

# Committee for North Sydney

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## Submission on Our Next Ten Years

The Committee for North Sydney thanks the North Sydney Council for this opportunity to contribute to planning for the next ten years.

The Committee was formed in 2018 for exactly this purpose, bringing together eminent planners, architects, urban designers, engineers, lawyers and community leaders to contribute to conversations about our longer term future. The Committee has sought to provide the Council with independent expert advice and ideas. All members of the Committee are residents of North Sydney.

Today, we believe there are three overriding priorities for the Council's action and advocacy:

- The planning system
- Blanket residential densification
- The Western Harbour Tunnel

Below we briefly describe each of these big challenges.

We then highlight just *one priority* for each of the five current themes.

Finally, we invite the North Sydney Council to regard the Committee and its members as a resource able to contribute to public and technical conversations.

### The planning system

The 75-year-old system of local planning controls that enabled communities to manage the impacts of urban development within a regional strategic framework set by the State has been dismantled, bit by bit. Councils are left to (over-) manage the impacts of minor development while all significant development can ignore the agreed goals and standards expressed in LEPs.

A Community Strategic Plan has lost much of its power to deliver agreed outcomes when LEPs have little effect and development control is bypassed.

Accordingly, the Committee for North Sydney supports the Waverton Precinct's recent request that the North Sydney Council:

- **actively raise in multi Council forums** the need for reinstating across NSW a system of local planning controls within a regional/Statewide strategic planning framework;
- argue that Councils should manage the local height and density detail and preserve heritage areas and create green spaces within a consistent and clear framework;
- call for all local, regional and statewide plans to be routinely revised and reshaped periodically.

### Blanket residential densification

The NSW Government hopes to achieve rapid production of housing, mainly by removing local and other restrictions on apartment towers at designated centres, mostly public transport hubs.

The organic growth of transport hubs means that:

- there are few if any idle sites;
- intricate patterns of land use have evolved; and
- a distinctive sense of place is highly valued.

For these reasons, rapid intensification is likely to be controversial, precisely because it will have many negative impacts. This description could apply to the whole of the North Sydney municipality.

The Committee believes that the North Sydney Council should prepare for the disruptions of blanket permitting. For instance:

- Rapidly identify the intensification potential of many sites and areas, and seek to facilitate development where it has least or best impact.
- Develop plans, standards and guidelines to facilitate development that:
  - builds on an area's strengths and heals its deficiencies,
  - contributes activities and spaces for all, and
  - complements and adds to, rather than exploits and uses up, the area's social values.

As noted in the previous section, the Council has few legal powers to shape how intensification takes place. However, its powers of **advocacy, representation, mobilisation and negotiation**, sometimes undervalued and underused, have never been more necessary.

### **Western Harbour Tunnel**

The third overriding issue for the future of North Sydney is the impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel. The easiest way to explain this impact is "the Rozelle interchange comes to North Sydney".

TfNSW, the elements that are still effectively the RTA, Transurban and others will say that their plans cannot be changed.

- They have said this from the beginning, yet massive changes have happened.
- The plans were never actually finalised, allowing a wholly new form of crossing under the harbour, the deletion of the Beaches Link, and many other adjustments.

In the light of these changes, and disregarding the government's insistence that it's too late to change, the North Sydney Council must use every avenue to demand that *access to the Western Harbour Tunnel be redesigned*.

The city centre and the areas all around it cannot be inflicted with a defective design that routes all south-bound users of the Western Harbour Tunnel through Miller Street, Berry Street and all the streets that lead to the city centre.

The Committee for North Sydney has been expressing the urgency of this issue since the plans for the Western Harbour Tunnel were announced.

Turning the city centre into a *congested traffic interchange* (even while all recent changes to the Sydney city centre have *removed* traffic) will delay, impair or prevent every positive plan and policy that the North Sydney Council has for the city centre, and *must be stopped*.

**It's never too late** to defend the interests of the entire North Sydney community.

### **Highlights**

Initially, the focus of the Committee for North Sydney has been on the city centre. Note: North Sydney's community and civic heart is (or should be) seen as a 'city centre', not as a 'CBD' (it's that as well, but *business* is only one of the essential roles of the city centre).

Since its formation, the Committee has communicated strategic and long-term ideas and proposals to the North Sydney Council.

- In the current context, we will highlight just *one priority* for each of the five themes.
- We are aware that many decisions of the Council, often made after extensive community involvement, are overridden by the NSW Government.
- In the proposals made below, we anticipate that the Council will use its regulatory, administrative, urban management, expenditure and advocacy powers to the fullest extent.

### **Culture and Creativity**

The plan should prioritise the goal of achieving a **city hall in the city centre** – a large flexible and subdivisible space at the heart of the city centre that is available for public and private meetings, performances, exhibitions, events and new uses that will emerge over time.

