

Submission to RWA Draft Built Environment Plan

April 14, 2006

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my concerns about some of the ideas presented in the RWA's Draft Built Environment Plan, as a resident of the Chippendale/Redfern area and as a designer.

The Redfern/Waterloo area is obviously a very unique area of Sydney's inner city, and it should be treated as such. Firstly, Redfern/Waterloo is home to Sydney's Indigenous Australian community, and this fact needs to be respected and handled as an asset to the culture and attractiveness of Sydney as a city for both residents and visitors.

My principal concerns are:

1. The zoning of The Block (Eveleigh Street precinct) and the disrespect/ignorance towards the Aboriginal Housing Company's Pemulwuy Project and Gadigal Apartments contained therein that this rezoning equates to.
2. The proposed Commercial Business Zone as providing jobs that are unlikely to significantly lessen unemployment of local residents, unless unprecedented measures are taken to ensure the developers and tenants run training and job placement programs for local residents who are statistically less educated than the greater population of Sydney.
3. Proposed tunnel between the ATP and North Eveleigh and its likelihood of adding immense strain on surrounding roadways, interrupting the success of the Wilson Street bicycle highway, and spending large amounts of money which could equally be used to provide alternative means of transport & connection between the 2 sites thus adding to the attraction of the Redfern Station & Eveleigh area for tourists and Sydney-ites alike.
4. The process taken by the Redfern-Waterloo Authority for conducting community consultation and the dividing of interdependent issues of employment, built environment and human services into staged plans that do not allow residents to get an overall picture of the changes proposed for the area.

1 Zoning of Eveleigh Street – Site D

I support the initiation of the Pemulwuy Project envisioned by the Aboriginal Housing Company and supported by aboriginal and local residents of the Everleigh Street precinct and surrounding areas. This project includes the building of high-quality multi-residential housing on the Block, the establishment of cultural, education and entertainment facilities that will both service Aboriginal Australians and provide regional attractors for tourists and Sydney residents, and resolve the connection between Redfern Station, and the precincts to its north and east.

A team of highly qualified and well-respected urban design, architecture and landscape architecture professionals have been involved in the formulation of this masterplan. The Redfern-Waterloo Authority would be much wiser to support this development than to reinvent the wheel. To rezone this precinct sends a message to the Redfern community, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal that the RWA has not been listening. The Aboriginal Housing Company and the team engaged on the Pemulwuy Project should be treated as consultants for the redevelopment of the surroundings, as they are well aware that changes in The Block's built environment is long overdue. Firstly and foremostly, the population density on The Block is much less than what is recognised as an acceptable level for allowing natural surveillance and the building of family and community that fosters a safe neighbourhood. The rezoning of this precinct not only ignores the

ongoing work of the AHC and the Pemulwuy masterplan, but also makes parts of this plan come above the proposed floor-space ratios and therefore impossible to attract developers and make happen.

The RWA is absolutely right in its evaluation of Redfern Station as an important transit hub – but why not go all the way, instead of transforming it into what appears to be another Bondi Junction. This is not in the least in lines with the character of Redfern Waterloo, and rather, needs to be given treatment as a place with huge potential to become a cultural regional attractor and hub for Aboriginal arts and culture for Australia.

2 Commercial Business Zone – Site E

How will this be working to serve local residents through job creation? Jobs housed in office towers are likely to be largely for people with university degrees and not for people who have been disadvantaged by poor education. This seems to be an extension of the CBD, which lacks a well-considered approach to linking the downtown core and this new core via a revitalised Regent Street and Cleveland Street. 18 stories worth of well-paid workers will equate to a large amount of cars requiring significant amounts of parking, and putting strain on roads in the area. I would suggest that significant planning controls be placed on development requiring developers to design according to Best Practice sustainability principles – perhaps by setting a requirement for a minimum of 3-star rating with the GreenStar Rating System for all development – and requiring developers/tenants to put in place programs that: (a) encourage commuters to use public transport through incentives, and (b) train and employ local residents for a large proportion of the jobs they offer.

Incentives to attract developers could include reduced prices on the land, meaning that the state government wouldn't make such a pretty penny, but that development would truly and genuinely contribute to the Redfern-Waterloo community, *and would pay for itself in the longterm* through a large increase in visitors to this and surrounding precincts who are eager to check out this world-class sustainable Redfern centre and Aboriginal Cultural venues adjacent.

I would argue, and many would agree, that 'increasing wealth' to an area isn't enough – the trickle-down effect is inefficient and often unsuccessful in alleviating social and economic disadvantage. Environmental, social, cultural and financial well-being are all equally valued by the Redfern-Waterloo community, and it is the first 3 factors that draw residents of higher economic status to live in this area in the first place. Job creation needs to take a holistic approach, and strategies need to adopt forward-thinking measures that view built environment, job creation & human services as interdependent, along with environmental and social well-being.

3 Tunnel between ATP and North Eveleigh precincts – Site C to B

This will undoubtedly be used highly as a through-route for non-local traffic, and will put huge strain on the roads north of the trainline and south of King Street, and a King Street already suffocated with vehicle traffic. I understand the need to connect the two sites, but why not take a completely different approach. This suggestion would require further investigation by RWA and engineering & local/pedestrian traffic consultants, but initial ideas include several pedestrian bridges linking the sites at different convenient points thus making people park at the ATP and walk to the North Eveleigh Precinct, or a light-rail loop that services the 5 strategic sites surrounding Redfern Station, with the station as the principle entry point.

The Wilson Street 'bike highway' is a hugely successful bike route and a great start to encouraging the level of bike commuting that is needed to ease the squeeze on inner city roads. This tunnel would be a step backwards for bike commuting in Sydney, and an increase in amenity for drivers.

I am not in any way convinced that a tunnel for cars is a good way, let alone the best way, to connect the two strategic sites, and I hope that a more forward-thinking approach can be taken on this matter.

4 RWA's Community Consultation Process

The Redfern-Waterloo area is indeed long overdue for some changes, and there is no denying this. However, a whole-system approach needs to be taken to ensure that the opportunity is not missed for Redfern-Waterloo to become a highly amenable place to live for current and future residents, and a world-class tourist destination for the people in the world keen to learn more about contemporary and traditional Aboriginal Australian culture and art.

The division of the RWA plans into Employment & Enterprise, Human Services and Built Environment – while being convenient and manageable for the RWA – makes the process of community consultation very difficult, and anything but transparent. I support the call for a second stage of community consultation prior to finalisation of any plans for Redfern-Waterloo, in which plans for each of the 3 sectors can be viewed as a consolidated whole following changes informed by the first round of community consultation happening now.

Without this second round of community input, the RWA cannot consider itself to be a transparent body working for the benefit of the community and users of the Redfern-Waterloo area. Two months for each plan is simply not good enough, particularly when it's impossible to get a whole picture of what the RWA has planned for our community.

For full transparency, I would also like to see submissions – or at least the number of submissions made to each of the component draft plans – published on the RWA website, and for the methodology being used by the RWA to compile the data collected from community residents to also be made transparent.

Thanks for reading, and I trust that the RWA will take my concerns, and the concerns of the many others alarmed by the Draft Built Environment Plan, into action when revising the plan. Remember that the tortoise won the race – it takes time to get things right, so let's not rush it!

Sincerely,



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