

Parramatta CBD Planning Proposal

November 2020

About the Committee for Sydney

The Committee for Sydney is an urban policy think tank. We are advocates for the whole of Sydney, developing pragmatic and innovative solutions to the most important problems we face.

We take pride in our independence and work with decision makers across the political spectrum. Our work is collaborative, inclusive and forward looking. It is underpinned by rigorous, evidence-based policy work that is passionate but balanced and steeped in the experiences and expertise of our members and stakeholders.

Most of all, we are passionate about Sydney and its future.

'In 20 years Parramatta will be a bustling, cosmopolitan and vibrant metropolis, the Central City for Greater Sydney. It will be a smart city that is well connected to the region, surrounded by high quality and diverse residential neighbourhoods with lots of parks and green spaces. It will be innovative and creative and be well supported by strong, productive and competitive employment precincts. It will be a place that people will want to be a part of'.

– City of Parramatta, Local Strategic Planning Statement

Introduction

The Committee for Sydney welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the draft Parramatta CBD Planning Proposal.

We wish to congratulate Parramatta City Council on this ambitious and visionary proposal for Parramatta CBD, Sydney's second metropolitan centre. The draft proposal has been a long time in the making: the result of five years of development and technical studies, and extensive consultation with State agencies. The changes to land use and built form controls proactively plan to strengthen the economic function of the Parramatta CBD, while increasing capacity for new housing, employment, business, recreation and cultural opportunities.

The Parramatta CBD is the primary jobs, services, economic and business centre for the Parramatta Local Government Area and the wider Western Sydney region. The CBD supports significant government and civic administration, businesses, major education institutions, and provides significant lifestyle activities such as restaurants and entertainment.

Ongoing viability and durable growth of the Parramatta CBD is central to realising the vision of *A Metropolis of Three Cities*, the Greater Sydney Commission's long-term vision of Greater Sydney's future. The community of Greater Sydney needs Parramatta City to realise its role as the metropolitan centre of Sydney's Central River City. To keep pace with rapid change and with its role shift, land use transformation and public transport investment is required.

To this end, we are greatly encouraged by much of the content of this Planning Proposal. The Proposal seeks to expand the capacity of the CBD to increase commercial and housing opportunities – facilitating economic and employment growth. In doing so, the proposal seeks to maximise the enormous potential of the Parramatta CBD and the wide range of benefits it could bring to the local community and Greater Sydney as a whole.

These proposed changes are given increased urgency by current investment in Greater Parramatta – headlined by the development of the Civic Link, the metro rail system connecting the Parramatta and Sydney CBDs, and significant state investment for the Greater Parramatta and Olympic Peninsula (GPOP) as the Greater Sydney Commission's first Place Infrastructure Compact (PIC).

Further, bringing concentrated economic activity back into Parramatta CBD will be a central pillar of Sydney's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recession. This proactive approach from Council should help to encourage

investment and enable Parramatta CBD to continue to play a substantial role in the social and economic future of Sydney.

Fulfilling the role of Sydney's second metropolitan centre

The Planning Proposal seeks changes to the existing Parramatta CBD boundary, as well as land use mix, primary built form controls, and the mechanisms for infrastructure delivery in the Parramatta Local Environmental Plan 2011 (Parramatta LEP 2011).

Core components of the Planning Proposal include:

Expand the B3 Commercial Core zone from 22 hectares to 38 hectares – an increase of 75%, increasing capacity to accommodate over 50,000 additional jobs across the Parramatta CBD

Provide a large area of land zoned B4 Mixed Use zone, to deliver over 14,000 additional new dwellings

Changes to floor space ratio (FSR) and building height allocations that impart new 'incentive' controls on several CBD sites, facilitating the provision of community infrastructure

Considerations for energy use and sustainability, sun access and shadowing, and maintaining heritage controls.

Incorporated into this proposal is also a Draft Update of Parramatta Floodplain Risk Management Plans, building resilience in the CBD and managing risks to life and property from flooding.

The Committee for Sydney supports these proposed changes to the Parramatta LEP 2011, which will help to deliver on population, housing and employment targets as set out in the Central City District Plan. The proposed changes to land use and built form controls will help provide an extra 50,000 jobs and 14,000 homes to the CBD over the next 40 years. This will maximise its chances of fulfilling its 'big city' ambitions as Sydney's second metropolitan centre.

