

NEUTRAL PRECINCT AGM MINUTES

Tuesday 10 May 2022, commenced at 7:10 pm

1. Apologies: Councillor Welch, Councillor Drummond, CM
2. Additional items added to the Agenda (see agenda item 8. General Business)
 - i. Proposed additional rate variation
 - ii. Traffic and parking issues in Neutral Bay
 - iii. NSW Government proposed extended hours of construction
 - iv. DA113/2022 29 Yeo Street Neutral Bay
 - v. National Trust event at the Cremorne Orpheum on 30 May
3. Business from minutes of meeting held on 12 April 2021:
 - i. Following review, the minutes were moved by TM and seconded by EC as correct.
 - ii. Council written responses to motions of April meeting:
Parking Meters: In response to the Precinct's motion seeking 15-minute free parking across commercial areas, Council's Traffic & Parking Support Officer advised that the minimum payment time at Council parking meters is not 1 hour. Parking for periods of less than 1 hour is already available at a pro rata rate at all meters.

DA 8/2022, 96-98 Ben Boyd Road Neutral Bay. In response to the Precinct's motion that the vehicle entrance /exit be reversed and seeking an understanding of car lift regulations, Council's Assessment Planner has advised that this DA is under consideration by Council's Traffic & Transport Operations Department regarding site specific concerns; Planners are awaiting minutes from the Design Excellence Panel which met 10 May 2022; and generally, Council is supportive of car lifts, however they need to demonstrate that queuing within the street or road is not detrimental to sight lines and traffic flows. Some sites are not suitable for car lifts.

4. Council decision on Young Street Plaza
Noted that on 26 April Council resolved to reject all tenders for the Young Street Plaza construction and re-open Young Street to traffic. The Mayor is to meet with Transport for NSW (TfNSW) to discuss alternate options within the Military Road Corridor including alternative options for Young Street with funding for the re-opening to be sourced from either TfNSW who funded the temporary closure or existing Council Engineering budget.

The vote for: Councillors Baker, Beregi, Bourke, Lamb, Santer, Welch and Spenceley.
The vote against: Councillors Drummond, Gibson and Mutton.

Councillor Drummond, was invited but unable to attend the meeting and provided a note to the Precinct on Young Street Plaza. The note was read out at the meeting and is attached to the minutes. Attachment 1.

Discussion points:

- It is understood TfNSW provided Council with an amount to improve/upgrade pedestrian facilities along the Military Road Corridor following the B1 project. Council allocated \$1.9m from this money to develop the Plaza and this money will probably have to be returned if the Plaza does not proceed. If the money is returned there would be a cost of around \$100,000 to Council to re-open the street.
- NB, along the Military Road corridor, has very limited open space. Many NB residents are already being disadvantaged by the widening of the Warringah Freeway losing small green spaces in Merlin Street South and half of Cammeray Golf Club. Now we are losing Young Street. It will be years of consultation before we get another open space plan.
- The overall look of the temporary construction and its maintenance has created some negative comments about the Plaza. The whole area looks like it has been built by someone who doesn't want the Plaza to be permanent.
- It was suggested that Council look at the new Lane Cove Plaza as an example of a good community open space.
- One resident indicated that local community consultation by the Chamber of Commerce shows 3 to 1 support for the Plaza.
- Reduced parking availability in Young Street and increased traffic being directed to Waters Road have caused issues for some residents which indicates the need for an integrated traffic plan for the area.
- There doesn't immediately appear to be other options for new open space in the Town Centre. By also rescinding previous approval to the NB Town Centre Plan because of resounding community disapproval to the inclusion of 12 storey development on some sites, this meant the proposed Plaza to replace the Grosvenor Street car park has also been lost. It's a great shame Council, in response to community concerns about significant overdevelopment in the area just didn't reject the 12 floor build height proposals aspect of the Plan.
- Residents commented that by installing the Plaza we are moving towards a 'Village feel'.
- It was recommended everyone write to all Councillors in support of retaining the Plaza
- In relation to the Warringah Freeway widening/tunnels projects it was acknowledged that the Council is doing its best to negotiate with TfNSW about issues. The proposals amount to some 5,000 pages of project 7 construction detail. Because of this, Council is primarily focussed on the impact of the significant changes in Berry Street and to Cammeray Golf Club.
- Residents who support the retention of the Plaza were advised to write to all Councillors and to sign the Neutral Bay Chamber of Commerce petition. A copy of the petition was made available at the meeting.

MOTION

The Neutral Precinct supports the retention of the Young Street Plaza.

