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PB SMH Tues 23.8.1972

These analyses & queries are still <sup>historically</sup> ~~important~~ <sup>IMPORTANT</sup>

ONE WEDNESDAY morning earlier this month about 10 men sat down at a table in the State Planning Authority offices above Castlereagh Street. They included Sydney City Council planners and senior SPA officers.

The four-hour meeting, convened without publicity, was an attempt to resolve some of the problems caused by application of the City Council's strategic plan.

It was a fitting celebration of the first anniversary of the council's adoption of the plan in principle. Few of those who welcomed it—the most important City planning venture since the Royal Commission of 1909—realised what a tortuous game it was in for. In some respects it has been outstandingly successful; in others it seems to be losing ground.

Frustrations met by the reformers on the City Council who are trying to push it along have been enormous. Infighting in offices, committee rooms, telephone conversations and polite but deadly letters to newspapers ranges the labyrinthine structure that somehow is meant to govern Sydney.

Meanwhile, the public watches what it hopes are the death throes of the great office-building boom.

Mr George Clarke, whose company, Urban Systems Corporation Pty Ltd, led the team of consultants which drew up the plan, puts much of the public disappointment down to misunderstanding of the plan's methods.

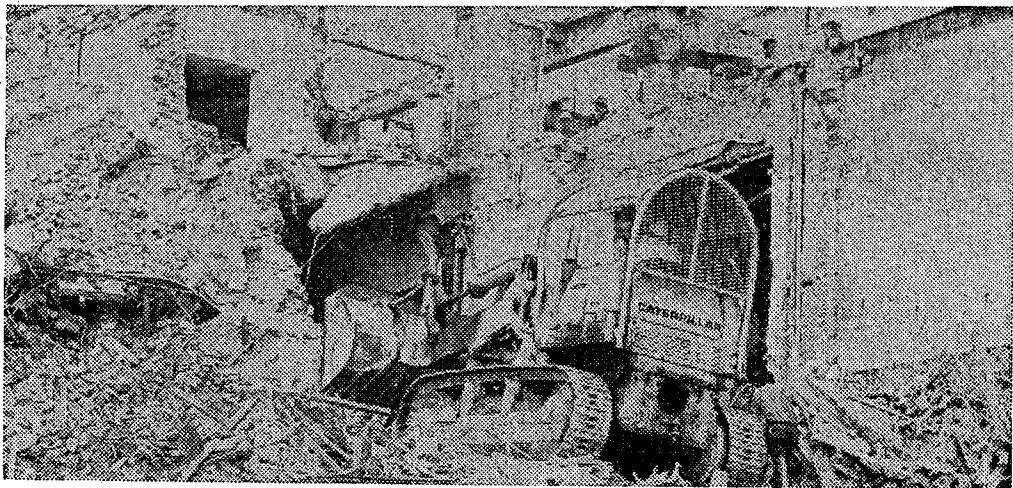
"If I had to do it again, one thing would be different—the word plan would not be used at all, just strategy," he said. "Because it was called a plan, some people got the idea it had a detailed specification for every square inch of the City. But in fact it is the beginning of a continuing process of City planning."

At the same time, Mr Clarke and many others think the plan's biggest achievement so far has been to educate public opinion about City planning. The community and many particular-interest groups are now far more self-conscious about the impact of their actions on the complex system of buildings and activities in the City.

Community attitudes are now leaning towards being anti-office development, anti-expressways, anti-cars, anti-pollution and congestion, anti-overdevelopment of The Rocks and Woolloomooloo, and pro-new cities," he said.

There are some more concrete signs of progress. A number of the new buildings soon to go up around Wynyard will incorporate elements of the Wynyard pedestrian network, although some pedestrian links will be cut for decades because

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At the Australia Hotel earlier this year. 1972

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# Benevolent blackmail

*This month saw the first anniversary of the City Council's adoption of the City of Sydney strategic plan, the boldest essay in City planning for more than half a century. HAMISH McDONALD examines where the plan has got to today.*

tion of the floor-space ratio code and the car-parking control code, adopted on December 6, recent council building approvals have begun to show a deeper concern with environmental effects. "The kind of application which we used to approve even six months ago would never get passed now," says Alderman Andrew Briger, architect and head of the council's City Development Committee.

The change is due to reconstitution of the council's planning department which took place in January. The department recently worked out standards by which to evaluate environmental impact. Its performance will be crucial if the council is to get the planning functions and powers now held by the multitude of statutory and ad hoc bodies sitting above it in the planning tree.

