

CONVENOR'S MESSAGE

This issue of the **PLan** Newsletter has been a long time coming. Why?

Firstly, there was the concerted effort to Save Little Mindil for the people of the Northern Territory. We have not won that battle yet.

Secondly, there has been the exciting **PLan** Community Issues Survey running for several months. The results are now in, and prove what we have been saying for years is true.

Thirdly, we have been upgrading what we do for our new role in the Rapid Creek Shopping Centre Environment Hub, which we will soon share with three other community organisations. This will initially be for short hours, until we get more resources, as we are still all unpaid volunteers.

The challenges have renewed us, but more than ever, we need to share the skills of our many talented members to do what we know needs to be done to improve planning in the NT.

Now read on about the 'state of the art'. **PLan's** key goal is to improve the living environment in the Northern Territory. The Minister has undertaken that the new NT Planning Scheme will be made workable by new legal regulation, and we want to see this done as soon as possible.

Towards better planning!

M A CLINCH

RAPID CREEK ENVIRONMENT HUB

And now for some Good News!!!!

On Thursday, 9 August the Minister will be officially opening the ENVIRONMENT HUB, next to Matthew Bonson's Electorate Office in the Rapid Creek Shopping Centre. This brainchild of the NT Government provides a shop front (Shop 9) for four community organisations to better assist the public with information. It is fully fitted out for us and the rent paid.

The organisations are:

PLan: the Planning Action Network, Inc

Aboriginal Conservation Alliance

No Waste Alliance

Environment Centre, NT Inc (as well as the Woods Street Office)

Initially we will be present only on Wednesday afternoons (2-4pm) and on Sunday 9am -1pm to help the public, to provide information about planning issues, and be more involved with members.

PLan will be able to perform at a higher level, but there are some additional costs, possibly meaning an increase in annual subscriptions to \$20 per annum.

LITTLE MINDIL AND THE PUBLIC

It will be a tragedy if Little Mindil is ultimately privatised. Throughout the latter half of 2006, the people fought hard to preserve it, but the NT Government would not listen. Ownership of beaches in the English speaking world traditionally stays with the people, as a most important common right.

A long campaign tried every legitimate means to persuade the government not to alienate Little Mindil from its status as Crown land. There were public meetings, rallies to Parliament House, two huge petitions with thousands of signatures, media releases, Letters to the Editor, and a huge on site concert. There were also public walks, and landcare activities. Hats off to Lyn Martin, Nick Kirlew and Rob Wesley-Smith who led the campaign.

Still the government clung to the vague 'What is Your View' 2004 public survey of the three near Myilly Point sites as justification, writing all the time about access, when ownership is the public right. The government seemed to act as if it was a selfish move by a few Myilly Point residents. We were accused of dishonesty.

The area is Lot 5994, and related lots between Myilly Point and the Casino. This was recognised by the Planning Minister Tim Baldwin of the CLP government as an essential part of the natural Mindil Beach Basin.

This area is ringed by the Escarpment, and takes in all the land from the foot of Myilly Point, through the Public Golf Links, and the George Brown Botanic Gardens to Bullocky Point. This is a natural coastal plain, subject to salty inundation. We believe it composes the Mindil Beach Reserve, wisely set aside for public recreation by our civic forefathers, and included the public caravan park before the casino was built there.

The CLP cabinet decided to rezone Little Mindil back to O1 (Open Space) as it had been in 1999, but lost an election. Our recall is that in even earlier days, Clare Martin, (when in Opposition) as Member for Fannie Bay, stood with us on Little Mindil at a public meeting when there was a threat of it being taken over by the Casino for entertainment.

In 2006, the government was committed to using Little Mindil as a tropical resort. It put out an expression of interest document. The people, who own the land, were not permitted to see the bids.

One response favoured by many, was a low scale eco resort with restored vegetation, waterfalls, birds and butterflies. Whilst this may have attracted smaller local investors, sites so low are subject to tropical tidal surge, requiring major capital to raise them higher for safe occupation. Storms along Mindil Beach showed how vulnerable the foreshore is to sea action damage.

