

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT HAROLD PARK: FACTS ON WEBSITES AND A RELATED PERSONAL EXPRESSION OF DESIRE TO INVEST

On 29.10.09 Stephen Veber and associates from the firm Cundall provided a community consultation on sustainable development at Harold Park, which I understand they hosted free. Harold Park (10.54ha) is to be sold and is owned by NSW Harness Racing Club Ltd. One can be a social member and use Harold Park for \$5 p.a. I joined on 31.10.09.

Geographically, Harold Park relates closely to the North West area of the City of Sydney Local Action Plan Strategy 2007-2010, which encompasses the suburbs of Glebe, Forest Lodge and Annandale. According to the Action Plan Strategy, 'NW residents value local heritage and support community programs, public spaces and facilities that strengthen and celebrate their diverse social, cultural and economic mix. Pedestrian space, cycleways, public transport, open space and public art are high on the agenda'.

Harold Park requires a Global Sydney planning approach. The NSW Government Metropolitan Strategy states, 'Sydney City and North Sydney will continue to be harbour cities at the heart of Global Sydney. They will be the focus for world class business, tourism, cultural, health, education and entertainment activities'. Fact sheet 5 of the Metropolitan Strategy, on Environment and Resources and Parks and Public Places states Sydney Basin is the fifth most biologically diverse region in Australia. The Plan sets out cross government targets to improve health of waterways, protect plants and animals, improve air quality, minimize noise pollution and protect Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Harold Park development thus has national and international significance, which suggests the Commonwealth government, as well as NSW government and the City of Sydney, have an interest in its sustainable development, according to the directions above.

In July 09, the NSW Minister for Planning, Kristina Kenneally, wrote to the Club in response to its request for consideration of Harold Park development as a state significant site. The Minister determined the site should be dealt with as a matter of priority with The Sydney City Council as the determining planning authority, working closely with the NSW Department of Planning and the Club. However, since Harold Park is part of Global Sydney, the interests of all tiers of government are logically involved. Tanya Plibersek, the local member and Commonwealth Minister for Housing, seems the most relevant federal representative regarding sustainable development at Harold Park. The Commonwealth government policy is for more affordable, fair and sustainable housing and there is Commonwealth funding to support this direction which may be accessed.

What did the community meeting want in regard to Harold Park development?

On 21.10.09, after information provision by Cundall representatives on a variety of sustainable development issues, the meeting split into a number of key interest groups for report back on their main sustainable development goals. At the end of this process the room of 35 people agreed, by a quick show of hands, either overwhelmingly or

unanimously, that all wanted the existing open space at Harold Park to remain as open space but greener. I voted in agreement with them. This is discussed later.

What does NSW Harness Racing Club want?

From its website, NSW Harness Racing Club appears primarily to conceive of itself as a racing industry developer and secondly as a group of citizens and employers who are strongly concerned about jobs, housing, transport, and parkland, especially for low income people, throughout NSW. The Club is selling the Harold Park site mainly to use the money more effectively to develop the Harness Racing Industry in NSW. According to the website, the major costs to do this are estimated to be the following:

Relocate and carry out major upgrades to the Menangle Park Paceway in Sydney's South West at an estimated cost of \$15 million

Repay \$25 million in loans to the Harness Racing Racecourse Development Fund

Increase prize money to establish a stronger financial base for the industry.

Harness Racing NSW has also committed to redirecting the above Fund monies to provide funding for the following regional paceway facilities:

\$5million – Riverina; \$3 million – Bathurst; \$4 million - Tamworth.

The total cost of the racing industry redevelopment needed to meet the NSW Harness Racing Club industry development goals above is estimated as \$52 million. However, this figure ignores the issue of increased prize money, which may perhaps be a vital matter to establish a stronger financial base for the industry. I have no idea.

Discussion on the development of Harold Park and a proposal for investment:

The most likely way forward, if recent Harbour foreshore and related development is an indication, would be for a commercial developer to seek to tear down all existing Harold Park structures and build palatial flats which would be sold for around \$1 million each or more, so only the rich could have them. The commercial developers and their merchant bank or other backers would also fight to get as much land as possible for buildings to house the rich and make the greatest profit. This development invites waste at every turn as architects, lawyers, builders, related professionals and the earliest groups of tradesmen on the site fight tooth and nail to get the largest cuts of the development money possible, before it all runs out. The Council would also cream off some of the development money so that some people currently living on social security are housed, but those who work and seek to buy their own homes have little chance of housing in the same environment. The buildings will then be managed in a way which ensures that maintenance is extremely complex, its costs are very high and nobody ever seems to be accountable.

