

June-July 1962

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OVERALL DEVELOPMENT
OF SYDNEY CITY CENTRE - A PROPOSAL

CONTENTS

- I WHY HAS PAST DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN
 SYDNEY TENDED TO BE INEFFECTIVE ?

- II BASIC STEPS TO SUCCESS IN OVERALL CITY
 DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT.

- III SKETCH OUTLINE OF A SUCCESSFUL CITY
 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
 ORGANISATION FOR SYDNEY.

G. Clarke

JUNE - JULY 1962

written, printed & distributed
by G. Clarke

I WHY HAS PAST DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN SYDNEY TENDED TO BE INEFFECTIVE?

Australian and American cities share many similar problems of civic disunity and lack of civic leadership. The most basic cleavage is, of course, between the tradition-encrusted forces of capital and of labor. These tend to exist and to flourish in Sydney, side by side, each in command of its own separate institutions and spheres of action, but with little or no working civic contact between them. Distrust between their respective followers hangs on from the period of the nineteen-thirties. Tacit bargains may now and then be struck between their respective leaders, but there is no open and truly effective co-operation in civic matters.

The Labor Party commands all the political, legislative and administrative powers of both State and City Government. Nevertheless, the Labor power structure is itself made up of different groups (Parliamentary, Executive, Industrial, Local) with special responsibilities and interests. The Labor Movement as a whole does not often focus its full range of powers upon civic projects. Even when it does, it can achieve little in city development planning without the support of the most powerful leaders of private business.

The Sydney business community is likewise dispersed into many different groups with specialised capabilities and interests, such as Finance, Retailing, and the Professions. Most of its most influential leaders live in distant suburbs and are more taken up with State-wide or National affairs than they are with ideas about the City itself. The Sydney City Centre is, to most of them, merely a regrettably inconvenient area where they have one of their places of business. Although they individually command great resources of finance, and influence far beyond the confines of the City, they are not united in any common civic purpose. Even if they were so united, they would to-day find themselves effectively excluded from any real participation

in the shaping of city policies. Their potential civic enthusiasms lie sleeping, and they are not disposed to use their influence in the implementation of city plans which they have had no hand in shaping.

Property owners, developers, and investors do come in contact with City and State Government. However these contacts almost exclusively concern particular small buildings on particular small parcels of land. Each owner, developer and investor takes, for lack of any immediate alternative, a strictly narrow view of his own role in city development.

The traditional forms of city property investment, land subdivision, building design and construction, building regulation, zoning control and city administration, all tend to fragment and shatter responsibility for co-ordinated modern city development and re-development.

These forms, laws, and procedures are 'traditional' in as much as they were all based upon experience in the 18th, 19th and early 20th Centuries. To-day's needs are entirely different. The complex needs of to-day's City Centre will only be satisfied by new and complex forms of co-operation.

Overall city development planning in the recent past has been ineffective because plans have only partially been worked out for small bits of the city, by groups which are, by themselves, too weak and/or too sectional to secure implementation of any special plan or project. No single group has, within itself, a sufficiently wide vision, sufficient technical knowledge and sufficient political or financial strength to see what needs to be done in Sydney and to do it. Let us briefly mention some of the strongest groups and their relationships, or lack of relationships, with recent city planning and development activities.

The State administration has state-wide responsibilities and its

Department of Local Government is heavily overburdened with the problems of county, municipal and shire bodies outside the City of Sydney. The City Council lacks the research and planning staff that a city the size of Sydney ordinarily possesses; it lacks a convincing city plan and it does not command finance, or the confidence of the business community in general. Lacking these things, it cannot take a position of forceful leadership in civic development. It has no real plan, and in any case lacks the support and influence necessary to implement a city development plan.

The Banks, Insurance Companies and other Finance Houses have plenty of alternative avenues and locations competing for investment. They command the essential resources needed for implementation of plans. Their mortgage investments in Sydney Centre could be made even more secure, for further into the future, by wise plans for civic development. But they are so far only uninvited spectators watching the city planning game from the sidelines. They will presumably continue to reserve their strength until invited to join the team.

