

## Summary of Workshops

4-5 December 2014

At each workshop, NT Planning Commission Chairman Mr Gary Nairn welcomed participants to the meeting and introduced:

- Ken Johnson, NT Planning Commission Member,
- Steve Thorne, Consultant (Design Urban Pty Ltd),
- Mark Meldrum, Director Lands Planning, Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment (DLPE),
- Peter Somerville, Planning and Development Manager, DLPE Alice Springs,
- Kirra Cox, Planning and Development Officer, DLPE Alice Springs, and
- Louise Taylor, Senior Project Officer, Planning Commission Secretariat.

He outlined the reasons for the Planning Commission undertaking the review of the Planning Scheme provisions for Alice Springs CBD.

Steve Thorne provided an overview of previous investigations. He outlined some of the key weaknesses identified in the Urban Design Audit (2009) including:

- footpaths,
- fencing,
- car parks,
- street trees,
- street furniture,
- public amenities,
- signage,
- active building frontages, and
- car parking siting.

The discussion was supported by a 3D fly through and imaging program, which included a representation of the proposed four storeys Supreme Court building on the old Commonwealth Bank site (Parsons Street) and a possible eight storey re-development of the old Melanka site (Todd Street).

### Key Discussion Points

Around 80 people participated in four workshops held on 4-5 December 2014. Workshop participants included a broad cross-section of the community, including land owners, residents, architects and business owners.

Key discussion points raised by workshop participants are summarised below.

## **1. *The Review Area - zone of influence.***

- Moving the core study area, and therefore the CBD, south was suggested; as a higher density development was being proposed outside the identified CBD area.
- Limitations around development of the heritage area were discussed. Eight storey buildings adjacent to heritage places were not considered suitable. Lower profile child care facility proposed by Melanka to be alongside the Heritage Precinct was noted, as was the reasonable distance between the Supreme Court and The Residency.
- Moving the core study area, and therefore the CBD, west was suggested, in light of the announcement of an expression of interest to develop the vacant site on the corner of the Stuart Highway and Whittaker Street.
- Moving the core study area, and therefore the CBD east was suggested, to include parts of East Side.
- Several people spoke about the need to keep the CBD compact to maximise walkability.
- Questions were raised about whether the same guidelines could apply to the core study area and zone of influence.
- It was suggested that the CBD (and associated zone of influence) should not be looked at in isolation, but rather as a bigger picture, including commercial nodes around the town.
- Questions were raised about the development of sites outside the core study area greater than 3 stories, including the Melanka and Whittaker Street sites.
- A participant suggested it should be extended south to catch Melanka and Heritage area.
- A participant suggested there is a need to plan for future requirements of accommodation to meet demand over a 20 to 40 year period, but the requirements may not be appropriate for the short term.
- A participant suggested the zonings be reviewed to allow more mixed use.
- It was suggested a safer CBD would happen through more accommodation in the CBD.
- A participant advocated the creation of polycentric nodes, and asked if consideration had been given to the connection of adjacent areas to the CBD, as they all interact with the CBD.
- One participant felt the current CBD is dysfunctional, and therefore some organisation, or structure, to the area would be positive for the town.

## **2. *Structural Changes in the Alice Springs CBD***

- Questions were raised on how certain areas should be allocated for certain uses, and how to differentiate or mix.
- To enjoy living in CBD, it is best to have mixed use which creates activity 24/7.
- Movement corridors should be identified each for vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists.
- Observations were made on the adverse impact of malls internalising shopping rather than on-street shops.
- Suggestions were made to look at one-way traffic with more on-street parking.
- All workshop participants agree that they want a safer CBD.

- A participant noted that the safest time to be in the CBD is when the Masters Games are on. The reason being because of the huge increase in the number of people in the CBD.
- Questions were raised about whether residential living in the CBD was necessary to make the town more vibrant.
- A participant noted that he enjoyed living in the CBD and would like to see more residents living there, being able to walk to work etc.
- Several participants stressed they want to see quality design.
- Several questions were asked about the demographics of who would live in residential units in the CBD.
- One participant said the town has turned its back on the river, which is a great asset, and should be recognised more.
- One participant stressed the need for a place for tourists in the CBD (to park vehicles with trailers or caravans), rather than being tucked down by the library.
- Several workshops participants advocated the need for any guidelines developed to be adopted in conjunction with Alice Springs Town Council (ASTC). The Mayor agreed and said ASTC is working closely with the NTPC.
- Some participants believe the town needs to retain a unique character ('would you know where you were if you were placed here blindfolded?') while others believe that the time for "a town like Alice" is over and a new identity needs to be developed.
- A participant spoke of the number of significant sites/areas in the CBD to Aboriginal people, and suggested it was important to incorporate this into any structural changes.

