



2030 STRATEGY IGNORES COASTAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

After considerable discussion with the community, Council planners and business representatives, Tomaree Ratepayers & Residents Association (TRRA) has submitted its response to the Nelson Bay 2030 (CBD) Strategy released by Council in June.

TRRA supports Council in its initiative to prepare a strategy which sets a direction for the future character, shape and function of Nelson Bay and addresses current problems. It is aware that there are a number of proposals for development and redevelopment which will have a critical impact on the future and function of the town centre.

However Geoff Washington, Acting President, stressed that TRRA has not found a consensus of opinion that would support the recommendations of the Strategy that its goals can only be achieved through intensification of the built environment, high rise and encroachment on existing open space. He said '*an overwhelming majority believe that the natural beauty of Nelson Bay and its link to the foreshore are characteristics which are at the heart of the area's attraction to residents and visitors alike*'.

TRRA's feedback, which was considerable, indicates a strong desire to maintain a relatively low-key coastal town character. In a strategy such as this there is a need to more fully take into account guidelines already existing for coastal town development, namely the NSW Coastal Policy, the Coastal Design Guidelines for NSW and SEPP 65. Specific advice in the Guidelines encourages planners to exercise restraint particularly in relation to built form, with development predominantly low-scale and generally heights up to four storeys in town centres.

Although TRRA views development on the Sea Breeze Hotel and the Council's East Donald Street Car Park sites as crucial in the revitalization of the town, the Association rejects the proposal that two towers here are the solutions to regenerating the business district. It believes that any such approval will establish a precedent which will see other high rise development throughout the CBD.

TRRA supports the Strategy's suggested Principles relating to control of building form and design in the CBD but only within the existing allowable height and floor space ratios.

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The Association concludes that the marked increase in Floor Space ratios recommended in the Strategy across the CBD would constitute overdevelopment for a coastal town such as Nelson Bay which would benefit from filling vacant blocks and commercial premises. The negative consequences would be overshadowing, loss of views, increased traffic densities and higher than necessary land value expectations with higher costs of development and rental. High land costs and rentals are already recognised in the business fraternity as major constraints on the viability of the CBD.

TRRA supports the elements of the Strategy that recommend that Nelson Bay be an active, sustainable, viable and pedestrian-friendly town and tourist centre, that it have attractive open spaces and environmentally sensitive development, that the foreshore be linked through activities and modifying the road structure to emphasise pedestrian movement throughout the town centre as well as access to the community by public transport. It also endorses the introduction of development controls which preserve key views and access to nature and improve the quality of built form.

However TRRA insists that there is a need to ensure that the vision and scale of the development of Nelson Bay is based on an accurate analysis of relevant statistics and State targets. The Lower Hunter Regional Strategy target increase of 1500 jobs and 1200 dwellings used as a basis of intensification of development within the CBD is actually the target for the wider area stretching from Soldiers Point to Fingal Bay and south to Anna Bay. The forecasts of 'tremendous' growth in tourism used as a basis of large-scale development, especially at the high end of the market, are not supported by the Council's own Economic Strategy 2007 or Tourism Australia statistics. TRRA strongly recommends that the basic statistical, economic and market research should be available before proceeding to decide on the CBD Strategy. The development of a comprehensive tourism strategy is a vital prerequisite when so many critical components of the CBD business package are tourism dependent.

The Association feels that there is a desperate need to control the unfortunate proliferation of unsuitable and underutilized holiday accommodation. It agrees with the advice of Mike Cullen, one of the Strategy's consultants, at a recent business breakfast meeting, that the future of the town lies in encouragement of permanent residents, who are not seasonal in their support of businesses. Future residential development should be suitable for permanent residents of all ages. It has been proved that a town that is attractive to permanent residents is also attractive to tourists.

TRRA agrees that a conference centre could be important in development of the town, bringing in tourists out of season, but the Strategy does not provide a market analysis for this or consider options in the location of such a facility. TRRA also considers that the need to address road and traffic planning, particularly the by-pass road, is a first and immediate priority. With these two issues, together with retention of current building heights, there is limited discussion in the Strategy of options. This has led to the suggestion from a number of members that the report has been written to meet pre-determined outcomes.

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TRRA supports the need to maintain and increase the number of jobs in the local area. Encouraging the return of community facilities and Council and State government administrative facilities could help. TRRA endorses the Strategy's conclusion that in retail its future does not lie in the growth of chain stores. The objective of small high quality shops and specialist food stores, is an attractive concept and should be supported. However, development of a retail and business strategy for the CBD should underpin recommendations as to its future composition and scale.

TRRA does support the need for one appropriately-sized, quality supermarket in the CBD offering goods at the same level as Salamander Bay. This would encourage locals to patronize this and the surrounding shops rather than travel out of the CBD. Careful design to ensure street frontage presentation that is not a monolithic box has been achieved in many other locations.

TRRA favours the location of car parks at East and West Donald Street or to the south of the town, to encourage pedestrian movement through the town to the Marina. The additional suggested Victoria Parade location will exacerbate traffic problems here, destroy a natural backdrop to the Bay and draw custom away from the CBD. It is important that the strategy for Nelson Bay be developed with reference to broader regional planning initiatives such as the Port Stephens Futures Strategy, Foreshore plans and relevant development initiatives such as an expanded Newcastle Airport, the Diggers Club, and Salamander Shores.

TRRA maintains the central importance of preserving at all costs the remaining natural attractions of Nelson Bay and enhancing links and views to the Bay. It does not oppose development or efforts to improve the economic and employment opportunities on the Tomaree Peninsula but insists that they be soundly based on reliable statistics and market analysis.

An email copy of the full 29-page TRRA submission can be obtained by emailing tra@iprimus.com.au.

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