City Retailers are not by themselves a powerful positive force for civic redevelopment. They have tended to take defensive action, and to escape from their heavy dependence on city locations by setting up in major suburban centres.

City professional men have feared involvement in the hurly burly of city politics and have tended to concentrate upon their private affairs. Other civic leaders and enthusiasts, people prominent in artistic, academic, religious, clubs and sporting activities have concentrated upon their special interests and have tended to confine themselves to promoting civic causes which fall short of overall city planning and design. Nevertheless, leading citizens of this general type have effectively promoted the Opera House, City Fountains, and the National Trust, as well as scores of major charity functions. Given half a chance, such

citizens would actively support a broadly based, and effectively led, process of city planning and urban design.

Last in this brief list, but one of the most important groups of all, is the Trade Union movement. Trade Unions, while undiminished in influence and growing in wealth, have remained aloof and seemingly unaware of the growing needs of their members for better living and working conditions in the Sydney City Centre. The Trade Unions are experienced in wielding influence in industrial and electoral battles but have not yet seemed to use their strength in either the planning or implementation of modern city development. Like the Banks and Insurance Companies, they are champion players who have not been invited to join the civic team.

Of all the groups we have briefly examined, no single one is strong enough by itself to control or mould the centre of Sydney to any coherent, overall design.

The Sydney City Centre is to-day much like a battleground where separate individuals and independent groups fight for their own special buildings or their own pet development schemes. The net result of the present conflict, if continued, will be a down-grading of Sydney as a city, and as a national and international centre.

II BASIC STEPS TO SUCCESS IN OVERALL CITY DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

The fundamental reason why our past city development planning has been largely ineffective is that the top leaders of the city's most influential groups have not yet met together and agreed to work together for the good of the city and for their own mutual benefit. The city has many groups and many leaders. No one of them, no small sectional group of them, can 'go it alone'.

The Town Hall is the duly constituted meeting place for the city's citizens. It is the place where civic policies and plans should be discussed and decided. But the Town Hall fails to serve its proper purpose if it becomes the preserve of only a few Aldermen and officials. The Aldermen need the support and assistance of the city's real power structure. Failing this support and assistance, no coherent city plan can be either prepared or made to work.

Therefore the most basic step to success in city planning is to open the conference and committee rooms of the Town Hall to the leaders of the most influential groups and institutions in the City and in the State. This presupposes that we know who these people are. They will certainly include the most powerful and active men in Banking, Insurance, Trade Unionism, the State Labor Party Executive, Retailing, the legal profession, the academic world, the Public Service, the major religious denominations, and the communications industries (press, T.V., radio).

The initial purpose should be to form a citizen's organisation for the following purposes:-

to promote the economic, social, cultural and aesthetic interests of the City of Sydney by general means, but in particular to promote and assist the preparation and implementation of a

long-range overall city development plan.

Such a body requires a name and a body of Governing Trustees calculated to win and maintain the respect and support of all citizens in the metropolitan area. The name could be **THE SYDNEY CIVIC TRUST.**

The first task of the Civic Trust would be to organise itself so as to command universal respect. A Governing Council of, say, 30 Trustees, appointed for a five year term, should include the top community leaders, each appointed as an individual, and not as an official representative of any body, group or organisation. The Governor, the Premier or the Minister for Local Government, could be invited to become Patron. There should be corporate and individual classes of membership, with high subscription fees. The Civic Trust could in many ways be a parallel or partner organisation to the National Trust. It could have an active social committee - and could earn some kind of official support or recognition from the State Legislature.

The most vital initial functions of the Civic Trust would however be to stir and lead public opinion, and to raise funds, to assist city planning activities. Fifty Sustaining Corporate Trustees, each subscribing £1,000, would put £50,000 at its disposal. Other fees and subscriptions could cover its ordinary minor operating expenses.

Immediately following formation of the Civic Trust, the Council of the City of Sydney should establish a Master Plan Advisory Committee, to assist the Council and its regular Committees. The Master Plan Advisory Committee, although limited in membership, should closely interlock with the directorate of the Civic Trust. Three of the latter should, for example, be ex-officio members of the M.P.A.C. The Lord Mayor should be Patron of the Committee and its Chairman should perhaps

be the most influential private finance man in the City of Sydney. Membership of the Committee should be designed to encompass in a small group, widely accepted leaders of labor, the public service, business, the professions, the universities and the religions. The Chairman of the City Council's Planning and Finance Committees should be ex-officio members.

