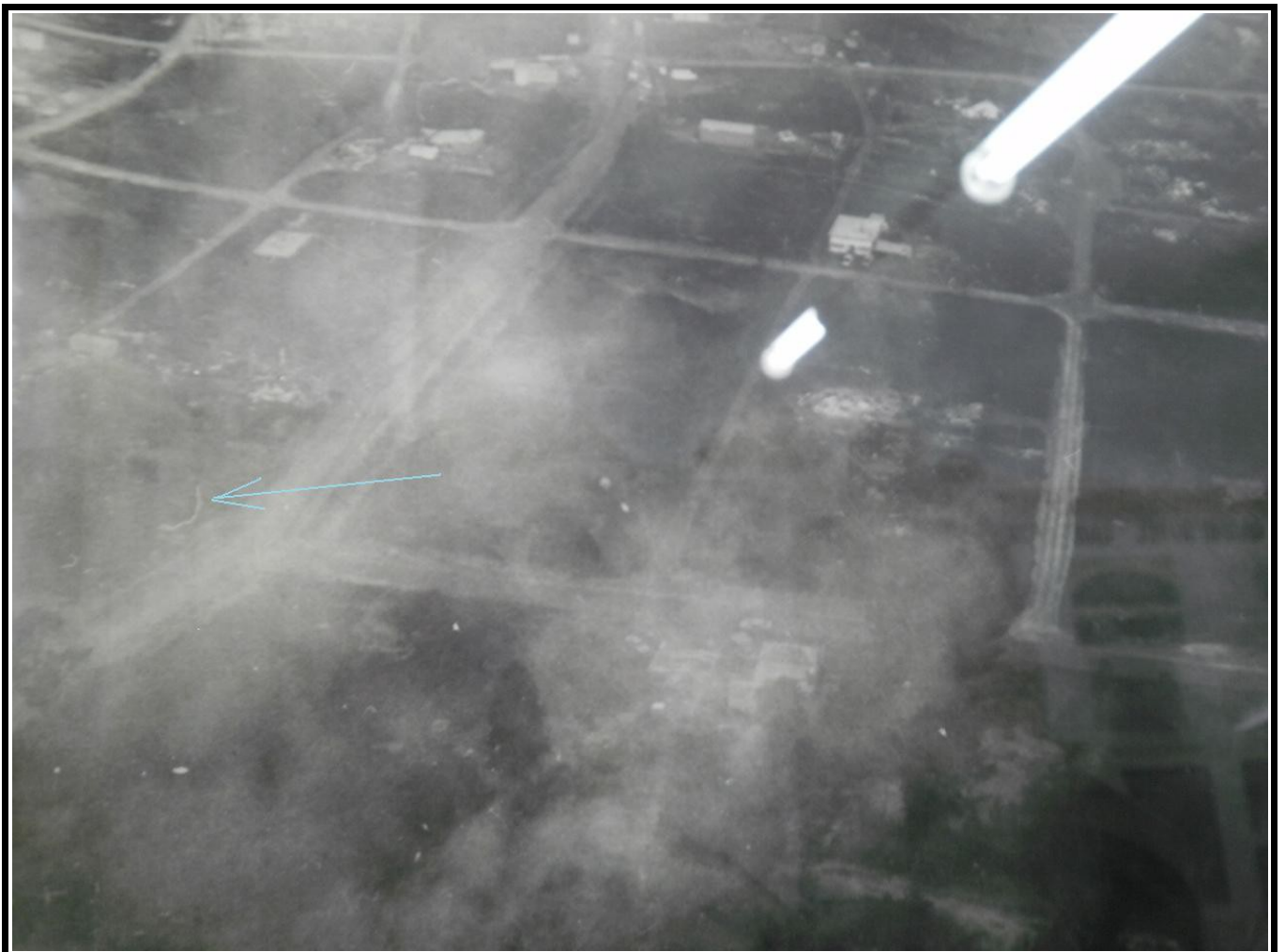


Image 11: The same area in 1981, taken during the bushfire. Previous fires had destroyed most of the cottages. There is no sign of ruins of the miners cottage in image 10. Phil Vickers mentioned there was only a camp near the site by this time.

These historical photographs explain why the lot at Volume 206149, Vol. 1, is a rectangular lot measuring 961sqm, the size and shape typical for residential use in Zeehan, being identical to the neighbouring lots along the Main St. It also indicates there has been little use of the land since the early mining and residential use, for many decades.

