

The Mayor needs to get on board

Elsewhere on this site we explore the attributes of a *great city centre* – primarily as a focus of public life, with great public *places* and civic *spaces*, and also less tangible attributes such as strong communities, lively public conversations, and open government.

The North Sydney city centre may be seriously deficient in 'places and spaces', but the city has a proud history of electing independent representatives to national, state and local governments, of active community involvement, and of open and responsive local government.

The formation of the Committee for North Sydney is firmly within this tradition.

It enables independent, public-spirited experts to contribute to improving those 'places and spaces', through strategic planning, urban design and development related to the characteristics of North Sydney.

It was therefore a big surprise to receive a letter from Cr Jilly Gibson, the Mayor, accusing the Committee of 'constant negative dialogue and distribution of misinformation' and, in effect, demanding that we prove we are not a 'political activist group'. In short, 'Go away!'

In the Mayor's column on the Council's paid page in the *Mosman Daily* on 14 February 2019 (page 8), she seems to blame the past lack of office investment in the North Sydney city centre, not on its well-recognised deficiencies (stifling demand) but on those (like the Committee for North Sydney?) who point out that the North Sydney city centre can be much better. So it's all our fault!

In the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 18 February 2019, the Mayor re-invents the Committee for North Sydney as a bunch of old, negative, out-of-touch residents engaged in 'a battle against development' and hostile to apartments. This is getting serious!

We therefore take this opportunity to explain the origins and operations of the Committee, and why Sydney Metro's cash grab takes North Sydney and Crows Nest in the wrong directions.

Soon after the Committee was formed last May, representatives met with Councillors, and separately with planning staff and the Mayor, to explain our aims. We explained our structure, supported by an open, inclusive, incorporated association – as fully documented on this site.

Despite our focus on long-term strategic initiatives, we recognised that Sydney Metro's plans for a massive commercial tower at the corner of Miller and Berry Streets presents the community with a stark choice: either to urgently call on the NSW Government to think again and consult widely, or to lose the best – and possibly only – chance to create the kind of grand civic heart that the Mayor explicitly acknowledges is missing.

Members of the Committee attended and spoke at Council meetings on Sydney Metro's proposal. Our contributions led to a resolution of the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2018:

THAT the [Council's] submission advocate design excellence and design options that promote a public plaza providing a heart for the North Sydney CBD...

THAT Council write to the Minister responsible seeking further community consultation in relation to revised design options.

The Mayor voted in favour of that resolution, along with all other Councillors who voted on it. It is time that she properly represented the position of the Council in her public statements.

It is time for the Mayor to apply her energies to getting the best results from commercial development, instead of facilitating the demands of Sydney Metro and the Government of NSW.

It is time for the Mayor to genuinely welcome informed and considered contributions to the long term planning and development of the city centre.

In the spirit of developing such a partnership, the Mayor has been invited to become a member of the Association for the Committee for North Sydney.