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THE 1973-74 REVIEW AND REVISION OF THE
1971 CITY OF SYDNEY STRATEGIC PLAN

An Address given at the Council of the City of Sydney Action Planning Forum Wednesday, November 22, 1972, in the State Office Block Theatre, by Mr George Clarke, a Principal of Clarke Gazzard Planners and Urban Systems Corporation; and Director, City of Sydney Strategic Plan.

MR GEORGE CLARKE :

The Sydney City Council has today given a practical demonstration of the City Planning process in action. That is not a platitude. A wide range of conflicting interests is represented here today in this auditorium. Some of the very real conflicts between these interest groups have begun to appear in the discussion this afternoon.

This Forum today, and in fact, the whole of the Sydney City Council's activities in the city planning field over the last three years, have demonstrated a few things I have learnt over fifteen years in practice. First, city planning is community planning. Planning for and with a community of persons, groups and institutions, is not the straightforward or simple technological or architectonic activity some people think it is. Community planning is in fact a social learning process. One can equally well reverse those terms and say that social planning is a community learning process. The planning process involves the exposing of conflicts of values, and conflicts of interest, and the seeking of consensus on some creative synthesis of a plurality of values and interests. Here today we have representatives of the high activist, very radical, extremely critical, Planning for People Campaign for Surry Hills, and here today we also have Mr Robbins, who is a real estate developer owning properties in Surry Hills, who is also very radical in his criticisms of the delays and frustrations caused by the administration of development control.

One key purpose of a process of this kind is to expose openly these sorts of conflicts, to examine them, to seek to define them, to narrow them down to their essences, and, if possible, to reconcile those of them that prove to be unnecessary conflicts.

Those irreconcilable conflicts which cannot be reconciled through processes in which we merely employed professional planners, consultant or staff, maintain, or attempt to maintain, the thin veneer of civilised behaviour that enables society to change in an orderly fashion, those conflicts which cannot be resolved in processes of discussion, thought and consideration, ultimately go into the political arena where they are decided on the basis of political power.

We professionals here today have perhaps not always tried to exacerbate the conflicts, but have tried to keep what might be called the community planning "primary school" in some kind of order. In August, 1972, the City of Sydney and its citizens completed the second year of an ongoing city planning process, which may be said to have begun with the formal commissioning of work on the first City of Sydney Strategic Plan on August 10, 1970. We professionals, together with the entire Sydney community, are now in what we might call the third year of the City of Sydney primary planning school. Some are fast learners, and to those fast learners here today, we apologise for the perhaps simplified way in which some of the problems have been presented. But some are slow learners, and those we have to look after.

The City Council's new planning process is, to the best of the abilities of Council and its consultants, and within the limits of Council power, systematic, open, cooperative, responsibly independent, and continuous. It's systematic as Alderman Briger said this morning because, in brief, it proceeds from the general to the particular. Council's 1971 Strategic Plan for the City of Sydney determined a flexible, long range strategy (comprising four Objectives, sixteen Policies and 83 Priorities for Action) on the basis of which Council decides its tactics for a particular year and determines the action it will take month by month.

Council's planning processes are open. Today's Forum is one demonstration of that. It provides the maximum possible exposure of planning problems, opportunities and controversies to the media so that public opinion can play a more knowledgeable and effective role in both the shaping and implementation of planning objectives than public opinion has ever been allowed or able to do in the past. Public opinion in the 62 years between the publication of the Report of the 1909 Royal Commission on Sydney, and the publication of the 1971 City of Sydney Strategic Plan, had no opportunity to be knowledgeable, because there was simply no coherent documentation of facts, trends, problems and opportunities in Sydney's central city development.

Council's attitude in planning is cooperative inasmuch as it seeks assistance, guidelines and advice from regional and state authorities. At the same time it is responsibly independent in that it seeks to regain for Council the respect and the support of the public and of other authorities by gradually strengthening Council's own capacities and skills for effective City management and so gradually to reassume responsibilities for City government which have been over the past few decades taken over by ad-hoc bodies and State authorities.

Most important of all, Council's planning processes are continuous in that Council will regularly review and as necessary revise and amend its Objectives, Policies and Priorities, together with its Development Control Codes and Regulations in the light of the feedback of new information, and the reactions of public opinion and other authorities.

Thus, effective management of a complex urban system like the City of Sydney is itself a complex and systematic process. Some balk at the complexity of it, but the process can only be generated by repeated cycles of information, investigation, decision and action, followed by the feed-back of new information regarding the effects of action taken.

The first step in the cycle is the collation and analysis of the kinds of information and the types of investigations summarised in the research and technical sections of the 200 page book of the 1971 City Strategic Plan.