5. **Other previous usage.** In late 2013, while I was at the lot stacking stones, tourists stopped me to ask for directions. As they began to drive away, an old fellow in his late seventies drove slowly out of Fowler St into Main St in a well-aged white ute. He beckoned. He pointed to the pile of stones and said, “There used to be petrol bowzers there.” This would explain a small patch of bitumen a couple of inches below the soil where I was bedding down the dry stonewall. It seems that one of the previous usages of the site was a petrol station, and judging by the depth of the soil layer above the bitumen, it was probably twenty to thirty years ago.

In Land Titles Office records, the first modern owner is listed as “Aberfoyle Explorations”, who sold the lot very cheaply for \$50.00 on 24th August 2000 to Jennifer Cox of Devonport. At this time, Aberfoyle Explorations sold many lots together, and Jennifer's son-in-law, Shane Doherty, also bought a nearby lot in the same block. Both Ms Cox and Mr Doherty intended to build houses here. However, they never did, and Mr Doherty sold his block during the housing boom in 2008.

6. **Vacant and undeveloped for decades.** The north and south frontages abut public roads, while east and west frontages are adjacent to vacant crown land. **Image 12** shows the nearest land in use: blue circle for residences, yellow circle for industrial use.



Image 12: Google satellite image (2014). Mostly residential use (blue circles).

The lot is two minutes' walk to the town centre, with the Zeehan hardware, pharmacy, post office, real estate, ANZ bank, petrol outlet, museum, two second-hand opportunity shops, and two cafés. The health centre is a further minutes' walk away. It is eminently suitable as a residential area. So, one has to ask, *why has this lot and neighbouring lots remained undeveloped for housing, for so many decades?*

7. **“Living on the Coast: The Cradle Coast Regional Land Use Planning Framework”**⁴ [accessed 16/3/2014] states that there is a historical pattern in the Cradle Coast region of rural lifestyle development of sites which are:

too small if managed alone for viable traditional agriculture, but [which] are attractive as residential sites.

This 2011 document also states that:

*The Framework must ensure adequate opportunity for choice and diversity in housing location, type and style appropriate to all needs and circumstances; and which are designed to complement the natural and built environment and which maximise opportunity for amenity, safety and efficiency. Rural residential is a legitimate housing option and should be located without creation or increase in demand for inefficient infrastructure and service provision, compromise for future urban settlement, risk to people or property or impact on resource development, natural and cultural values.*⁵

8. **The question, “Why hasn't this lot or the neighbouring lots along the northwest end of Main St been developed for housing?”**, is somewhat answered in terms of Zeehan's housing situation. Professor Andrew Beer and Dr. Selina Tully studied Zeehan in their 2011 report titled “The Drivers of Regional Housing Markets in Australia: Evidence and Implications for Future Growth”.⁶ They state:

Local stakeholders report that an ongoing problem for the region is that it is considered affordable by government and thus the area is not a priority for assistance. This view, however, does not recognise that the poor quality (and age) of local housing and that the lack of good housing is a barrier the region as a place to live and work. Some land is available for further housing in each of the communities, however, building costs are prohibitively high. [End-note: Additionally, it is difficult to find a local builder with capacity to build.]

The housing markets in both towns [Queenstown and Zeehan] increasingly face challenges due to the significant tightening of credit for housing locally and the risk management/aversion strategies of financial institutions. The reality is that many of the postcodes in the region are not 'preferred' areas for lending and deposit requirements for housing have tightened, affecting the purchase and rental sectors.

Moreover, a large number of investors have recorded significant losses in Zeehan and this has affected investor confidence as well as the willingness of banks to loan funds for homes and commercial/business development.

... There is a clear and ongoing need for greater governmental direction of the housing markets in country towns. This should include an enhanced level of attention from planning authorities, strategic investment by social housing providers, the development and implementation of regional infrastructure plans, and targeted actions to improve housing affordability in these centres.

Simply put, it's a catch-22 situation. Building is too expensive because the area is a housing credit risk, so the overall quality of local housing diminishes, meaning workers are not attracted to the area, including builders who find it too expensive to work in the area. And, the cheapness of the poor quality housing means the state government believes there is no need to put extra resources into improving regional housing or infrastructure, creating another deterrent for workers and youth to stay and live in the area.

4 http://www.planning.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/180916/Cradle_Coast_Regional_Land_Use_Strategy_-_declared_27_October_2011.pdf

5 Ibid. (3.9.2)

6 <http://www.regionalstudies.org/uploads/conferences/presentations/international-conference-2011/beer1.pdf>

9. **Locals answer the question.** On speaking to Zeehan locals about my intentions to build a small dwelling on this particular block, the first response is always: “Do you know there are no services there?”

