

CITY OF SYDNEY STRATEGIC PLAN 1977-80
DISCUSSION NOTES

The 350 net site acres of County Centre Zoning of the City of Sydney Statutory Planning Scheme prepared by the State Planning Authority and gazetted by the Minister on 16th July 1971: Questions of office workforce, the land and office space market system, valuations, rates, legal powers of development control, and floor space ratios within this County Centre Zone

1. HISTORY 1964-71

The draft Statutory Scheme Map and Ordinance exhibited by the then Minister for Local Government, The Hon P.D. Hills, in 1964, contained a Clause 45 which specified Floor Space Ratios of a basic 10 and a maximum with bonuses of 12 for the 540 acre gross (350 acre net developable) County Centre Zone, excepting only the area west of Kent Street, where basic FSR was set at 5, and maximum FSR at 8.

Mr A.I. Davis, the Commissioner appointed to hear objections to the draft Scheme, recommended a basic FSR of 6 and a maximum with bonuses of 12 throughout the County Centre Zone, subject to there being no bonuses for sites with frontages less than 50 feet, and a suggestion that developments south of Park Street be required to have 50 per cent residential content in order to earn the maximum FSR of 12. The Commissioner's recommendations were re-exhibited, and objections invited.

The State Planning Authority (now the PEC) examined the further objections and recommended to the Minister a basic FSR of 6 and a maximum with bonuses of 12. Bonuses were to be given for "space set aside for unrestricted public use" (plazas etc); sites greater than 60,000 square feet in area; and for inclusion of residential content in a mixed development. The SPA recommended a full FSR of 12 for "international hotels" regardless of zoning.

In 1968, the development industry took fright at the FSR reductions which had been canvassed, and prepared Development Applications at a rate and on a scale never before experienced in Australia.

In March, 1969, the SPA's re-recommendation to the Minister of a cut in basic FSR to 6, was finally canvassed in the press. The development industry, including the Building Owners and Managers Association, protested vigorously against the proposals.

Because of the fear of FSR cuts to come, during calendar year 1969 the then City Commissioners were inundated by development applications, and approved for the consideration of HOBAC, major office space development applications totalling 1.214 million square metres (13 million square feet) of gross floor space.

The then City Commissioners had no clear legal powers to refuse applications on density grounds, but HOBAC had such powers.

The then Minister finally decided to omit any reference to Floor Space Ratio from the Scheme Ordinance, which was gazetted on 16th July 1971.

The gazetted Ordinance did not, and still does not, give specific power to control FSR, let alone specify any particular FSR figures. It was apparently intended that the City Council and HOBAC should handle the problems of density control.

The City Council had no clear powers, but was forced to rely on the technique provided by Clause 32, under which the responsible authority must "take into consideration" in deciding a development application "any detailed plan or design, adopted by resolution of the responsible authority, for the development of the locality ..."

The new City Council which took office at the end of 1969, produced and adopted the first Strategic Plan in August, 1971, and on 6th December, 1971, the City Council adopted by resolution Development Control and Parking Control Codes, which introduced differential Floor Space Ratio and Parking control standards attuned to the then perceived needs of every Precinct or locality of the City.

These Codes have since been administered by Council as a "detailed plan or design" for each locality pursuant to Clause 32 of the gazetted Ordinance.

Council's decisions are subject to appeal to the Appeals Tribunal, and subject to veto or alteration by HOBAC. HOBAC has continued to possess and administer clear and ultimate powers over all proposed developments over 80ft in height in the City and elsewhere in the State.

The major thrust of the 1971 City Strategic Plan and the Development Control and Parking Codes, was that the very large County Centre zone should not be treated as a single area over which all controls should be uniform.

The City, including the County Centre Zone, was for the first time treated as a series of distinctive and relatively small Precincts. Development control policies and codes were designed to meet the problems and needs of each Precinct.

The 1971 City Strategic Plan urged that the highest densities of development only be permitted in what the Plan called the "Central Spine" of the City, running north-south between Circular Quay and Central Railway, where existing investments in public transport capacity and facilities were already concentrated. The strategy was to restrain and restrict office development and floor space ratios in fringe areas such as Woolloomooloo, Surry Hills, Oxford Street, the area west of Kent Street, Ultimo and the Rocks.

This latter strategy was opposed, for example, to the plans of the SPA for office development at FSRs of 10 in Woolloomooloo, and of the SCRA for the Rocks area.

A most relevant table was published on page 83 of the book of the 1971 Strategic Plan, under Action Priority 2B, which urged concentration in the "Central Spine".

The table shows that the 200 net developable site acres in the Central Spine (The Tank Stream Precinct A1, the Mid Town Hub Precinct A2, the Town Hall Precinct A3 and the Brickfield Hill Precinct A4) could alone accommodate, at the following overall average FSRs, the following workforces :

FSR 4	FSR 6	FSR 8	FSR 10	FSR 12
160,000	240,000	320,000	400,000	480,000

It is obviously not necessary to develop the remaining 150 net developable acres of County Centre Zoning at average FSRs higher than, say 2, to accommodate any future possible needs for office space in the City.

