Trust in planning must be maintained

Why trust in planning is important

Trust, reinforced by strong community participation, gives legitimacy to planning decisions. It allows the planning process to be accepted as a valid means for making difficult trade-offs and determining land use decisions in the public interest.

The impacts of planning decisions are increasingly visible in the media. When planning outcomes are seen to be linked to private benefit or an overtly political agenda, the community don’t perceive the planning reasons as being independent or don’t see planners as in control of the outcome.

In these cases, the community believe they have not been heard and see planning as unsupportive or irrelevant – and they are less willing to engage in future. As a result, the reputation of planners and the planning profession can suffer and their capacity to create great places to live and work is reduced. The overall risk is for a less sustainable and less prosperous city.

Expectations for Pyrmont planning process

The Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) will not comment on the merits of the Star Tower proposal – especially as the proposal will soon be before the Independent Planning Commission.

However, PIA is acutely interested in a transparent and consistent planning process being maintained for the Pyrmont peninsula. This means a process that respects the community and stakeholder engagement expressed in the Eastern City District Plan, and the emerging City of Sydney Local Strategic Planning Statement.

Ultimo Pyrmont has a long and successful planning record with a state and local government collaboration that has transitioned a mix of industrial, business / tourism and housing uses in a striking inner-city harbour setting.

While one development proposal alone should not trigger a review, it is not unusual to reconsider the future use of a precinct where there are strong development pressures, changing economic development priorities and where future infrastructure could impact the capacity for growth. However, at this stage there is no decision on a future Sydney West metro rail station location in Pyrmont.

The Government’s request to the Greater Sydney Commission (GSC) to undertake a very rapid review (link) of the future character and capacity of Pyrmont Peninsula at this time is laden with risk.

This is not just because of the unresolved infrastructure capacity question, but because the community have recently been extensively involved on long term growth and local character strategies – and there is an expectation that this engagement would carry significant weight in future planning decisions.

PIA trusts that the GSC will consider the substantial recent engagement processes and offer the stakeholders respect by balancing those results against the outputs of the rapid review announced by the Government.

The outcome of the GSC’s Pyrmont Review should not just be executing the terms of reference – but ensuring that the community and other stakeholders continue to be willing to engage and trust that the land use planning system can shape places in the public interest.

ENDS – John Brockhoff