Whilst we love Little Mindil Beach for what it is, it would not suit eco tourists wanting a genuine natural environment.

Publicly listed land valuations on Lot 5994 of 5.6 hectares were a concern in themselves and when compared with those nearby. Valuations for the site were:

1996 - \$3,000,000; 1999 - \$4,700,000; 2003 - \$550,000; 2005 - \$660,000

The government chose the bid from Sky City Casino. It intends to build a resort adjacent to their hotel on the opposite (markets) side of the Casino. As is usual the method of acquisition would be a crown lease term, so that when the lease requirements are complete, and the \$6.6 million offered by the Casino is paid, the land will be owned by the Casino. Note that access to Mindil Beach was guaranteed by the first Casino but this has in recent years been cut off.

Planning Minister Burns publicly promised in March, 2006 that:

"Public ownership of the beach and foreshore at the 5.5ha Little Mindil Site would be retained."

The Macquarie Dictionary, the legal authority for Australian English, defines 'foreshore' as land stretching back from the sea as far as the agricultural land. Our government restricts it to the beach, and possibly to just half the beach at Little Mindil. Expression of interest documents showed differing boundaries on Little Mindil.

The Department of Planning and Infrastructure states that the final boundaries have not been surveyed, pending consultation with the Casino. Our meeting with Casino seniors was genial, and included a statement that they do not

intend to fence off Little Mindil. Their planning model for the site is low key and vague, we need more certainty, particularly as senior staff may vary, or the Casino change hands in some future corporate deal.

It would be better for an ongoing simple lease arrangement to be in place if the Casino does not plan major building on the actual Little Mindil site. Plans on a Darwin City Council website show a new road access to Lot 5994 via a bridge from half way up the present car park.

Government consultations on the survey of Lot 5994 and associated lots should include the public, as the Casino has seemed amenable to some important issues. Larrakia people have serious commitments to Little Mindil. Local environmental groups are keen to conserve the Myilly Point Escarpment, including the land closely along its base, which is rich in natural plants, and to have a public walking track in the vicinity. The creek beside the Casino running to the golf links needs remediation.

The community should be involved to discuss the proposed boundary between the "beach and foreshore", and the rest of Lot 5994. Department of Natural Resources information, based on years of monitoring and research, shows that the whole Mindil Beach coastline is changing due to erosion and deposition. It is unwise economically to build on the fore dune which is a significant natural feature and mobile over time. It is an essential part of the public enjoyment of the beach.

If the crown lease term is to go ahead resulting in alienation of crown land, the whole length of Little Mindil Beach, areas both sides of the mouth of the creek, and the fore dune should be outside new 'Casino' lot boundary. This is a matter of both access and public ownership, not access alone.

DOWN DISCONSOLATE STREETS

On 1 February, 2007, the Northern Territory Planning Scheme (NTPS) was introduced, after many years of promoting it by departmental staff. People wondered about the origins and status of the Chief Minister's big, end of the year public planning promotion 'Creating Darwin's Future: a Tropical Harbour City'. Some ideas and proposals on a map, raised fears on the safety of the civic precinct and other sites...

On 7 February 2007, The Australian newspaper published Nicholas Rothwell's seminal article on the sad and often ugly new face of Darwin, and the rapid destruction of the more friendly old one. Titled 'Down Disconsolate Streets', this longish article described in detail, and with almost immaculate accuracy, the unhappy decline of Darwin's living environment. This was a watershed article which said out loud what people had been thinking, and drew a huge public response.

Rothwell described how, in the face of accelerated development lacking disciplined direction, authentic streetscapes, like the Esplanade, have been destroyed, ugly buildings rushed up close together, views blocked, heritage trashed, heights mixed. People, why all this pressure when Darwin's population of about 100,000 is static in total ?

He wonders about priorities in the Waterfront Project. He questions, as most of us do, why the Development Consent Authority (DCA) approved a doubling of the height of the 23/24 storey towers from the normal 12 storey limit, on the old Koala Motel site, at the corner of Daly Street and the Esplanade, and lampoons the Admiralty tower. What he says has happened to the clause (Section 51(r)) in the Planning Act which makes the DCA consider potential impact on natural, social, cultural or heritage values?