The second step in the work cycle is to establish the City's objectives, policies and priorities for action. This part of the process is what we call 'strategic planning'. The 1971 Strategic Plan for the City of Sydney comprises four closely integrated Objectives, sixteen interrelated Policies, and eighty-three interlocked Priorities for Action.

The third step in the work cycle is the making of decisions and the taking of action to manage, guide and direct development in accord with the adopted objectives, policies and priorities. This part of the process we here call 'action planning' or 'planning in action'.

The fourth step in the work cycle must be to assess the experience gained by planning in action over several years. New information and experience can only be gained through action. On the basis of this new information, the management cycle begins again. Thus, the 1971 City of Sydney Strategic Plan is to be reviewed, and, if necessary, refined and revised as a whole during 1973 and 74.

A contemporary city planner, William Alonso, has summarised today's needs for this approach to planning as follows :-

'... What is needed is continuing planning, which produces every year a plan for the new few years (e. g. action planning), and every few years a plan for the next two or three decades (strategic planning), so that the next steps and the distant goals are known at all times'.

Thus, City planning and management must be understood as a continuing process, because City growth and change is a continuing process. It must regrettably be complex, because the City's people, and their values, problems and needs, are complex. It must be systematic, because the City is a system: action or inertia concerning one physical, social or economic element in the City affects all of the other elements of the urban system.

Thus our steps for the next month or the next year, like converting Martin Place, or streetscape improvements, or building a retirement village in Surry Hills, are parts of a process which is governed by our long term strategy. Similarly, our long term strategy must be reviewed and revised in the light of the results of our short term actions. Now this is an accepted procedure in people's planning of their personal lives, an accepted procedure in the planning of corporate organisations. There is no logical reason why it should not be the accepted procedure for governments at all levels.

Council has resolved to comprehensively review and revise, for publication by mid 1974, the 1971 City of Sydney Strategic Plan. The desirability for this review and revision was foreseen and recommended on page 70 of the 1971 Plan and I refer you to that for a detailed explanation. The 1974 Review, as we see it at the moment, will be conducted in the light of such new factors and subsequent events as the greatly heightened awareness, appreciation and knowledge of urban problems and opportunities not only among the general public but also amongst State government instrumentalities, in the creation of which the 1971 City Strategic Plan has itself been, as was intended, a significant generating force and catalyst. The 1971 City of Sydney Strategic Plan was basically an educational document because the Council cannot move an inch, no elected body of men can move an inch, without the support and sympathetic understanding of public opinion; and they can't move in the right direction until the reason why they should move in that direction is thoroughly explained and understood by their electorate.

That is the answer to those who say the 1971 City of Sydney Strategic Plan was subtle or vague, too general or open-ended.

The second factor is the long term implications of the emerging data and the results of SATS - Sydney Area Transportation Study - to which the 1971 City Strategic Plan was itself an input and which can now in turn receive inputs from SATS.

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The third factor is the current oversupply of office space, and the consequent likely amendment or postponement for some years of office projects not yet commenced, which appears already to have affected many proposals, particularly schemes for the Rocks and Woolloomooloo.

The Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority's plan, which was formally approved by the Cabinet and announced as approved by the Minister for Local Government on February 3, 1971, specified that the Rocks would attract 32,000 workers to a precinct of the City of Sydney which has practically no existing workforce of any sizeable significance. Also in February 1971, State Planning Authority officers confidently predicted that Woolloomooloo would attract a workforce of 80,000 or more people, 15,000 of whom were to be Commonwealth public servants. Also at that time, we had State Government approved plans for the development of the tertiary education complex in Ultimo, to take 60,000 students and in the vicinity of 3 or 4,000 academic staff. We also had State Cabinet blessing on the concept of a major World Trade Centre at Pyrmont, which was never actually costed nor never postulated in any specific detail.

Those government approved projects were enough in themselves to take the workforce of the Sydney CBD to more than 400,000 people. At that time, it was not possible for Council and its consultants to disregard such decisions, approved plans, and statements by other senior authorities. In fact, the Council's consultants did question the magnitude and some of the effects of the above proposals and in the table on page 83 of the 1971 Strategic Plan invited attention to their potential effects within the County Centre Zone and in Action Priority 2 particularly came down strongly against the already approved plans for Woolloomooloo. Action Priority 12F of the 1971 City of Sydney Strategic Plan, adopted by the Council by formal resolution, called for a complete reappraisal of the State Government's approved concept of putting 60,000 students in Ultimo. There's absolutely no doubt about that, there's no doubt about what the Strategic Plan says, and there's no doubt about the Council's attitude to the wisdom of concentrating tertiary education for the whole metropolitan area in that one little Precinct of the City of Sydney. The reappraisal of that concept is the major purpose and objective of the Ultimo Action Plan.

