



The Palm Beach & Whale Beach Association Inc.
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25 March 2024

Ms Sue Higginson, MLC, Chiat

Inquiry into the development of the Transport Oriented Development Program

Parliament House

Macquarie Street

Sydney

Dear Ms Higginson

INTRODUCTION

1. The Palm Beach & Whale Beach Association (PB&WBA) is a community-based group, founded in 1918 and with a membership of over 450 representing the interests of both owners and tenants resident in Palm Beach and Whale Beach, as well as local businesses. We are grateful for the opportunity to put forward our views to the Parliamentary Enquiry on the Transport Oriented Development Program. Although this Program does not impact directly on our Local Government Area, it adopts a similar approach to meeting housing demand and suffers from the same disadvantages.
2. The logic of increasing housing density around transport hubs is unarguable but if the only criterion is transport and not the availability of jobs or services, as appears to be the case in some instances, the Program will not be a success. To take one example from the 8 Sites and two from the 31 Stations, Bays West, Killara and Roseville, what they have in common is no shopping or other services, no parking, and few jobs or employment opportunities. The criteria associated with the Program did not take these aspects into account. Two of those three locations are on the edge of growing higher density areas, Pyrmont and Chatswood, with room for further expansion.

SHOP-TOP HOUSING CONCERNS

3. In some of the 31 sites, there will be small areas zoned E1 or E2 with a few shops, such as at Roseville station. If the Transport Oriented Program means these areas to qualify for higher shop top housing development, care will be required to preserve the essential nature of these E1 zones – small shops, low rise buildings of 1-2 storeys, friendly and accessible precincts. Over-development such as that contemplated in the Government's Low Rise, Mid Rise Housing Development proposals will produce dark narrow windy chasms which people will be reluctant to visit. A height limit of 21 metres is too high in E1 and E2 zones

BROAD POLICY CONCERNS

4. The overall philosophy of building denser development near stations and transport hubs is logical and appropriate. However, the Proposals are not set into any broader context or framework, other than a drive to build more dwellings. There is no attempt to set out the kind of Six Cities which the Government wishes to achieve and the result will be a chaotic approach to development. The impact on social amenity and quality of life has to be examined.
5. There is no attempt to ascertain which areas have the best or most suitable infrastructure to cope with greater numbers of residents. For example, many of the heavy and light rail lines and stations are, according to recent publications, fully utilised during current peak hours or very nearly so - statistics from 2019 revealed that more than half of Sydney railway stations do not have capacity to cope with more passengers in the peak period between 8.00am and 9.00am. Chatswood is one of those stations.

6. There is no discussion of any of the possible or probable effects of the Program, positive or negative. The public, which will have to cope with these Program, have a right to be fully informed about their effects.
7. There is no discussion as to why the Six Cities need to keep growing and what the benefits might be.
8. There is no attempt to divert growth to other centres within NSW than the Six Cities – no attempt to ask other States to share the problem, even though some have a strong demand for more labour and no attempt to explain why the Six Cities can't simply say "We are full". In this respect the slogan "More homes where people want to live" is unhelpful – it is not practicable, it is not affordable and it is a poor substitute for proper policy discussion.
9. There is no attempt to align new dwellings with job growth or job demand or any business or service development in order to ensure that the new arrivals can be housed near business or other organisations.
10. Many Councils have a Housing Plan which included quotas for additional housing and identified suitable sites for affordable housing. What will happen to such housing plans? Shouldn't quotas again have a role to play in these Proposals so that the public can monitor progress and hold councils to account.
11. There is no attempt in the Program to involve local councils. They know their areas much better than the Department of Planning, they know where the opportunities for development are likely to be, they are responsible for approving developments and they will be responsible for administering whatever is the result of the Program, and will have impaired financial strength to cope because of the transfer of expenses from the Government to councils without additional funding.
12. We support the emphasis in the Program on affordable housing.
13. The protection of heritage areas and heritage buildings is very important. Sydney has little enough of its heritage remaining because of past destruction and is a city with relatively little "soul" or character. Heritage precincts which are zoned C3 or C4 are not subject to the Proposals but there are many heritage precincts and heritage buildings which are not within those zonings. Such heritage buildings and heritage precincts are not so common that protecting them would make the least difference to housing supply. The effort should be made to leave heritage areas intact and focus new developments into more suitable locations. It can be easily dealt with in the proposed new SEPP.
14. Provisions for landscaping plus moving 6 storey buildings closer together will create a greater tendency to wind tunnels and have a damaging effect on tree canopy. Tree canopy is a major popular issue. A reduction in tree canopy will make Sydney a hotter and unhealthier city. The provisions of the Apartment Design Guide, which are State policy and include separation, should not be so quickly put aside. Some of the new developments in Meadowbank or Zetland, for example with substantial plantings in open space between 5 storey buildings are a much better and healthier and more attractive model.
15. For those E1 zones which have an R3 zone in their immediate vicinity, 21m height is too high – these E1 zones will have nothing higher than 3-stories and many are only 2. Lifting the height control on shop-top housing will not produce significantly many more housing units but will produce darker, windier, less attractive local centres for no significant gain. Again social amenity and quality of life have not been considered and these are permanent changes so there is no going back if they are adopted as they are.
16. It is understood why the Government would wish to adopt such a broad brush approach to the housing problem but it has significant downsides and it fails to make good use of local knowledge possessed by Councils – it is critically important that the Government and Department find a way of working with Councils and using their skills, rather than trying to impose hasty solutions on the Six Cities.

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17. There are several other major issues of concern not addressed in the paper. One of the major reasons for the shortfall in housing supply over the last couple of years is the shortage of labour. Where are we to find the tradespeople to provide the significant increase from 47,000 to 75,000 dwelling units per annum? A second problem is that the rush to increase the supply of housing will inevitably result in corners being cut and more problem buildings occurring. A third issue is that the private certifier system is fatally flawed – there are not enough of them, they are insufficiently trained, they are not properly monitored and they are paid by the developers; this system has to be changed.

The points we make above under the heading “Broad Policy Concerns” also apply with perhaps more force to the Government’s Low Rise and Mid Rise Housing Proposals and we hope the Committee will bear this in mind during its deliberations.

We appreciate the opportunity to make our views available to the Government in tackling this critically important challenge.

Yours truly
Professor Richard West AM
President
Palm Beach & Whale Beach Association
18 February 2024