The realisation of this Planning Proposal is identified as a priority action for delivery on local planning priorities of Council's Local Strategic Planning Statement¹, primarily Priorities 1, 4, 6 and 11:

- 1. Expand Parramatta's economic role as the Central City of Greater Sydney;*
- 4. Focus housing and employment growth in the GPOP and Strategic Centres, as well as stage housing release consistent with the Parramatta Local Housing Strategy (when endorsed);*
- 6. Provide for community infrastructure and recreation opportunities; and*
- 11. Build the capacity of the Parramatta CBD, Strategic Centres, and Employment Lands to be strong, competitive and productive.*

In addition, the proposed land use changes and built form controls help deliver on Planning Priority C7 of the Central City District Plan, 'Growing a stronger and even more competitive Greater Parramatta':

¹ City of Parramatta (2020) Local Strategic Planning Statement: City Plan 2036.

'To strengthen Parramatta's position as the metropolitan centre of the Central River City, planning needs to increase capacity for new knowledge-intensive jobs, including A-grade office floor space, which is currently at capacity².

Parramatta's CBD can be an exemplary case of density done well

While we encourage and are excited by the realisation of these proposed changes, the Committee for Sydney would like to offer some considerations to make the proposal even better.

We challenge the City of Parramatta to use this platform to make Parramatta a shining example of density done well: the intensification of economic and employment activity that also improves social and environmental outcomes, accompanied with relevant social and physical infrastructure, and in sympathy with local heritage and design.

Prioritise great open, green and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes

The CBD Planning Proposal has a new active frontage clause (clause 7.6F) requiring certain buildings that address the street, the river or a public space to have interactive uses on the ground level that foster a vibrant and liveable city, such as shops and cafes. These active frontage measures should prioritise creating great open, green and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes. The proposed sun access protection clause (Clause 7.4) protects solar access to key public spaces, particularly during lunchtime hours, to encourage use by residents, visitors and workers.

With increased density it is vital that people have access to high-quality public space to congregate, socialise and exercise. The public realm on streets in the Parramatta CBD is not always pedestrian-friendly, and there should be efforts through this to ensure that new development creates better street frontages and/or streetscapes. Pedestrian permeability should be prioritised in the planning of large blocks.

It is unlikely that the dense agglomeration of people and activity will return to pre-COVID levels in the immediate term, and providing open and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes will help bring people back to Parramatta CBD. COVID-19 has laid bare the importance of quality public space in densely populated centres, and this should be prioritised as restrictions are eased.

Recommendations:

- Council should set an objective of creating safer, greener streets in Parramatta: reclaiming Parramatta's high streets from congestion and clutter, through:
 - widening footpaths,
 - planting trees and
 - removing clearways.

² Greater Sydney Commission (2018) Central City District Plan, p. 58.

A climate change resilient CBD

Increasing landscape resilience to climate change resilience needs to be central to the proposed changes. In coming years Parramatta is predicted to experience warmer days, higher extreme temperatures, and more severe storms – planning for the built environment needs to be proactive to ensure that the CBD remains hospitable, comfortable, and safe.

The Planning Proposal introduces clauses to efficient and sustainable use of energy and resources in new buildings, minimising consumption of energy and water – to help manage climate change and urban heat. We also support the update of floodplain risk management in the CBD – as outlined in the *Central City District Plan*, the Parramatta CBD is the most flash-flood affected major CBD in Australia. The adoption of a ‘shelter in place’ evacuation method is a practical intervention that takes urban morphology into account.

A climate resilient CBD also needs to prioritise urban greening and the greater use of tree canopy to cool down CBD streets. In tandem with the economic regeneration of Parramatta post-COVID, these changes would help to encourage commerce and retail along local high streets, as well as making the areas safer and more liveable for the local community.