### **3. *Quality Design Outcomes***

- A balance needs to be achieved between providing guidance vs prescriptive controls for future development
- There needs to be a design definition of what Alice Springs is or should be
- Design theme, materials and colours need to be considered
- A participant advocated the consideration of the surrounding country and its unique form & colour when designing buildings
- Participants spoke of weather protection being a necessity. They suggested use of verandahs is iconic and should be encouraged. They considered frontages such as the Alice Plaza frontage to Todd Street should be avoided
- There is an expectation by consumers to have air conditioning, and major shopping centres are unlikely to change this
- Many participants advocated the importance of the heritage areas, and the requirement to design buildings to compliment this aspect of Alice Springs
- There were suggestions to increase building setbacks for upper levels when adjacent to heritage sites.
- Some participants noted that there is too much surface level parking in the CBD
- Several workshop participants suggested one way streets
- Participants proposed that more on-street parking is required
- Participants stated that buildings need better interaction with street

- Participants highlighted that more shaded areas and better quality footpaths are required, but are unsure how to mandate it
- There was general support of a requirement for a permit to demolish structures
- A participant advocated giving developers “space” to design, but believed it was important to have guidelines introduced

#### **4. *Building Heights***

- Higher buildings close to heritage items need specific attention, (ie lower maximum heights or buffer zones, etc).
- Impact of 8 storey building up against a heritage item would be a poor outcome.
- Allow for a step up in form of a 2-3 storey podium with higher storeys setback further.
- There be a minimum lot size for development over 2 or 3 storeys.
- A question was raised on the ASTC’s rationale for limiting the river block to 5 storeys
- While some participants were not against 8 storeys, they were against bad design. Design requirements should be compulsory. How does designer respond? How does the Development Consent Authority respond?
- Questions were raised about why buildings of 3-5 stories are not financially viable.
- Many residents who supported taller buildings believe there should be a restrictive buffer of between 3 and 5 stories around sites of heritage value in order to protect them.
- Several participants agree with the concept of roof top gardens etc, but some were concerned as to the pressure this requirement may place on developers.
- Several participants are against buildings taller than 3 or 5 stories, regardless of design.

#### **5. *Key Views and Vistas***

- There was strong agreement by many participants that the views to the ranges must be protected, however there was differing opinions as to what level of protection was required.
- Participants advocated the use of the scenic vistas in the orientation of taller buildings, eg towards the MacDonnell Ranges.
- It was acknowledged that 3D technology was helpful in showing the views to be gained and/or lost from the construction of taller buildings in the CBD, and will be a useful tool for designers, assessment officers and the general public to assist in considering the impact of taller buildings.

#### **6. *Other Issues***

- One participant questioned the inclusion of indigenous people's needs in the plan in terms of making provision for the expected increase of people arriving in Alice Springs in from bush communities in future years.
- There were suggestions that the CBD would be more vibrant if uses such as hotels were moved in and organisations such as ASTC moved out.
- Several participants would like to see areas set aside for open space.
- Questions were asked regarding the NTG's role in providing open space, as it is usually in the public realm, not privately owned land.
- Several participants questioned the wording for the guidelines in that the word *should* is used for design requirements, while they believed the word *must* is more appropriate.
- Some participants felt that allowing taller buildings was only looking after the needs of developers.
- Some participants were concerned about the effects of flooding in the CBD with higher densities, given the problems already being encountered when flooding occurs.
- Questions were raised about the ability of the town's natural resources to cope with the proposed increase in residents.
- Participants asked whether the guidelines would include green energy measures.
- The requirement for open space to cater for all members of the community was suggested.

## **7. Comments**

The workshops were well attended; with a mix of land owners, residents, business owners, developers, community organisation representatives, government departments and local Councillors & council officers attending.

The participants were advised of notes being taken to record feedback, but were also encouraged to lodge individual submissions with the Planning Commission by 17 December, 2015 (close of exhibition period).

The Planning Commission is grateful for the feedback received during the workshops, which will contribute to a community engagement report on the Alice Springs CBD Review project, and will be considered by the Commission at its next meeting on 17 February, 2015.

For further information, please contact NTPC Secretariat on (08) 8924 7341 or by email at [ntpc@nt.gov.au](mailto:ntpc@nt.gov.au).