Work continues on action

plans. Two are due in September, filling in details of the William Street boulevard and suggesting low-cost improvements to the look of streets by footpath widening, tree-planting and improved street furniture.

It is too early to tell how well the strategic plan's methods of "benevolent blackmail" are working. There is particular uncertainty about historic buildings. Techniques being applied to extract public benefits from developers as yet have little legal force, and will not have it until they gain statutory imprimatur from the State Government, advised by the State Planning Authority. No one has yet appealed to the courts against decisions made on the new codes.

Naturally, the SPA does not disagree with the objectives of the plan, but it has serious reservations about the floor-

space ratio and parking control codes. It is worried about the plan's judgment that there could be 360,000 to 400,000 people working in the City by the year 2000 (the present City workforce is about 240,000).

The Minister for Local Government, Mr Cutler, points out that this large working population could conflict with the plan's aims to improve the environment and reduce congestion; not only would numbers using public transport increase, but average distances to work would be greater because a high proportion of City workers would live in outer suburbs now being developed.

As the plan had envisaged, 91 per cent more peak-hour commuters would come into the City by train in the year 2000 than do now, 62 per cent more by car, 67 per cent more by ferry and 19 per cent less by bus (because of the Eastern Suburbs railway).

Mr Cutler said that heavy capital expenditure would be needed on parts of the rail system — extra track between the City and Strathfield, for example — and problems would arise at City stations, particularly Wynyard, which was already near capacity.

of buildings put up just before the plan's new codes came into force.

The huge new development on the Australia Hotel site — sad as it may be to see so many City landmarks go — will at least be developed according to the plan, with public amenities and several pedestrian links to other blocks and the Martin Place underground railway station.

Quite apart from applica-

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next  
newsclip  
sheet

conclusion of first  
of two feature  
articles by  
Hamish  
McDonald  
on SMH  
leader page  
(then p 6)

The workforce density likely from the provisions of the strategic plan would therefore have to be related carefully to transport and traffic capabilities. The SPA's advice was still to wait on results from the Sydney Area Transportation Study now being conducted by Dr Robert Nielsen.

It is likely to be at least 12 months, probably more, before the authorities can really weigh up the plan and, presumably, rationalise the development approval process to give more power to the City Council.

However, many planners are wondering whether transport and workforce problems will really be so bad. The authors of the plan are themselves beginning to abandon their population estimate.

Mr Clarke says that in the review due in a year "we will revise our estimates downwards."

"It is, of course, impossible to predict long-term population, but a useful working hypothesis today could be to envisage a workforce of about 300,000 in the City by the year 2000," he said.

This would have to be reviewed every three years.

Meanwhile, the picture now building up is of the Commonwealth and State Governments inevitably adopting a policy of crash development of new cities and suburban centres, with appropriate investment in Statewide and metropolitan transport. The City workforce would change in quality rather than quantity, becoming part of a major financial centre for the Pacific region.

"Only people who can afford to come will come," said one architect. "People will no longer be able to afford 250 sq ft of City office space for a clerk."

"Only those who need to meet their opposite numbers face to face will remain in the City. These are expansive people, who need plenty of space around them."

If this is so the plan's floor-space ratio code might not need the drastic dose of medicine from Dr Nielsen which some people expect for it.

One does not envy Mr Cutler, on whose desk most contingencies, conjectures and recommendations will eventually land.

(A second article will appear tomorrow.)

# The Sydney Morning Herald

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DESIGN . . . 2

# What about Woolloomooloo?

By HAMISH McDONALD

SOON AFTER the City of Sydney strategic plan was published on July 20 last year it became evident that the biggest immediate threat to it would come from developers buying up the shabby terraces, warehouses and workshops of Woolloomooloo.

In the statutory planning scheme for the City, gazetted a few days before the strategic plan was released, and the State Planning Authority's Woolloomooloo study of 1969, Woolloomooloo was zoned blue—for "county centre"—as was the central business district across the Domain.

"County centre" meant, in effect, gradual development as a business area. With encouragement from the authorities, real estate investors took this as a go-ahead. They managed to achieve a degree of site amalgamation that shocked even the SPA. The big building plots they had accumulated would allow huge buildings under the SPA's floor-space ratios and bonuses.