Some of his impressions of **PLan** are off target. Our objective is to achieve a better living environment. Working on this for twelve years, we often express a different view from those committed to development at all costs. **PLan** has never been Left, Right or Green. Members are of various political groups, but share skills working together for better community life.

We research, and use facts and evidence, rather than rely on party contacts. We help people to understand the planning system. We try to save significant heritage, beaches and foreshores, parks and reserves, and support tropical design and planning outcomes, consistent with our particular lifestyle.

What does disappoint us is that a few of those who supported our prime objective when in Opposition, are against us now, telling people that 'they will have to get used' to the way things are now. They supported us protecting the Green Escarpment above Stokes Hill Wharf, but look at it now.

CREATING DARWIN'S FUTURE

Back in October, 2006, the Government in what appeared to be a major public relations exercise, offered as a plan for Central Darwin, a series of colourful A4 brochures called Creating Darwin's Future: a Tropical Harbour City. This plan has nothing of the status and quality of the Central Darwin Planning Concepts and Land Use Objectives Land Use Objectives of 1999, and related documents. The government sought feedback.

Gone is the firm basis in natural resources, physical constraints, cultural and heritage, values, transport essentials, measured through consultation with those in the community with local knowledge and experience. Instead, basically just a few petty ideas thrown in together, with no planning zones, and no precincts. You hardly know where you are on the map. Anyway how could our plans for Darwin be based on a 'tropical harbour city', when the Chief Minister is committed to an industrial harbour?

This 'offering' was a reflection of a campaign of many years by senior departmental planning bureaucrats, supported by Minister Burns, to expunge the land use objectives from the Planning Act and introduce a new NT Planning Scheme without the Land Use Objectives (LUO's). This process would make it easier for planning staff.

Government pinpointed Singapore as the ideal for the model. The Singapore had long ago been rejected by the community. Why should Darwin look like a concrete Singapore? The government seemed soon to realise that this association raised strong hostility.

On 18 February, 2007, the government published a double page spread in the NT News, 'Feedback Sought on Proposals for Darwin's Future'. This included the words:

'Where to from here?'

Consultation on Creating Darwin's Future will continue over the following months in conjunction with the development of implementation plans for key proposals and initiatives.

The NT government continues to meet with key organisations responsible for undertaking initiatives, including Darwin and Palmerston councils, developers and building owners.'

This statement underlines two serious flaws, ie. A government mindset equating the future of Central Darwin with the total planning process, and the exclusion of the community from any serious planning consultation.

By then, comment on the government's planning approach flowed thick and fast, as reflected in the NT News, in editorials and commentators focused on loss of lifestyle and planning direction, and Wicking had a series of incisive cartoons on related topics, and in the non-print media.

CAPITAL CITY CHARTER

The new NT Planning Scheme has the Capital City Charter as an essential element. This arose from a series of public forums held in recent years by Darwin City Council, on Darwin's role as a capital city. **PLan** participated in all of these. Invited interstate speakers, particularly from Brisbane and Adelaide, shared their experiences in planning their cities.

Essential pointers from these forums were:

Look at the whole city, not just the CBD.

Agree on a 'badge with a keyword or phrase that identifies your capital city's uniqueness, eg. 'young', 'resilient', etc as the same things that attract tourists to visit are those which attract people to come and settle.

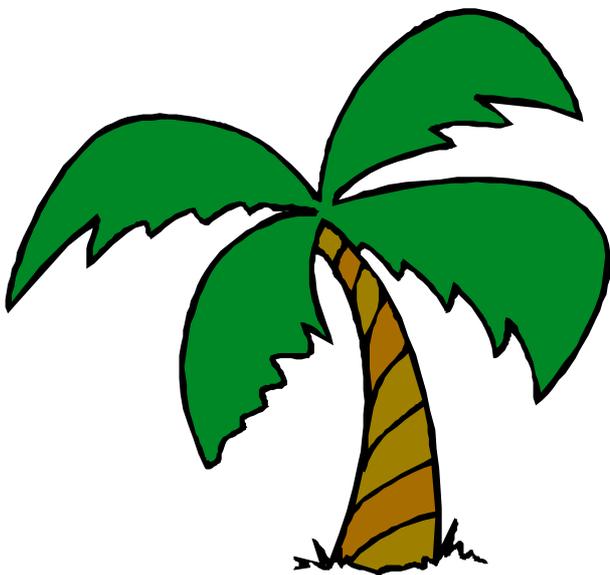
Give the community an ongoing role in planning the city, as they know it well as they are committed to life there.

