



28 September 2009
Mr Peter Gesling

General Manager
Port Stephens Council

Re: Town Plan for Salamander Bay Commercial and Community Precinct

Dear Mr Gesling,

At our general meeting held on 10 August 2009 a presentation was made by a resident and TRRA member, Anna Glasby, on the issue of the proposed sale of land within the Salamander commercial precinct and associated planning issues. Ms Glasby has provided us with a copy of a letter from the Mayor of Port Stephens Council dated 18 August PSC2009-02408 responding to her representations on this matter.

TRRA notes the Mayor's advice that Council has decided to reject the offer made by Tecan and Merc to purchase the Council owned land at 155 Salamander Way so as to retain control of the development of the site to achieve a better urban outcome. TRRA supports this decision.

TRRA notes that Ms Glasby's request for any master plans for the Salamander precinct have not been forthcoming and that carriage of the sale and preparation of an associated DA appears to have been allocated to the responsibility of the Commercial Property Section.

A resolution was carried unanimously at the TRRA August meeting to write to Council formally requesting details of any current or past plans for the overall structure, function and appearance of the whole Salamander commercial precinct. The resolution also expressed members' concerns that Council appears to be moving to develop its remaining land in this precinct without there being a clear master plan for the whole area.

TRRA fully agrees with Ms Glasby's assessment that the whole precinct shows signs of ad hoc development which has been approved in the absence of sound master-planning. How else would there be several sub-sections of commercial and public facilities operating largely in isolation from each other? It looks as though deliberate efforts have been made to make sure customers are denied pedestrian access between the various components. In the absence of linkages most customers are forced to drive their cars, say from the Rigby Centre to the Shopping Mall or from the library to the Mall. Even the line of commercial outlets fronting Salamander Way and Bagnall's Beach Road are separated by fences or landscaped strips. Try walking from the Tavern to Mitre 10 and on to McDonalds!

Of equal concern is the poor linkage between community functions of the church and school facilities to the south and east of the mall and the Pacific Blue Resort, all of which are separated by dual carriageway heavily trafficked roadways.

The library/meeting-room, community radio and child-minding functions to the south west of the main car-park have emerged as a strong community use area. TRRA asks if this zone is to be protected and urges Council to identify **now** any other significant community and /or public services which ought to be part of the Salamander precinct? Options will be closed off by the sale of the land.

The Association also questions whether there are any plans or concepts to improve the overall amenity of the area, such as upgraded landscaping, public spaces, playgrounds or performance spaces, all of which normally form part of major town centres.

Turning to the issue of future commercial activities, has there been consideration or decisions as to the type of business or services that are needed on the Tomaree Peninsula and which of these might ultimately be financially viable. Will future uses at Salamander Centre include residential, office, entertainment, bulky goods, car sales and service or a public transport interchange? The future of the Salamander precinct also needs to be considered having regard to the proposed functions and character of both Nelson Bay CBD and Taylors Beach commercial/light industrial areas. In this context, what reference has been made to the Futures Project, the Community Settlement Strategy, the Economic Development Strategy or the Cultural Plan in determining future land use in this important precinct.

Has there been thought given to the scale and appearance of future development e.g. setbacks, building heights or architectural themes?

At what stage will there be an opportunity for the community to express an opinion on their needs and aspirations for what seems to be emerging as their commercial and cultural hub?

TRRA has also sighted the letter to Ms Glasby from Carmel Foster, Commercial Property Manager PSC 2009-02408, dated 11 September. This letter does not allay our fears outlined above. It confirms the fact that there is no overall plan for the precinct and that subdivision and sale of lands are to proceed without provision for any additional community facilities which engender community identification and which are vital components of successful town centres.

While the Mayor's letter refers only to the involvement of Council's Property Section, **our expectation would be that the future of this important precinct deserves an equal role for the Sustainable Planning Group of Council**, whose professional skills are necessary to address the issues raised above.

Yours sincerely

Robert Young,
Chairman,
Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association
deputychair@trra.com.au