However, the NSW Harness Racing Club seems far from the normal legal, financial and related frightening mafias that always try to do things with their closest friends in secret, while telling us they are acting in our interests. I was amazed when I read the Club website because of the wealth of clear and sensible information it provides. After having walked over the Harold Park site on 31.10.09, I think the way for everybody to have what appears best may be for the NSW Harness Racing Club to invite partners from relevant government and community organizations and individuals to undertake group investment to assist further development of the site together and primarily so that it provides a mix of green space and comparatively low income housing, based, if reasonable, on the existing building, rather than tearing it down. I would love to invest modestly in such an open planning and development process. I am amazed the Club would want to sell the site.

According to Metropolitan Strategy Fact Sheet 3 on Housing, in 2031 Sydney will have a population of 5.3 million people. Single person households will go from 22% to 30% of all Sydney's housing. As a self-funded retiree I am one of those. The City of Sydney Council has a commitment to social mix and there are also many educational institutions close to Harold Park. For more sustainable development the Sydney population density will need to be greater and there is plenty of room for this because 80% of suburban streets are currently protected from increased density and most of their dwellings are free standing single or two storey houses. The current tendency is for this kind of development to spread out towards the Blue Mountains and North and South, because builders tell me this is the cheapest way of building because of all the dysfunctional government regulation and related incentives. One does not have to be a supporter of high rise construction to see that much more dense urban development is better for more sustainable development. The availability of good transport to big parks is also vital.

The current building on Harold Park is huge, but tucked unobtrusively under a cliff. Superficially it seems a perfect site and building for refurbishment. To pull down buildings unnecessarily seems comparatively unsustainable to me. Architectural beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I speak as one who hates all the ugly, vulgar, exorbitantly priced, half-empty, giant, freezing cold or overheated hotels built all over the world before the financial crisis. The only Sydney buildings I find truly memorable are the Opera House and the Westin Hotel. While I love and remember many of the major parks of Sydney and London, many of the more recently celebrated buildings of London and Paris appear as giant monstrosities to me. Although I find the older buildings in Paris are often incredibly beautiful, the comparatively few big parks that all Parisians have to make do with appear greatly under threat. The main reason I live in my Glebe townhouse is because my third floor bedroom is surrounded by beautiful trees in which birds and possums often cavort. I am also very close to Glebe Pt. Road, parks, Sydney University and always walk to town. I bet many others would prefer to live in the inner city too.

The renovation of the historic tram sheds at Harold Park and all related commercial or voluntary development could be undertaken in a primary context of green space and low income housing. Personally, I would love to see planting and breeding to support and show native species to the public. Stanley Park, which does this in Vancouver, is one of the loveliest I've ever seen. At a City of Sydney Good Neighbour barbecue in Foley Park

on 1.10.09, I saw a blue tongue lizard, a bearded dragon, a ring tail possum and a tawny frog-mouth shown to many interested children and adults by Josh Baker from Australian Wildlife Displays. Tourists would love more of this and without an attempt at rescuing endangered species, the local cats and dogs will continue to destroy all our wildlife, as the human population grows. Sprawling building on the city edge is no help.

Jeff Lord of DBL property, a consultant to the Club for the sale of Harold Park, has offered to take anybody who wants to see it over the site. I would like to go again with him and he welcomes many others also. When shall we go?

The Environmental Defenders Office has a free workshop entitled Reconnecting the Community with the Planning System on Wed.18/11/09 at the Mitchell Theatre, Level 1, 280 Pitt St. from 5pm – 9pm. Contact daveb@tec.org.au or on (02)9261 3437.

A submission which addresses the treatment of the family home and some key questions posed during the current Review into the Governance, Efficiency, Structure and Operation of Australia's Superannuation System (2009) and related inquiries is attached. Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. **Who ideally deals with it?**

Yours truly, Carol O'Donnell, NSW 2037.