Local and 'state' government should work together.

In Darwin a new very small Capital City Committee of NT Government and DCC people produced a brochure called 'Capital City Charter', largely consisting of 'tired' development and business focussed ideas centred on the CBD, without ensuring community input and content. Behind the scenes, a larger more serious document, entitled 'Darwin Central Business District Planning for the Future: a Capital City Committee Project has now been produced without our prior awareness.

Given the controlling role of the 'Capital City Charter' in the new NT Planning Scheme this is a travesty in terms of 'open government' and 'public consultation' resulting in poor planning.

One useful part of government planning is the establishment of the Urban Design Advisory Committee of architectural and related professionals to advise the government on urban design in Central Darwin. It will also advise the Development Consent Authority (DCA). However, specific advice is that there will be no community representation, or committee to advise on planning.



CBD URBAN PLANNING FORUM

Seemingly in response to public feeling, the government asked Elton Consulting, a specialist development public relations firm, to run a Darwin CBD Urban Planning Forum 'consultation' process for a full day to consider how the general city area should look, ie. CBD Urban Design. **PLan** responded hopefully to an invitation to an 'Advisory Committee' meeting on the planning of the forum, but was disappointed to find it was more an explanation of the agenda already seemed in place.

Separately we had to ask personally for just three members of **PLan** to attend the actual Forum. We do not know who the other invitees were, but most people thought along similar lines as our members anyway.

The Forum set out to answer the questions:

- * How do we achieve better outcomes from building design in the CBD?
- * What should our streets, parks, and open spaces be like?

An initial series of papers gave us an excellent background. They were given by:

- * Rod Adams, who worked on the redevelopment of the Melbourne CBD, making it more of a peoples place
- * Bob Nation, our so-called Government Architect who gave us useful Urban Design basics
- * Ross Finocchiaro as a local developer, made some remarkably candid and constructive statements
- * Other locals John Bailey and Alan McGill added their thoughts.
- * Rod Applegate a senior planner for the Department of Planning and Infrastructure added an overhead presentation with illustrations
- * The Administrator, Ted Egan spoke up for a tram system from the Waterfront Project around the city

The audience then broke up into workshop groups, discussing propositions set down for us about such topics as street activities, pedestrian routes and parks, heights of buildings, and setbacks, tropical architecture, greenhouse issues, and 'low hung fruit'. These were guided by departmental staff.

Our members felt that these 'guided' a little too much. It became clear at this stage that the Rod Adams' idea of street level activities was not so much moving the first floor facades of multi-storey buildings back from the pavement, as with the TIO building at Edmunds Street, but fostering pavement activity by pushing onto pavements and roadways.

This visitor also did not understand that Darwin people like fresh air, like to keep away from

crowds, and like their parks to be within close walking distance. He could not see that Bicentennial Park would need to be supplemented, as dense city living increased, that the Old Hospital site is a long walk in the hot sun for a young mother with a stroller.

While many spoke for natural cooling, there was little detail on how this could be done, and whether this would actually give buildings the necessary tropical look. There was a misplaced assumption expressed strongly that if buildings won a five star environmental national standard rating they would meet the need. Unfortunately these ratings are based on southern standards.

People did not favour box like buildings coming right to the pavement with inadequate landscaping. They did not like being dwarfed or crowded out. There was massaging to persuade people that tall buildings were actually OK. We thought the Darwin Central Hotel was a good example of the tropical look. There was a strong cry for heritage.

