



Inner city area, scene of the rebuilding controversy.

Battle of the building codes

By IAN FRYKBERG,
"Herald" Civic Reporter

THE FIRST round has been fired in an important battle between the Sydney City Council and developers. The outcome could determine the future environment of the central city area.

The battle will be fought over those parts of the City still left to be redeveloped.

The clash started recently when the president of the Building Owners and Managers Association, Mr W. J. Gately, attacked the council's new planning concepts and said they had caused a drop in land values — "conservatively, a 20 per cent overall devaluation."

He said the planners had been too brutal in enforcing their concepts, and developers and property-owners in the city could lose millions of dollars.

The association is representative

of Sydney's major developers and property-owners and has considerable power as a pressure group.

The cause of the dispute is the council's new floor-space ratio and parking codes, adopted last December. Both are being looked at with hostile eyes by some developers because they consider them too restrictive.

The FSR code — floor-space ratio, or the amount of floor space in a building in ratio to its site area — is the backbone to the council's Strategic Plan for the future development of the city to the year 2000.

Generally it reduces the previous ratio of 10:1 with a maximum after bonuses of 12:1, to a base ratio of 5.5:1 with a maximum of 12.5:1 after the awarding of bonuses.

In theory it means that developers can still erect buildings as big as they could under the old ratio—but in practice there are not likely to be too many of them because to get the maximum ratio they will

have to provide a multitude of public amenities such as plazas and other inclusions such as hotel, motel or residential accommodation, shops and theatres.

The parking code is just as contentious. It requires, among other things, developers to contribute towards a fund for the construction of perimeter parking stations as part of a long-term policy of eliminating kerbside parking in the City and reducing traffic congestion.

Mr Gately said this would cost a developer of an Australia Square property about \$900,000 from which he would get no financial return.

One major developer told me it was doubtful whether the council could legally enforce the parking code.

Not all developers agree with Mr Gately's statement that the council is being too brutal in trying to enforce its policies. Some readily admit that they have had a "good run" and have a responsibility to

the City to consider the environment.

It is also considered doubtful whether a drop in land values — for long considered artificial, anyway, and criticised as such by some developers — would have a harmful long-term effect.

The \$400-plus per square foot land cost in the City was created by the developers themselves, and a reason for the concern over the drop is probably that many are holding areas of land in the City. In fact, lower land prices would mean that developers would be able to amalgamate sites more easily.

Major retailers would probably welcome lower land prices because this would be reflected in lower rates, which in turn would provide them with a more economic trading situation.

The City Council now finds itself in the position of having to defend its policies against developers on the one hand, and against the State Planning Authority and ad hoc

authorities such as the Heights of Buildings Committee and the Parking Advisory Committee on the other.

The authority feels that some of the council's planning policies are not restrictive enough, bearing in mind it recommended a blanket 6:1 floor ratio over the City.

The Government-appointed ad hoc authorities are opposing the council's policies, particularly its parking code, because they feel there is too much emphasis on private transport and not enough on public transport.

The County of Cumberland Passenger Transport Advisory Committee and the Parking Advisory Committee are likely to oppose the council's plans to build perimeter parking stations on this basis.

The outcome of the battle will have a major effect on the future of the City and on whether Sydney can be stopped from rushing headlong into the problems now being experienced in many overseas cities.