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Melbourne councils proposed city planner doubt

By TONY MAIDEN

A ROW may be brewing in Melbourne City Council over the selection of a consortium to draw up the city's strategic plan.

The Building and Town Planning Committee last week recommended that a group known as Interplan Pty Ltd be awarded the project. This proposal is expected to come before the full council on May 15.

However, stirrings of discontent are apparent in some sections of the council.

It is possible that an attempt will be made to have the matter referred back for further consideration.

This would be an unusual step. The council seldom publicly goes against the advice of a senior committee, especially on technical appointments.

But several councillors admit to "disquiet" over the recommendation and are currently canvassing the depth of opposition.

The plan is expected to cost the city council in the vicinity of \$200,000.

Main complaint is that the recommended consortium has at best only a thin smattering of Australian participation.

It was put together by Melbourne architects McIntyre and McIntyre, and includes Victorian economist and planning consultant, George J. Connor and Associates.

Major part of the operation, however, is to be shouldered by a high-powered group of overseas consultants.

It includes Dr Otto Koenigsberger, a noted American planning consultant, and Dr Chester Rapkin, director of the American Institute of Urban Environment and Professor of Urban Planning at Columbia University.

The team will be headed-up by two other American planning experts, Mr Donald Wolbrink and Mr Robert B. Jones.

Each of the other four consortia on the council's short list also include a "name" overseas planning expert as consultant.

But in each instance the majority of work was to have been done by Australian-based planners.

None of the unsuccessful groups would comment openly on the situation yesterday.

Several are, however, known to be upset by the committee's decision.

"I thought we had outgrown the 'overseas-experts-are-best' syndrome," said one well-known planner. "We obviously have a long way to go yet."

McIntyre and McIntyre and George J. Connor and Associates also refused to comment on the situation yesterday, beyond saying that they had heard no suggestion of dissatisfaction with the committee's recommendation.

Both companies said the Town Clerk, Mr F. H. Rogan, has asked that the matter not be discussed publicly.

Mr Rogan is on leave, and could not be contacted yesterday to confirm that a gag had been applied.

While some city councillors would undoubtedly like to see the short list thrown open again, they probably face an uphill fight.

It is known that the committee was unanimous in recommending the Interplan consortium.

And members were last night

inclined to dismiss the murmurings of discontent as "sour grapes."

Commented one: "The question of Australian participation was naturally one of our considerations."

"But the selected consortium was way ahead of the rest, on almost any ground you wish to mention."

He said that opposition would decline when other councillors had an opportunity to see the competing submissions.

He believed that these submissions would be made available, probably later this month.

Footnote: The controversy caused more than usual interest in the resignation of Councillor Roy Morgan, as chairman of the Building and Town Planning Committee.

There is however, no connection: Councillor Morgan stepped down from the chair because of plans for an extended overseas trip, and indicated his intention of doing so some time before the strategic plan decision was made.