The role of the M.P.A.C. would be to deal with and advise the City Council on long-term overall city development plans and policies. It could provide the City Council with welcome relief from the exhausting week-by-week political pressures on planning and development matters. The M.P.A.C. would function in much the same advisory capacity as the City Plan Commission of the typical U.S. city.

The task given to the M.P.A.C. would be to supervise the preparation of a city development plan, a set of long-range city development policies, and a detailed programme for implementation. It might be given, say, two years for the job. In order to carry out this task effectively, it would need the active participation of second-rank community leaders, and would need to be able to draw on the technical assistance and advice of a wide range of government and city council departments, private planning consultants, and specialist university researchers. Community leaders below the top-most rank should be invited to serve on Task Forces, or sub-committees, each covering a special subject and reporting to the M.P.A.C.

Administration of M.P.A.C. and Task Force activity could be under the supervision of the Town Clerk. Finance should come, possibly in equal parts, from the City Council and the Civic Trust. A full-time, fully professional Master Plan Project Director should be appointed on, say, a five year contract.

This type of organisation, dependent on free co-operation between

normally antagonistic or indifferent pressure groups, has proved astonishingly successful overseas, particularly in the U.S.A. Its prime value is not in its formal organisation structure but in the informal processes of leaders learning to meet, talk, plan, and act together for their mutual benefit. The community leaders will receive a civic planning education in their Town Hall meetings. They will feel pride of authorship in the completed plan, which they will know has protected their most vital interests. The accommodations and compromises which will be necessary can be made through informal contacts between State and City Government leaders, and leaders of private interests. Thus when a plan is completed, it should be already known to members of the M.P.A.C. that it will be completely acceptable to the City Council, the State Cabinet, the Civic Trust and to the community as a whole. Finally, the M.P.A.C., through its Task Force dealing with public relations, and through the Civic Trust, can lead public opinion and the voters to an appreciation of the city's needs, hopes and plans.

These basic steps to successful city development are based upon a realistic view of how things get done in a big city. Many groups and individuals have the power to veto or fatally obstruct civic action. To force compliance by dictatorial action is repugnant to us. Therefore genuine co-operation, accommodation and agreement must be achieved between all the veto groups.

III SKETCH OUTLINE OF A SUCCESSFUL CITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION FOR SYDNEY

The established chain of responsibility for local governmental policy making and administration, from Cabinet through the Minister for Local Government down through the City Council, its Committees and Departments, would not in any way be disturbed by the additional organisational ideas outlined here. The suggested innovations involve the gaining of real participation by citizens in the planning process by means of new advisory citizen bodies.

THE CIVIC TRUST

A body probably similar in composition and character to the National Trust, it would be governed by a group of Trustees, appointed for terms of, say, 5 years, elected by the membership. The membership shall be of several classes, notably corporate and individual. Companies and individuals would be invited to become Sustaining Trustees and Sustaining Members, paying large scale donations. Wide civic publicity could be given to the lists of Sustaining Trustees. Many kinds of citizen bodies, clubs, societies, institutes would be invited to become affiliates of The Civic Trust.

The Trust will have the prime object "to promote the economic, social, cultural and aesthetic interests of the City of Sydney by general means, but in particular to promote and assist the preparation and implementation of a long-range overall city development plan".

It would need a permanent Secretary or Director who would have special ability in the fields of public relations and fund raising, and who would be personally acquainted with many leaders throughout the community.

The Civic Trust need not be constituted solely with reference to the City of Sydney. It could be a state-wide organisation, but it could be induced to make sponsorship of the Downtown Sydney Master Plan Project its first major activity.

THE DOWNTOWN SYDNEY MASTER PLAN PROJECT

This should be the name of a project to be jointly sponsored by The Civic Trust and the Council of the City of Sydney. Its aim should be to prepare within 2 years a 3 dimensional Master Design Plan for Downtown Sydney - and to show how the Plan could be implemented within ten years thereafter.