Vote: For – 13

Abstain - 1

5. Pedestrian safety issues

TM raised the issue of metal plates over utilities sites on footpaths indicating some plates have become sooth creating a trip/slip hazards for pedestrians. He advised

that, after some lengthy negotiation with Council officers that they have agreed to look at the issue and liaise with Telstra, the owners of the plates, if they consider necessary.

6. Report from April Combined Precincts' meeting

GC reported that new Mayor Zoe Baker attended the meeting and spoke of her support of the Precinct System as a genuine method of consultation; her commitment to open space in North Sydney (including being against overdevelopment); the opportunity to pressure the State Government to seek changes in planning controls for heritage/planning proposals and pushing back regarding Cammeray Park. Mayor Baker is in the office every Friday and her door is open and visitors welcome.

GC provided the background on the Cammeray Golf Club being significantly impacted by the widening of the Warringah Freeway to allow for the Western Harbour Tunnel and the Beaches Link Tunnel. The lease of the property to the Council has been returned to the Government. The widening of the Freeway/tunnels projects will mean excising nearly half the area. The Golf Club will be reduced to 70% of its size but still hoping to provide 9 holes and tunnel/freeway maintenance buildings will be erected on the remainder.

7. Development Applications

- i. DA 295/2021: 104 Wycombe Road Neutral Bay. Amended plans. Alterations and additions to existing dwelling house and construction of swimming pool. Noted. No affected resident attended the meeting
- ii. DA 106/2022: 76 Ben Boyd Road Neutral Bay. Demolishment of existing dwelling houses and construction of four dual occupancy dwellings and associated works on four recently approved Torrens lots.

Discussion points:

- Noted the site is the joining of 74 and 76 Ben Boyd Road currently comprising 2 separate dwellings
 - The proposal is for 8 residences each with a double garage.
 - It was acknowledged that this type of development is not required to provide visitor parking, however, while there is unrestricted parking in this section of Ben Boyd Road residents know it is very difficult to find a parking space.
- iii. DA 67/2021/2: 22-26 Spruson Street. Modification of consent to change approved materials for a residential development. Noted. No affected resident attended the meeting
 - iv. DA113/2022 – 29 Yeo Street Neutral Bay. Replace an existing portico with a new metal portico. Noted. No affected resident attended the meeting

8. General Business

i. Proposed additional rate variation

Noted that the April meeting of Council approved by exception to apply to IPART for a 1.9% increase in rates in addition to the 7% already approved.

Discussion points

- Unlike the extensive community consultation on the 7% rate rises cumulative over three years here has been no community consultation on the proposed additional amount of 1.9%.
- ii. Traffic and parking issues in Neutral Bay
 - A resident advised that parking is becoming very difficult in Spruson Street due to increased number of commuters parking in the street to avoid restricted parking between Spruson St and Military Road

MOTION:

That the Council consider installing restricted parking between 1 and 9 Spruson Street, on one side of the road only.

Vote: unanimous

- iii. NSW Government proposed extended hours of construction. Discussion deferred to June meeting.
 - iv. DA113/2022 29 Yeo Street Neutral Bay - see above item 7iv.
 - v. National Trust event at the Cremorne Orpheum on 30 May at 6:30 pm. Tickets available from the Orpheum box office. Dr Ian Hoskins North Sydney Historian and Dr Peter Sheridan AM, renowned Art Deco expert, will discuss and take questions on the history of the Orpheum cinema. Noted
9. Upcoming meetings noted:
- i. Neutral Precinct - 14 June. www.neutralprecinct.com
 - ii. Council - 23 May. www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au

10. AGM Office Bearers election

The Returning Officer, Mr TM, declared the office bearer positions of Co- Chair (2) and Secretary vacant.

Two nominations for the two positions of Co-Chair were received from Dr. Efi Carr and Mr Glen Curyer. As the only candidates they were declared elected.

One nomination for the position of Secretary was received from Ms. Cathy Peters. As the only candidate she was declared elected.

The meeting closed at 8:40pm

Attachment 1: Note from Councillor Dr Alayna Drummond regarding Young Street Plaza

To the Neutral Precinct,

I wish I could be there this evening to discuss with you the Neutral Bay Plaza. Unfortunately, I am unwell and in isolation, so I am sending this note in my absence.

As one of the most proximate Precincts to Young Street, I commend your logical and rational analysis of the Neutral Bay Plaza and note your show of support for the project. I too am passionate about retaining this valuable space for our community.

As a lifetime nearby resident, I can confidently say that we have waited too long for Neutral Bay to be improved. Our most recent community consultation showed that public open space is our highest priority in Neutral Bay (70% of respondents). Despite the fact that many candidates advocated for public open space during the recent election campaign, I was shocked to see a bloc vote of 6 against this proposal. The arguments presented against the project simply do not stack up and the community consultation shows 3:1 support for the project. In alignment with democratic processes we should be making decisions based on majority support, backed by sound planning and data. All of these are outlined below.

