

City of Parramatta – Council meeting, 25 Feb

Public Forum

Janet McGarry on behalf of Epping Civic Trust

I would like to speak to item #12.2 – Pedestrian accessways in Epping

The Epping Civic Trust is the peak community body for the Epping area – an area that has undergone rapid change and unprecedented growth. This will be familiar to you as councillors as quite a number of papers have come to council meetings recently. They are largely trying to ‘fix’ issues that should have been subject to proper planning in the first place.

This paper (retitled from an original called Public Road closures which is more accurate) is yet again an example of an item coming to council without the forethought and preparation and without being set in the context of a proper plan for the area.

Whilst this version of the paper better covers the need for at least 3, quality accessways between Rawson and Beecroft streets and the role of the current DCP, it fails to acknowledge what has happened since – much higher and more dense development, with a much higher population, than was thought of in 2011.

These laneways are part of a complex challenge facing council to ensure that proper pedestrian access is provided for a vital route between Epping Station and Rawson Street, the area bounded by Beecroft Road and Rawson Street.

The latter is where the civic ‘heart’ and retail centre of the future Epping Town Centre will be, whilst of course the railway station is an extremely busy transport hub. Thousands of people a day currently travel this route

What is missing in this paper is a full connectivity discussion and a much more nuanced plan for how both traffic and pedestrians will move around this area. Instead, it is clear in the risks identified at the end, that this paper is prompted by developer pressure. The laneways owned by Council (and therefore PUBLIC property) need to be obtained by the key developers so they can realise their plans.

But, where is the public interest in all of this. Read item 6 – Desired Outcomes – and the first item is all about the wishes of developers. Where is the connectivity plan? Where is a greater master plan for this key precinct (including the council owned car park site on Rawson)? Why is council moving to facilitate developers ahead of the long term public interest which would be best served by a full master plan?

I will give two examples to show how important this paper is.

Item 6.2: Says that council will amend controls to ensure access is protected. This cannot in fact be guaranteed as there is an example on the east side of Epping where it has failed. Last year, the Sydney City Central Planning Panel accepted a developer's proposal to wipe out one of the 3 so-called guaranteed accessways from Cambridge to Oxford Streets, as part of a DA application. Council accepted this in their report. How can we be sure this won't happen here as the development process proceeds?

Second example: Item 23 – one of the proposed accessways is currently subject to a DA. This DA has put forward in their design an accessway which has steps in the middle of it. And they think this is acceptable as pedestrian access. It isn't. It is a bad outcome which would be facilitated by you accepting this paper tonight and selling off the laneway the developer needs.

The community is already undergoing immense strain. At the very least, it expects its council to do better. To prepare for the future and set in place fundamentals prior to development approvals. To pass this paper in its current form, sets the groundwork for a massive, and long lasting, fail. The residents deserve better from you, our public representatives. The Epping Civic Trust urges you to send this proposal back to staff with a recommendation that a proper and full master plan for the Rawson street precinct must come forward first.