2. THE ANALYSES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 1974-77 CITY OF SYDNEY STRATEGIC PLAN

On December 2nd, 1974, the City Council adopted the revised and updated 1974-77 Statement of Objectives, Policies and Action Priorities for the City. This revision took into account the data and conclusions of the Sydney Area Transportation Study.

Technical Annexures B and C to this document contained exhaustive analyses and projections of Sydney Region and Sydney City workforce. These Annexures were published in xeroxed, spirally bound form.

On the basis of those analyses and projections, the 1974 strategy was revised by recommendations that the "Central Spine" be slimmed down, and the area within which relatively high FSRs are permitted, should be correspondingly reduced (See Policy 2 - City Structure, between pages 14 and 19 inclusive of the book of the 1974 City Strategic Plan).

The boundaries of the Central Spine were tightened to Alfred Street, Circular Quay; the Bradfield Highway; Kent Street and George Street, Eddy Avenue, Elizabeth Street, King Street and Macquarie Street.

Areas eliminated from the redefined Central Spine included :

- * The Rocks between the Cahill Expressway and the Argyle Cut;
- * The area west of Kent Street, and west of George Street south of Liverpool Street;
- * The area bounded by Elizabeth Street, Liverpool Street and Wentworth Avenue;

- * The State Government area on the east side of Macquarie Street.

It was proposed that action be taken by State authorities to gazette amendments to the Statutory Scheme to reduce the area of the County Centre Zone to the area of the slimmed down "Central Spine".

It was also proposed that in the Mid Town Hub Precinct within the Central Spine, and in areas on the fringe of, or outside the Central Spine, action be taken to reduce maximum FSRs for office purposes, to limit potential workforce growth and to protect existing residential, retail, entertainment, service, industrial, wholesaling or port-oriented uses.

However, since December, 1974, when this strategy was approved by the City Council, there has been little apparent urgency to take any specific action, because of the over-supply of office space either built or under construction (sufficient to meet projected needs until the mid nineteen eighties), and the collapse of the city building and development industry due to inflation, high interest rates, holding charges, taxation and levies of a variety of kinds.

3. DETAILED ANALYSES AND PROJECTIONS OF OFFICE SPACE BUILT, DEMOLISHED AND UNDER CONSTRUCTION; AND OF THE EXISTING AND LIKELY FUTURE DISTRIBUTION OF OFFICE AND OTHER WORKFORCE

It is difficult to precisely and accurately correlate the statistics published by a variety of sources, all of which are based on slightly different definitions, assumptions and areal boundaries.

The analyses and projections published by SATS in 1973 and by the City Council in 1974 (in Technical Annexure C of the 1974-77 CoSSP) broadly agreed that the total City workforce (of all types, and within the Municipality as a whole) can reasonably be expected ultimately to reach a plateau of around 340,000, or 27,000 more than in 1971, with a major increase in office type jobs and a decrease in other types of jobs.

In 1974, Council's Consultants projected that of this ultimate municipal total, about 175,500 would be in office type jobs within the CBD (i. e. within Precincts A1 to A5 inclusive - see Figure C3 in Technical Annexure C to the 1974 CoSSP).

The major difference in 1974 between the SATS and Council projections was that the Council projections indicated that these workforce levels were more likely to be reached by about 1985, rather than by the year 2000, as postulated by SATS.

It may be that if the current depression continues, the SATS projections of slower growth may be realised in actuality.

Despite minor variations in estimates of currently vacant office space, space under construction, space demolished, and space likely to be let and occupied in future years, the broad picture remains as described in the 1974 Strategic Plan :-

"However, regardless of whatever plans or policies are adopted, a great deal of the City's future is already committed. Office space already either vacant, being built, or for which siteworks have begun, within the City, seems sufficient to accommodate the majority of all likely additional workforce, at least up to 1985."

4. RECENT INTERIM DEVELOPMENT ORDERS

Two Interim Development Orders gazetted in the last twelve months have significantly reduced the office development potential of fringe City areas. These IDOs restrict development in Woolloomooloo and in the Light Industrial (Zone 4B) areas within the area covered by the City of Sydney Planning Scheme.

5. P.E.C. POLICY

The NSW Planning and Environment Commission has not yet made a submission to the Council relative to the 1976 review of the Strategic Plan. However, in view of the Commission's previously expressed views that FSRs should be reduced it is not unreasonable to assume that the PEC will recommend that FSRs be still further restricted on the basis that floor space existing and committed for building already provides for 178,000 office workers whereas Council projections indicate a requirement of floorspace for 175,500 office workers which could be reached by 1985 but which in view of the present economic situation might not be reached until much later.

6. WHERE SHOULD RESTRICTIONS BE IMPOSED?

If it be accepted that permissible FSRs, at least insofar as they relate to office buildings, should be reduced, then it will be necessary to decide in which precincts or areas restrictions should be imposed. There seems little advantage in changes in Precinct A1 Tank Stream because of the extent to which development has already progressed. It has always been conceded that reductions in Precinct A2 Midtown Hub might be more acceptable than in other spine precincts. It would seem that FSRs in precinct A3 Brickfield Hill should be subject to special scrutiny. The comments and advice of BOMA in respect of possible reductions in Precincts A2 (Midtown Hub) and A3 (Brickfield Hill) would be particularly useful and should be sought.