Recommendations:

- Prioritise urban greening and tree canopy for active frontages on streetscapes and public spaces. Council to consult with DPIE around tree canopy and green innovation opportunities.
- Council to approach Resilience NSW, NSW Circular and Resilient Sydney to help set the conditions for a climate resilient CBD.
- Climate resilience and sustainability should be a feature of the design review process with adequate expertise engaged through panels and by proponents

Enable diverse economic outcomes

The Planning Proposal will increase A-grade commercial floor space, deliver more commercial uses in the CBD’s B4 Mixed Use Zone, and encourage jobs and business growth. These changes will bring new office towers and jobs in the Parramatta CBD, strengthening its economic role and significance. We commend the council for incentivising greater commercial/retail in the B4 zone.

There is an opportunity to consider more diverse economic outcomes for Parramatta – for instance, the evolution of Parramatta into a 24 hour city, supported by Council’s *Night City Framework 2020-2024*. In the medium term, development on Parramatta’s river foreshore will support a visitor economy.

Council should seek to embed nightlife in its open and public spaces proactively, including greater provision for outdoor dining and activities and open-air cultural activities. Rather than a blanket restriction on outdoor media, as outlined in the CBD Planning Proposal, Council should consider well-placed and well-designed advertising for its visual appeal, wayfinding, and provision of public wi-fi.

The development of local nightlife should be balanced with the interests of local residents but remembering that many in the local community would benefit from having a vibrant and diverse mix of arts, hospitality and cultural venues on their doorstep. Further, as local economies rebuild following the COVID-19 disruption there is potential for Parramatta to expand local amenities, particularly in the creative industries. For instance, space for start-ups would encourage an entrepreneurial spirit, and engagement with the arts would hold significant benefit for vibrant and enticing public places.

Recommendations:

- Build on the *Night City Framework 2020-2024* to include greater provisions for outdoor dining and extending trading hours for businesses.
- Look to create opportunities in the CBD by encouraging expansion of creative industries, and space for start-ups. Remove regulatory and cost barriers to temporary installations (pop-ups, parklets) that can bring vibrancy and spectacle into the CBD and encourage creative sector presence.
- Support development that uses the design competition approach to create innovative and attractive build form for creative, hospitality, and entrepreneurial industries. This may involve relaxation on prescriptive podium heights and set-backs.

Residential considerations

We support maintaining a strong residential element in the CBD – vital to the realisation of vibrant local places and the vision of the 30-minute city. The proposed changes should help to increase stock and deliver a diversity of housing options and price points. As with many parts of Sydney, housing affordability is a big challenge in Parramatta, and we encourage state government to invest in social and affordable housing for residents.

The widespread shift to working from home, catalysed by COVID-19 social distancing requirements, has the potential to change dwelling preferences. For example, it is anticipated that there will be a rise in two bedroom apartments and people seeking an extra room to be a study/office. Council should be cognisant of market trends when considering what is appropriate development.

Development should also consider the provision of parking. Planning controls may require more than one parking space, which could lead to an oversupply of parking in the CBD. Aggregating and reducing parking into central garages or multi-utility hubs potentially means that street space can be used for things like wider footpaths or cycle lanes, both of which we support.

Recommendations:

- Continued advocacy for regionally significant transport infrastructure that can support a 30-minute city vision.
- Adjust residential zoning to take consideration of changing housing stock preferences as a result of COVID-19.

- Reduce on-street parking in the CBD, and reduce off-street parking requirements across the CBD.

Community Infrastructure

We support Council in encouraging the provision of community infrastructure in this proposal via a new clause (clause 7.6l) requiring community infrastructure, such as recreation facilities, community facilities, environmental facilities and public reserves, to be provided with new developments, should applicants wish to take-up the significant development 'uplift' offered under the Incentive FSR and Incentive Height of Building controls in the Planning Proposal. This supports the city vision of density done well, with thriving and diverse streets and usage.

As outlined in Parramatta's Local Strategic Planning Statement, Council will collaborate with the State government to incorporate appropriate community infrastructure funding provisions. Council has just adopted a *Community Infrastructure Strategy* to guide investment decisions.

Recommendations:

- Prioritise community infrastructure that supports major public projects with regional benefit, including the Parramatta River foreshore and the Civic Link green corridor between Parramatta River and Parramatta Square.
- Encourage First Nations place names and wayfinding for new community infrastructure