There was a short 'public session' in late afternoon which was advertised as an opportunity for people to have their say on the future of Darwin. As programmed Minister Lawrie spoke, reiterating her most important promise to provide regulations to make the new NT Planning Scheme work. June d'Rosario spoke as programmed. However the session would have been closed off then, if not for a very bold public who rose to claim the right to speak on setbacks, followed by an expert concerned that as a consequence of recent cyclones near Darwin, we need to upgrade our building standards. The responses dismissed them shortly.

Each working group reported back to the total, and their findings were summarised and posted at public displays at Raintree Park and Casuarina Square. Although the summaries contained useful conclusions, they were felt to be sanitized.

As time has passed, the Chief Minister seems to be 'boiling down' the outcomes of the Forum as 'tall buildings are OK, more awnings, and trees, and a walking track around Darwin.' We hope that is not true. Nevertheless, those who attended, met a lot of nice people, and learned a lot about planning and architecture. For that we are glad.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Housing affordability is a big issue nationwide. It is wrong for Australia when a dependence on market forces leads to a seriously growing gap between the rich and the poor, particularly when the 'poor' cannot afford a secure permanent home. This is a serious social issue.

It is disturbing in Darwin to see real estate and property interests crowing about median house prices exceeding \$400,000. House lots on new estates of previously government land are advertised for over \$200,000. Young people, new to Darwin tell us they cannot afford the rents, and are unhappily living in undesirable places. One figure has predicted that the recent national conference on housing affordability in Darwin will lead inevitably to more high rise flats in Central Darwin. We hope to avoid this in tropical Darwin, as world-wide experience shows that too many people living close together can lead easily to social problems. Where is the square in Synergy Square?

How will we grow a population with the range of skills we need? We are facing a huge factor of population turnover, rather than acceptable growth figures. As former Chief Minister Paul Everingham knew, we need ways to keep families here. We even expect many of our serving military families to live on below standard lots while their spouses and parents are away fighting for Australia. Mr Maslow tells us there is more to happiness than 'jobs, jobs, jobs.'

There is no shortage of land in the Northern Territory. But as stated nationwide, the answer to affordability lies not in either releasing more land, or increasing loans to first home buyers. These steps would force prices higher. There are answers. The CLP has a policy which is encouraging and worth trying. We also welcome the efforts of NT Shelter.

PLan COMMUNITY SURVEY ON PLANNING ISSUES

Some More Very Good News

PLan will launch on 11 August, 2007, the results of our ***PLan*** Community Survey on ***Planning Issues***. Since the Freds Pass Show, we have been gathering responses in various ways, with a total of over 400 now recorded and analysed. If you would like your own copy of our brochure ask for one, and the information will be on our website soon. This survey was completed with the assistance of a grant from the Community Benefits Fund.

For years we have been listening to what people say, and passing it on to governments, and the media. For years we have been told that what we say is only our opinion. This survey is the proof that what we have been saying to governments and the media is what people say to us.

The text summary from the brochure reads as following:

'Respondents clearly want:

- * Parking provisions adhered to, and visitor parking provided
- * Proportional open spaces for dense living
- * Government support for heritage protection
- * Foreshores, beaches, headlands, and landmark escarpments to be publicly owned and protected
- * Community purposes land to be unfenced
- * Open public recreation space to be planned.
- * House lots to be at least 800 m².
- * More multiple dwelling zones (up to two storeys)
- * Rural residents lots not to be less than one hectare
- * Amenity to be honoured by the DCA
- * The DCA to stop trading off planning controls for 'Merit'

- * The Right of Appeal to be extended to all persons affected
- * A Review of the DCA and legislation controlling it
- * Inclusive public consultation
- * The Land Use Objectives to be established
- * Large areas planned using the LUO's process, and not the Specific Use Zone process

We will pass on this information to the NT Government and media.

The separate brochure shows much more detail. Listing the 'statements' proposed, and through bar charts, analysing the answers given as ratings by the public. Ask for the coloured brochure.

Copies of the extra comments written on the surveys will be displayed at our stall (22A) under the trees, at the Tropical Garden Spectacular, at the George Brown Botanic Gardens, on Saturday 11 August, and Sunday 12 August, 2007.

ASK US FOR YOUR COPY, OR PRINT IT FROM OUR WEBSITE SOON!

