



## Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association Inc.

8 December 2017

### **Battle lines drawn – the height war the Nelson Bay community must win.**

Sadly, Port Stephens Council planners have completely ignored strong community views on the character of Nelson Bay. The revised implementation and delivery program for the Nelson Bay Strategy put up to the Council meeting on 12 December is a radical departure from the consensus reached in 2012. It proposes *not only* more than doubling the current 'default' building height limit *throughout* the entire town centre (from 15 to 35 metres – the height of the crane on Church St), *but also* make only token efforts to prevent developers from requesting, and receiving, approvals for *even taller* buildings. The result would be a constant ratcheting up of heights as each developer sought to obtain views over new buildings in front of their site.

**“We now depend on our new Mayor and Councillors to honour their election promises to preserve the character of our main town”,** said Nigel Waters, convenor of TRRA’s planning committee. **“We urge Councillors to send this document back for a re-write that reflects the strong community opposition to high-rise buildings”.**

**“The community has been battling against a high-rise Nelson Bay for more than 40 years”,** said Nigel Waters. In a poisoned legacy from the last ‘development at any cost’ Council, the planners are now promoting a developer-friendly high-rise vision that would, in the view of most locals, ruin the unique selling point of Nelson Bay – its low rise coastal village look and feel.

**“We cannot overlook the conflict of interest for Council when it is itself the owner of the two major development sites in the town centre – the Donald Street East and West car parks”** said Nigel Waters. **“We know that some Councillors, and staff, have long harboured ambitions to ‘go high’ on the car park sites, and negotiations with developers in 2016 discussed 17 and 21 storey towers.”**

The revised implementation and delivery program, which is due to go on public exhibition until the end of February, argues that only by effectively abandoning

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height limits will developers be prepared to invest in the town centre. This despite clear evidence that with the economic cycle now turning, low-medium rise apartment buildings are viable, and despite equally compelling figures that show most apartments in taller buildings in the Bay remaining empty for most of the year.

Far from leading a much-needed economic revival, and bringing more of the permanent residents the town centre so badly needs, abandonment of height controls will kill off the very character that attracts visitor and residents alike, with the iconic water views north from the Bowling Club obstructed by apartment towers. Given the seasonality of our tourism, hundreds of empty apartments will compound the problem of a winter ghost town – with even longer shadows! And in the summer peaks, visitor parties bringing two or more cars to each unit, many also with boats, will worsen the already difficult parking and traffic problems.

TRRA regrets that we cannot devote our attention to the many other important issues in the Strategy while the threat of high rise hangs over the town. **“This is a battle for the soul of Nelson Bay”** said Nigel Waters. **“We must preserve the unique character of our town, and that requires strict medium-rise height limits, as was agreed in the 2012 Strategy, and confirmed by public consultation earlier this year”** he said. **“We cannot understand why Council planners are pursuing the high-rise agenda against the clear wishes of the community, and we call on Councillors to reject this recipe for trashing the scenic treasure that is the tree lined Nelson Bay ‘amphitheatre’.”**

TRRA believes that the proposed doubling of height limits and absurdly high ‘bulk’ limit (a floor space ratio (FSR) of 3:1) send entirely the wrong message to developers. The 2012 consensus of a five storey default with the option of making a special case for limited variations remains a true reflection of the community’s views, and would provide sufficient flexibility to attract the investment in high quality residential developments.

Contact Nigel Waters, Convenor, Planning Committee 0407 230 342  
[planning@trra.com.au](mailto:planning@trra.com.au) or

Geoff Washington, President, 0416 884 159 [president@trra.com.au](mailto:president@trra.com.au)

