

The Look and Feel of Hobart: What is your Hobart of the future?

The recent surge of interest in planning matters has, in part, been caused by concerns people have over Minister Gutwein's major changes to the Tasmanian Planning system. Author Richard Flanagan's Mercury article on May 6 set the scene for a spirited debate on what people want to see for their city - what is so special, what we cherish, and what we do not want Hobart to become. <http://www.themercury.com.au/news/opinion/talking-point-richard-flanagan-says-skyscrapers-will-ruin-hobart/news-story/eed05676cab050a571e3437bf7cbdf27>

With prosperity and international interest comes investors who think on a scale the size of which our small city has never seen.

Right now, the Council is asking anyone interested to have a say on the future of the Central Business Zone of Hobart (CBZ). It's doing this through a proposed Planning Scheme amendment, open from July 22 to September 1. This formal public exhibition time is your opportunity to make comments and stake an active interest in public hearings and assessments. As an Alderman, I want to gauge interest and opinions on planning matters - ultimately this helps guide my decision-making.

These current amendments aren't about height...

There seems to be some confusion relayed in the media about what the Council is proposing by a number of parties. To clarify this, the amendments being considered during this period are related to the positioning of buildings, and the statement of desired future characteristics for the Central Business Zone of the city. The Council is not considering height right now, but is waiting for more information and modelling on heights. The concern around 75 metres as a height limit has caused some greater angst around the issue which is understandable, but that shouldn't be a distraction to the possibility of having good public consultation on desired future characteristics. Height will be considered further down the track.

...and the amendments aren't about Fragrance

Nor do these amendments address the forthcoming Fragrance highrise proposals, two of which are located in an area covered by the Sullivan's Cove Planning Scheme. Understandably, there is growing public concern on the look and feel of the city, and height isn't easily separated from that notion.

Arguably, the Sullivan's Cove scheme is clearer about interpreting acceptable heights and streetscape, but even the Hobart Interim Planning Scheme does give more guidance than it once did. The Vodafone car park (corner of Bathurst and Argyle Streets) would not have fitted the current scheme. Notwithstanding, it is with further well-worded amendments to the desired future characteristics that this could be further strengthened.

Why is it important to have your say on the scheme amendments?

The Planning Scheme amendments are open for public comment from July 22 to Sept 1. They are based on a report by Leigh Woolley, an architect and Urban Design Consultant, who has spent much of his working life looking at Hobart in the context of both the city's natural and built environment. Mr Woolley was commissioned by the Council to review the Performance Criteria of the Central Business Zone (Clause 22.4.1).

Why amend the Planning Scheme?

The suggestions to amend the City of Hobart Interim Planning Scheme (CHIPS) came about after the Palace (now Hyatt) Hotel was approved, which will be located in the bus mall (next to Quest's Savoy Hotel and the Deloitte building). There is no doubt in my mind the decision to approve the Palace Hotel was flawed. Its height and proximity to other buildings of significant heritage value makes it undesirable for its position. While ten out of twelve Aldermen considered otherwise (Ald Cocker and myself), the Palace, like Vodafone and Empress Towers, will stand as a testament to what is ultimately desirable or undesirable

for our city's buildings' height and visual bulk.

The Woolley report sets out to strengthen elements currently silent in the City of Hobart Interim Planning Scheme relating to the Central Business Zone. Not least of all is the townscape. Townscape to me is a fundamental component of the experience of a city, especially Hobart with its many historic changes that have occurred over the years, and its place between kunanyi/Mt Wellington and the River. Other amendments to clause 22.1.3 are around viewpoints, and reinforcing the topography, scale and form integral to the look and feel of our small city.

The central business zone, bounded by Macquarie and Melville Streets, and east to west from Argyle to Murray Streets is that which Leigh Woolley's report considers. Is this the place to amass buildings? Is it an "intensification" which is desirable or "revitalisation" that the people of Hobart and other interested parties want to see for our city? What do we mean when we say we want to preserve its character, heritage, and human scale?

Heritage, it could be argued, is covered in other parts of the City of Hobart Interim Planning Scheme. However, if there is a case to include it in the Desired Future Characteristics, then I would like to hear that.

Your input is important!

Improving planning definitions allows planners, developers and the public to have a better interpretation on what are currently blurred lines in planning parlance. Aldermen want need informed opinions to help ensure that suggestions are heeded and taken as valuable contributions.

The exhibition period of 42 days will run from Saturday July 22 to Friday September 1. This is your chance to have your say on the suggested scheme amendments. Two public forums will be held at Town Hall on Tuesday August 8 at 5pm and Tuesday August 15 at 12:30pm. These will help

inform the public of the proposed changes, explain the submission process, and will be a chance to ask questions.

There is also the Hobart Not Highrise public meeting on 26 July, Town Hall at 5:30pm, which may help explain concerns that group has about building heights.

Opinions from the general public, experts and other concerned people who can add to the way elected reps can make informed decisions about whether we as a Council accept, modify or reject the planning scheme amendments.

This is such an important issue to get right for the future of our beautiful city. I encourage you to read the report and recommendations, to attend a public forum, and to contact myself and other aldermen as to your views. The report is available on the City of Hobart web page - this link to agenda Item 7.2 and includes the original report from Leigh Woolley: http://hobart.infocouncil.biz/Open/2017/06/CP_26062017_AGN_632_AT_WEB.htm

Here's the link to the Council page to find out more on how to lodge a submission: <https://www.hobartcity.com.au/Development/Planning/Planning-schemes/Planning-scheme-amendments>

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