Other factors which will influence the 1974 review include new data, now available to Council's consultants from surveys only recently completed, which indicate that the City office workforce may have actually fallen slightly between 1969 and 1972 and indicate that

Council's lower projected CBD workforce growth rates of between 0.7% and 1.3% per annum are likely to apply at least for the next 8 years. New data is also becoming available from Council's action planning programme and other private and governmental sources, including the 1971 Commonwealth demographic and dwelling Census and the 1969 Commonwealth Economic Census. Other vital factors will be inputs to be requested from the SPA of research data and regional policy guidelines relevant to the City's role in the region, in precise terms and specific detail, rather than the rather generalised statements that were able to be made available to Council during the preparation of the 1971 City Strategic Plan.

Another factor of course will be the possible significance of recent new initiatives of State and National governments regarding public transport, and selective decentralisation to new centres such as Albury-Wodonga, Bathurst-Orange and perhaps elsewhere.

Experience gained in the application of the 1971 Floor Space Ratio and Parking Policies and Codes, and the implications for these policies and codes of the rising standard of floor space used per worker, the growth rate of which some observers put as high as 2.0% per annum, will also be taken into account in the 1974 City of Sydney Strategic Plan.

With the advantages of feed-back from all the specific sources I have so far mentioned and probably others, Council will be able to make the 1974 Strategic Plan a significant advance on the 1971 Mark 1 Model, which was prepared under great difficulties in less than one year.

In reviewing some of those difficulties, it is useful to recall the context of decision making by other authorities within which Council was striving to work during the first half of 1971.

During 1968-70, the SPA had sought but failed to achieve governmental, professional, public or Council acceptance of a simple FSR formula proposed for the whole of the County Centre Zone, of relatively easy-to-earn FSR Bonuses which would allow a Maximum FSR of 12 on a Basic FSR of 6. However, the SPA's 1969 Woolloomooloo Plan, which was able to give untrammelled expression to the SPA's central city planning concepts and techniques, had been accepted by the outgoing City Commissioners. This Plan had been subsequently supported by the newly elected City Council, which determined to assist the SPA in its implementation. Council believed, as a matter of basic principle, that the planning efforts of other authorities should be supported, and that every effort should be made to maintain public confidence in this initial "action plan".

The Council accepted the impending gazettal of the City of Sydney Statutory Planning Scheme, which had been finalised by the SPA under the direction of the Minister, without any significant participation by the new Council. The pre-printed Scheme Map zoned 540 acres as "County Centre", within which virtually any use was to be permissible. The final Draft Ordinance had been amended to permit office buildings in the additional areas zoned "Light Industrial".

As I have already stressed, on February 3, 1971, the Minister for Local Government announced the Government's adoption and approval of the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority's Plan for the Rocks area, which provided for an addition to the CBD workforce of 32,000. In February, 1971, SPA officers predicted a workforce in the order of 80,000 or more for Woolloomooloo. This estimate was confirmed by the calculations set out in the Table on page 83 of the 1971 CSP, which showed that with an average overall FSR of 8 to 10, as permitted under the SPA Plan, Woolloomooloo could contain a workforce of 80,000 to 100,000.

Also in February, 1971, SATS advised the Council and its Consultants that SATS had adopted CBD workforce estimates of a low of 380,000 and a high of 530,000 for the year 2000, as alternative "dispersed" and "centralised" regional employment distribution projections.

Thus, the new Council, in preparing its 1971 City Strategic Plan, was confronted by a number of "faits accompli" :-

- a) The to-be-gazetted County Centre Zone was larger than the CBD;
- b) The final draft Ordinance permitted office buildings in Light Industrial Zones;
- c) The SPA had failed to achieve acceptance of a single FSR formula for the County Centre as a whole, which set a Basic FSR of 6 with relatively simple Bonuses giving a Maximum FSR of 12;
- d) The SPA Plan for Woolloomooloo permitted a "Maximum" FSR of 10, with provision for this being exceeded in "special locations and circumstances". The future Woolloomooloo workforce was consistently projected by independent calculations to be in the order of 80,000;

- e) The Rocks Scheme, with a projected workforce of 32,000, had been approved;
- f) Government plans had been approved in principle for a Tertiary Education Complex in Ultimo projected to cater for up to 60,000 students, and Cabinet had announced support for a major World Trade Centre at Pyrmont;
- g) Even if the then estimated CBD workforce of 230,000 to 240,000 within the then existing CBD were assumed to remain stagnant, the additional workforce planned for two sub-areas alone - the Rocks and Woolloomooloo - would bring the future total to 340,000 or 360,000 to which would need to be added other increases likely to result from other decisions concerning, e. g. Light Industrial Zones, the development of the Ultimo Education Complex and a possible future World Trade Centre.