The strategic plan tried to stop this. It recommended that development in Woolloomooloo be mainly residential, with the bulk of office development taking place in the City's "spine" between Circular Quay and Central Railway. The original floor-space ratio code, submitted to the council by its consultants simultaneously with the strategic plan, proposed a basic building ratio of 4:1 for Woolloomooloo, with bonuses much harder to earn than elsewhere.

But the developer, who had managed to achieve floor-space ratios of up to 12:1 under the regulations then in force. The 1.75 million sq ft of retail space, the motels, theatres, parking stations, sporting facilities, bars, restaurants, the railway station, the monorail, were to dress 3.5 million sq ft of office space.

The scheme received the endorsement of the Premier, Sir Robert Askin, who remarked at the announcement that "as always when you are dealing with progress and development you get a few critics about."

The council put up little fight. When the floor-space ratio code came up for formal adoption on December 6 the consultants' recommendation of a 4:1 ratio was dropped. Instead, the council decided to "administer development control" in the light of the 1969 study.

Approval of the Londish scheme in principle followed in May, obviously with reluctance. Sir Robert's prediction was subsequently proven correct, if understated.

Not only was the council attacked for its go-ahead to Mr Londish, it was savaged for its helpless attitude to the proposed Commonwealth offices on five acres of Woolloomooloo that would accommodate 15,000 workers. The attitude seemed to be that, if goaded, the Commonwealth would re-

vert to its original plans (dropped after much cajoling) to build a naval store on its Woolloomooloo land.

Happily, criticism from many other quarters appears to be working on the Commonwealth. The Federal Opposition has promised to re-site the offices (at Parramatta), and it is understood that some members of the parliamentary sub-committee which investigated the project favour a recommendation along the same lines.

The criticism of the developments has been based partly on the probable loss of all-too-rare residential areas to offices, but mainly on the growing evidence that transport facilities would be unable to cope with the workforce of more than 80,000 which such high-density development could eventually house. By comparison, the present Woolloomooloo workforce numbers only a few thousand, and that of the whole City about 240,000.

Certainly the build-up will extend over several years. But foreseeable transportation could not possibly cope. Mr George Clarke, director of the team of consultants who prepared the strategic plan, says that even the Woolloomooloo station on the Eastern Suburbs Railway that Mr Londish has proposed and offered partly to finance would be quite inadequate.

Even the 35,000 workforce envisaged in the SPA's 1969 study would severely strain public and private transport. The capacity of a single railway platform was about 4,000 an hour. Assuming that 8,000 could get to work via the suggested station (two platforms), the remainder would have to come by bus or car on roads already jammed, or by foot.

Other broadsides are fired. Critics say the retail space proposed by Mr Londish could never be taken up. They point out that the area is equivalent to about two major regional shopping centres, such as Roselands or Miranda Fair.

City planners in close touch with the SPA now believe that the authority is backing away from its previous prescription for Woolloomooloo. Certainly, the Sydney Area Transportation Study on which the SPA is waiting before making up its mind on the strategic plan as a whole could contain some embarrassing facts and recommendations.

Alderman Andrew Briger, chairman of the council's City Development Committee, believes that the council had no other choice but to accommodate the Londish scheme and others in Woolloomooloo. The City Commissioners had given the green light to the SPA's 1969 plan, and the reconstituted City Council in its early days had continued this approval.

The strategic plan had been

published after the majority of site amalgamation had taken place.

Others disagree. Alderman Gerard Draper, a member of the ALP group in the council, believes that the decision was avoidable and says it was rushed, with the council taking it on the basis of a two-fools-cap page report from council officers.

The SPA and such bodies as the Height of Buildings Advisory Committee still have substantial powers of veto over the planned projects in Woolloomooloo, and are reserving their judgments. The Minister for Local Government, Mr Cutler, says that revoking encouragement already given through existing building codes would be "an extreme use of power." He said his inclination—if official planning had allowed a strain on public transport—would be to provide additional transport rather than restrict the development.

One overriding planning law still remains to be applied to high-density development in Woolloomooloo: the law of supply and demand. A number of planners and developers believe that, in the light of surveys showing a glut of office space for at least several years, the development will not pass this test. Optimistically, they hope that market forces will rescue this perhaps crucial part of the strategic plan.

[The previous article appeared yesterday.]

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part of  
article  
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Less than three months later, on October 15, Mr Sidney Londish, leader of a business group which had acquired 11 acres of Woolloomooloo since 1969 and sought four acres more, unveiled his own grandiose plan for a \$400-million development that would, if fully carried out, set the tone for the whole precinct.  
By amalgamation of his pro-