These small residential-sized blocks are too small for anything but a residence --- but the cost of service connections is prohibitive. This is the same story for Jennifer Cox and her son-in-law, Shane. They sold their blocks because there was no power, water, wastewater, stormwater, or telephone services running past the boundary, and the cost of having them installed was not economical. The alternative, of an off-grid lifestyle, is seen as either too uncomfortable and depriving, and/or too expensive to set up with extremely costly wastewater systems, solar power batteries and so on.

Ms Cox listed the block in 2013 as a “building block” on www.gumtree.com.au, for \$6,000 O.N.O. In fact, many off-grid blocks have been for sale for many years on the West Coast, because it's too expensive to build. And, ironically, they're also too expensive to sell, because of legal costs, unless the owner and buyer both do their own conveyancing.

10. **Another hindrance to residential building is the zoning of the lots as “Rural Resource” because setbacks are not reasonable for a ¼ acre lot**, as listed in the West Coast Interim Planning Scheme (p.211 of 314):

“A building or a utility structure must be setback from the frontage:

1. not less than 20.0m; or
2. if the development is for sensitive use on land that adjoins a road specified in Table A1 to this clause, not less than the setback specified from that road;
3. not less than 10.0m from each side boundary; and
4. not less than 10.0m from the rear boundary; or
5. in accordance with any applicable building area shown on a sealed plan of subdivision.”⁷

To abide by these setbacks would create a building envelope of 17.48m x 0.12m, since the block is 20.12m wide along the front and 47.48m deep. I wouldn't be able to fit in a building 12cm wide. For these historical building blocks to be developed for housing, they would need to have their setbacks changed in the regional planning scheme to match General Residential zoning, or else be rezoned to residential.

11. **My solution for the off-grid ¼ acre vacant lot:** I believe the solution I propose is appropriate to the site and to the local circumstances.

Firstly, the residential dwelling proposed is sensitive to the natural and environmental values of the semi-wilderness aspect of the West Coast and fringe of Zeehan township. I aim to incorporate sound environmentally-friendly building principles like:

- passive solar building design, including double-glazing and thermal efficiency;
- rainwater storage, wastewater treatment, and dry composting toilet;
- solar-powered electricity and solar hot water;
- bushfire resistant materials and building design, as well as fire-resistant landscaping;
- suitable local endemic species in the landscaping;
- some recycling of building materials.

Secondly, as a standalone, off-grid dwelling, the proposed residential dwelling makes no demand on inefficient infrastructure and service provision, and would actually set a precedent for environmentally sustainable future urban settlement.

Thirdly, I aim to increase the soil nutrient level to support a small-scale vegetable and fruit

garden and greenhouse area, which would increase productivity of the soil, and become a potential source of income. I have a Permaculture Design Certificate (2000), and might look at buying adjoining crown land to develop for food production linked to ecohuts.

Fourthly, I aim to increase the aesthetic amenity of the neighbourhood with a classic miner's cottage profile, and with a pleasant mixture of semi-private and private recreational spaces.

Summary

There are a number of reasons why the 961sqm lot at Volume 206149, Folio 1 has remained undeveloped for decades, along with its neighbouring lots, on the northwest end of Zeehan's Main Street. These reasons include: high-risk credit area with regard to housing construction finance, few or no building professionals in the area, lack of infrastructure, costs of travel and transport of building supplies and tradespersons, workers are not attracted to the area owing to lack of infrastructure and services, the inappropriate zoning setback for the lot size, and the cost of installing onsite wastewater, water and power services or else connections to the main grid for water, wastewater / sewerage, power, internet, and telephone.

Clearly, residential and home-based economic development is the most appropriate solution for these off-grid 961sqm lots. This has not happened for *mostly economic* reasons. The only non-economic deterrent is impossible building setbacks. Therefore, I suggest that the West Coast Council recognise the need for low-budget residential development strategies, and adopt the setbacks of General Residential zoning.

I believe there needs to be a willingness on the part of the council to accept a higher-level of DIY solutions, which are specified in detail in my planning permit application. I have striven to find designers and professionals who recognise the needs of low-income individuals. I hope that the economic difficulties of developing such blocks can be recognised by council, and that they can be open to finding suitable, affordable solutions.

Yours sincerely,

Kelly Jones