In the light of the situation described above, the 1971 City Strategic Plan assumed and warned that there was a contingent possibility that the CBD workforce could, not would, grow to the order of 360,000 to 400,000 by the year 2000, and that in view of this possibility, the City Council and the public should recognise the need for strong planning measures within the City such as were proposed in the other parts of the Strategic Plan. This assumed that the proportion of the Region's workforce in the CBD would continue to fall - from 34% in 1947 and 21% in 1966, to about 15% by the year 2000.

The Council's estimate of workforce contingencies published in the 1971 CSP were, in fact, conservative, in view of the possible effects of the decisions and actions of other authorities. In view of those decisions and actions, BOMA urged Council's Consultants to plan for a future CBD workforce of 600,000. At the time the 1971 CSP was published in July, 1971, the figure of 360,000 was the lowest estimate of possible future City CBD-type workforce that had ever been made by any authority or consultant.

The 1971 CSP called for a strongly rail oriented linear Central Business District (See Action Priority 2B on pp 82 to 84), concentrated along the traditional and firmly established north-south spine, with extensive pedestrianisation in the core and parking on the fringe. It was envisaged that this linear spine would extend from Circular Quay to Central Railway, and that it would possibly continue along the Railway to Redfern Station. This spine CBD is readily accessible to and from railway stations serving all rail lines radiating from the City.

This concept is consistent with the SPA's 1968 Sydney Region Outline Plan principle of "linear extension along communications corridors with high intensity activities, such as commercial and industrial centres, and universities, located on the rail system where possible". It was on this basis that Council's Consultants recommended against extensive office development to the east in the Woolloomooloo basin which is cut off from the CBD by the Domain, and which will have rail access from one line only. However, since large-scale office development then seemed certain in that basin, the 1971 CSP warned in a bold-typeface note on page 49, that "Any significant growth of offices within the City, but outside the Central Spine Business District, will be at the expense of the CBD". In other words, future City CBD-type workforce would not grow beyond the estimated maximum contingency. Eventually, it would either be concentrated within the lineal Central Spine, in accordance with the recommended strategy, or else dispersed or scattered at a lower average density over a much wider area of the City - including the rest of the 540 acre Statutory "County Centre" Zone and the Industrial Zones.

In our work for the 1974 City Strategic Plan, we will be reviewing not only these but all the other policies of the 1971 Plan in order to test their validity, and if they are in any way found wanting, we will have no hesitation in revising them.

Many of the Action Priorities of the 1971 City Strategic Plan have already been wholly or significantly implemented by the Council acting alone.

The implementation of others, particularly those under Policy 5 on Public Transport, are now beginning to be implemented by the National and State Governments. The State Government has established the NSW Public Transport Commission, the purposes and functions of which have been defined by the Government and by the new Commissioners in the same terms as the Strategic Plan's Policy No. 5 and Action Priority 5B under that Policy.

Action Priority 4D of the 1971 City Strategic Plan, which dealt with the need for longer term capital investment budgeting in the public sector, called upon the Commonwealth Government to recognise that there is a major need for increased investment in city transportation facilities. It is heartening that this appears now to be well recognised in Commonwealth circles.

There are, nevertheless, a number of Action Priorities of the 1971 Plan which have not yet been implemented, although a start has been made on some of them. One such example is provision of retirement villages within the City. The Council has recently acquired a site for elderly people's housing in Surry Hills, and is proceeding with the planning and design of the project.

Much can still be done to prosecute the Policies and Action Priorities under the third and fourth Objectives of the Plan - those of "DIVERSITY" and "ENVIRONMENT". Policies under the Diversity Objective deal with Residential Life (Policy 9), Retailing and Tourism (Policy 10), Community Services (Policy 11), and Leisure and Learning (Policy 12). Policies under the Environment Objective deal with Preservation (Policy 13), Urban Design (Policy 14), Open Space (Policy 15) and Pollution Control (Policy 16).

I believe that with every month that passes, pursuit of the "Diversity" and "Environment" Objectives is assuming greater importance and is proceeding more vigorously. This is evidenced by much of the Council's recent work, and particularly by the Action Plans presented here today.

It may be expected that the 1974 Strategic Plan, and the new Action Priorities it will set, will reflect this emphasis on the quality and diversity of living and being in the City of Sydney.
