



Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association Inc.

Council allows 8 and 12 Storeys in Nelson Bay

Amendments to the LEP and DCP adopted by Port Stephens Council at its meeting on 13 October will clear the way for 8 and 12 story buildings in parts of the Nelson Bay CBD. Two of our three East Ward councillors, John Nell and Jaimie Abbott voted against this change as did West Ward councillor Giacomo Arnott. These councillors accepted that the vast majority of the Tomaree community rejected the push for high rise in the Bay.

The briefing for Councillors claimed that there is commitment to maintain the character of Nelson Bay and asserts that the changes represent an agreed community vision. In fact, Council has consistently ignored, underreported, and chosen to misinterpret clear community opposition to tall buildings. This opposition is rooted in a fear that the character of our town centre would be destroyed.

TRRA has been arguing since 2012 that sanctioning high rise development is not a magic bullet to revitalise the Nelson Bay town centre. Over the past 4 years Council has approved apartment buildings of 8 and 9 stories, more than twice as high as the current limits, using a Variation Clause. The promised investment has not materialised, apart from the presence of one unused yellow crane. Meanwhile, other coastal tourist towns have attracted significant residential development with height limits of no more than 4 storeys. In contrast, in the Tomaree area, single storey houses in "lifestyle" developments, well outside the town centre, and duplexes and townhouses are being snapped up.

The Council's attention has been drawn to the fact that residential buildings of 3 or more storeys across the Tomaree Peninsula, outside peak holiday times, have very low occupancies of around 30 percent. This is due to absentee ownership and the market preference of permanent residents which is clearly not for high rise apartments.

TRRA welcomes Council's acknowledgement of the importance of maintaining the character of Nelson Bay Town Centre, but this must include a sparing use of the Variation Clause. We supported the compromise of retaining a 5-storey limit in the heart of the CBD. TRRA also welcomes the DCP and design controls which have potential to ameliorate the fundamental change in character, provided these are adopted alongside the new LEP provisions. Council will need to strictly enforce these controls and heed the recommendations of the Design Panel.

Tall buildings will be possible in the significant zonings proposed for 8 and 12 storeys and this will create fears of being built out. This may already be discouraging developers and dampening the market for all residential property in Nelson Bay.

Tall buildings will affect nearly all views of the town from various points in the vicinity, including vantage points from kilometres away and of course, from offshore in the Bay.

Media Contact:

Geoff Washington
TRRA Media Officer
media@trra.com.au
Phone: 4981 3916

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