The Civic Trust sponsorship should provide active support from many different kinds of citizens and citizen groups, and some of, say half, the finance.

The Civic Trust should evolve over the first two or three years into an effective and powerful force ready and able to persuade the community in general and private leaders to implement the Plan. It can only do this if it has strong roots in both the governmental and private power structures.

City Council sponsorship should provide the remainder of the needed finance, say £50,000, and the making available of every other necessary assistance to the Project, including use of Council facilities and assistance by Council officers.

The Council could establish a Master Plan Advisory Committee to carry out the details of the Project, setting it up as a special council committee under Section 530A of the Local Government Act.

THE MASTER PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

This Committee could be composed as follows:-

3 Trustees of the Civic Trust, ex officio.

1 Chairman, appointed by the City Council, preferably a Banker or Insurance Company Chairman.

1 Vice Chairman, appointed by the City Council, preferably a Trade Union or A. L. P. Executive leader.

The Chairman of the City Council's Planning and Finance Committees, ex-officio.

A leader in the field of urban survey and research, who would be Chairman of the Survey and Research Task Force Sub-Committee.

A leader in the field of Human Relations and/or Housing, possibly a cleric or Trade Union leader who would be Chairman of the Human Relations and Housing Task Force Sub-Committee.

A leader in the field of City Planning and Design who would be Chairman of the Planning and Design Task Force Sub-Committee.

A leader in the world of law and/or finance who would be Chairman of the Financial and Legal Task Force Sub-Committee.

A leader in the world of mass communications who would be Chairman of the Public Relations Task Force.

Careful consideration should be given to the overall balance of personalities on the Master Plan Advisory Committee. Each major religion and interest group, profession, business activity, political party and so on should be represented by one of its most influential leaders. At least one member should be a woman. It will be necessary to find persons who combine in themselves several qualities of background influence in order to have all interests represented without having an overlarge and unweidly Committee.

THE TASK FORCE SUB-COMMITTEES

At the same time as the M.P.A.C. is established, up to five Task Forces, or sub-committees, should be appointed to carry out the detailed work in conjunction with the Project Staff. Each Task Force would, of course, be called upon to report to the M.P.A.C. on specific subjects within a specific period.

The Task Forces would be as follows:-

1. The Survey & Research Task Force

Chairman: A leader in the field of Urban Survey and Research, the head of a modern industrial undertaking, or even a prominent ex-public servant.

Members: Generally acknowledged experts, university professors, and so on up to about 7 or 9 people, including a City Council Alderman.

2. Human Relations and Housing Task Force

This group would be mainly concerned with the needs of the mass of people who use the city every day.

Chairman: A leading Trade Unionist or Labor Party man, or a leading cleric or university professor.

This Task Force should include other religious or union leaders, at least one housing expert, at least one woman, and one City Council Alderman.

3. Planning and Design Task Force

Chairman: A professor of Planning or Architecture.

Leading architects, builders and transportation experts, leaders in the arts and the professions, together with the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the City Council's Planning Committee.

4. Financial and Legal Task Force

Chairman: One of the city's leading bankers, lawyers or

insurance company chairman. Members of the legal and financial fraternities, including the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the City Council's Finance Committee.

5. Public Relations Task Force

Chairman: A leading Newspaper Editor. Leaders in the worlds of the Press, T.V., Advertising Agencies and related fields.

THE PROJECT STAFF

Day to day administration of the project would be generally under the guidance of the Town Clerk and Lord Mayor.

A special staff should be set up to carry out the mass of technical work for the Task Forces and the M.P.A.C. A first rate Professional City Planner should be hired on a, say, 3 or 5 year contract, to act as Project Director. Similarly, up to 20 other expert staff members would be needed, and could best be obtained on a contract basis for 3 or 5 years.

The chain of responsibility would then be, from the bottom up, as follows:-

1. The Project Staff - assisted by regular City Council staff and co-opted members of Government Departments, as well as by outside consultants.
2. The Project Director - assisted by Task Forces.
3. The Master Plan Advisory Committee
4. The City Council
5. The Minister for Local Government
6. Cabinet