- The Committee strongly advocated the inclusion of such a space in the building over the metro station.
- This would have made a positive contribution to the city, offsetting the destruction of Tower Square and the overdevelopment of the metro site.
- A city hall (or its equivalent) would have been a place-maker, increasing the value and status of the new building.
- It is regrettable that this kind of strategic fighting for the city was not taken up.
- **It's never too late** to take advantage of opportunities as they emerge – the MLC site is the next promising opportunity, and like the metro building is right at the place-making heart of the city centre – if a *city hall* is a goal that is kept alive in everything the Council does.

### **Economic Development**

The metro stations, like all major public and private investments, have a direct, predictable and measurable effect: they **increase the value of nearby private land** well above what that value would have been. Nearby landowners enjoy an 'unearned increment' from an investment made by government, or by business.

This has been demonstrated in many ways.

- The North Sydney Council actively supported the use of a temporary rate on land around the North Sydney station to fund its accelerated transformation into an impressive public transport facility.
- This is analogous to levies raised in the well-known business improvement districts (BIDs) in the US.
- Sites of such investment should be ringed by tight zones subject to differential rates so that the community receives a direct return on the investment while landowners still enjoy a windfall – a win-win initiative by government.

With the NSW Government mandating big increases in the development potential of land around transport and other nodes – overriding local plans and policies – there is a powerful case for differential rates to fund innovation, additional infrastructure, public spaces, nature and other programs. **It's not too late** for the North Sydney Council to fight hard to get an agreement with the state on this win-win policy.

### **Integrated Transport**

In the 2019 report *Five Big Ideas*, the Committee for North Sydney demonstrated that the appropriate **long-term future for Miller Street** is to consolidate and expand the pedestrian and landscaped space while shrinking the road space.

The road space would be two lanes as far to the west as possible, so that a civic space comparable to Martin Place could be created up to the face of the new metro building (see below under Open Space and Recreation).

The two traffic lanes, primarily for buses, taxis, deliveries and access, would be comparable to Victoria Avenue in the busiest part of Chatswood. The latter is currently being refined through a Movement and Place Plan.

- Pedestrians are prioritised, and life is maintained in a space that is too large to activate otherwise.
- Public transport is prioritised, because this is an *essential and efficient interchange* of rail, bus, taxi, cycle, walking and other movement modes.

**It's never too late** for the North Sydney Council to adapt its plans to reflect reality, movement imperatives, and city life. Many other possibilities will fall into place when this proposal is adopted.

### **Open Space and Recreation**

The discussion paper's map of 'Open Space and Recreation in North Sydney' clearly demonstrates the **paucity of civic space**. There are six small spaces that are largely peripheral, and only one other civic space: Brett Whiteley Place, a relatively short section of closed roadway.

- By far the best opportunity for scaled-up, well-positioned civic space is in front of the metro building.
- Unlike Brett Whiteley Place this space is (i) sufficiently level, (ii) brilliantly sunny and (iii) sheltered from the cold southeasterlies.
- There is still the chance to make this a great and busy space, without compromising the essential movement functions of Miller Street (see Integrated Transport, above).
- The impediment is Lendlease's state-approved plans to privatise both their setback and public land for terraced platforms leased to commercial operators!

**It's not too late** for the North Sydney Council to engage in tough negotiations with Lendlease and the NSW Government to ensure that the space in front of the metro station can be consolidated and enhanced to meet the needs of pedestrians, metro passengers, local shoppers and workers, civic events, happenings and emerging activities – and at the same time adding lustre and status to the Lendlease building.

### **Social Inclusion**

When governments (at all levels) adopt rules that increase the development potential of urban land, they have choice.

- They can simply award the increased value of the land to the owner, hoping that it will drive major intensification, but also knowing that much of the increased land value is a windfall for the current owner.
- Or they can extract real community benefit from the change in the rules, though direct value capture (an ACT style of betterment, or a differential rate, or a levy) or through meaningful contributions delivered by the developer.

In terms of the likely goals of the Community Strategic Plan, the coming wave of intensification is an opportunity to attach obligations to provide significant levels of affordable, social, cooperative and welfare housing – not in separate towers as proposed by the NSW Government for essential workers, but scattered about the city, embedded in residential towers that have real diversity of occupant and tenure.

Now is the time for the North Sydney Council to develop, and gain support for, strong policies of residential diversity, delivered tower by tower as dramatic increases in densities and land values result from the NSW Government's blanket permitting.

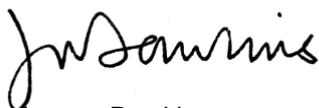
### **Participation**

The Committee for North Sydney welcomes the process for developing the Community Strategic Plan, and invites the Council to make use of the experience and expertise of the members of the Committee.

More generally, the members of the Committee are actively involved in the life of the municipality, and collectively represent a planning resource that can be called upon by the Councillors and administration.

We would welcome opportunities to discuss this matter, and any issues raised above, in due course.

Yours sincerely



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 Committee for North Sydney