I acknowledge that new Councillors were asked to make a decision on the Plaza before having seen the detailed reports submitted during the past term, including a 250-page traffic study over multiple time periods (including pre-covid), a human movement study and several detailed community feedback studies. That is why we are bringing this project back for a second time, so that fellow Councillors may this time make a fully informed decision based on facts, not anecdotes. In my opinion, some have been given inaccurate, exaggerated or misleading information that has unduly swayed their view of this project and led them to ignore the majority support of our community for the Plaza.

Given the Neutral Bay Plaza was fully approved last year, our community have been quietly waiting for the permanent Plaza to be built. I do not believe that our community felt it necessary to lobby their local Councillors about the Plaza as it had already been endorsed. Hence the decision to cancel the Plaza has been so confusing for so many residents.

I have summarised below my own views on the benefits of the Plaza. I have also included a breakdown of various criticisms of the Young Street Plaza that I believe to be untrue, based on my knowledge of the project.

Why should we keep Young Street Plaza?

- Better public transport flow (less cars slowing to turn left across military rd bus lane)
- Safer pedestrian movement (less roads to cross - particularly important for our elderly, young children, vision impaired, disabled, reduced mobility...)

- **Free place to gather** (cafes are only other alternative, obligation to spend money)
- Only sunny public open space on Neutral Bay North military road corridor (only alternatives are benches in the carpark, or children's playground)
- Our community wants it!! (3:1 community support for the Plaza in public consultation – surely we need to listen to what our community say? Isn't that the point of community consultation?)
- Most negative comments about the plaza relate to aesthetics, but this has all been addressed in the permanent design. The current temporary Plaza was built to have a short lifespan, 3 months, using materials that can be upcycled in other locations for sustainability. To enable longer community consultation, the trial period was extended (through the La Nina summer rains). It has now been there for over 18mths, coming up to 2years, and so looks tired, but the permanent construction will be high quality with durable materials.
- The Plaza includes a lot of new trees. And for anyone who is concerned by astro turf or paving (designed-in for durability) we can make it greener! More lawn, more plants, why not?

Debate

There are many excuses being thrown around by a vocal minority who are calling for the Plaza to be removed. These claims are misguided at best, and misleading at worst. As an informed Councillor who has been at every information session related to this plaza, on the past and current Councils, and read all our detailed planning documents, I call out the below misinformation:

Firstly, some people are suggesting that we can simply divert the funds elsewhere, to another “better” project in the area. Apart from the fact that the State Government funding deed states clearly that this is not an option, even if it were an option, it would take years and hundreds of thousands of dollars to redesign, develop, consult and fund another such plaza. And why would we do that when we have the Young Street Plaza designed, funded, approved and shovel ready NOW? To throw out such an advanced project is wasteful to say the least. Why would we not just tweak it so that we are all satisfied with the outcome? For the record, other surrounding streets such as Waters Road were analysed early in the process and discounted for multiple reasons including their significantly higher traffic flow.

Secondly, some people are incorrectly suggesting that Young Street Plaza could restrict our ability to create the Grosvenor (Woolworths carpark) Plaza in the future. Or that it is somehow “one or the other”. This is simply not true; the two projects are entirely independent of one another. We can have both. Why would we not aim for both??? Let's keep the Young Street Plaza and use it to gain momentum for the Grosvenor Plaza! Let's make Neutral Bay a series of plazas and parks! Sure, we can delay, again, and wait for the “bigger picture planning” before building Young Street Plaza, but by then we won't have the State funds to build it, so it is a moot point.

For the record, re-opening the Young Street Plaza will not fix the “Woolworths Truck problem”. The Grosvenor Woolworths loading zone is notoriously bad. Everyone has watched the Woolworths trucks do 10 point turns to get into the narrow carpark driveway. What will solve the Woolworths truck issue is the redevelopment of the Coles/Woolworths site so that the loading is correctly placed on the wider Grosvenor Street. All traffic studies over multiple years point to this solution. When this happens, the correct traffic flow will be along Ben Boyd Road, then Grosvenor Street – which the Young Street Plaza supports and enables.

Public open space is hard to get, and hard to fund. The Young Street Plaza is ~700sqm. Some say this is too small, but by comparison, our upcoming Hume Street Park expansion project adds approximately the same, ~800sqm (stage 1). That project has taken 10 years to acquire land / design / plan / fund and stage 1 is costing \$16m of ratepayer money (plus \$3.5m of State grant money). By comparison, the Young Street Plaza is costing \$1.9m (in addition to the initial ~\$500k that included surrounding infrastructure upgrade repaving the footpaths, drainage and lighting – all permanent work), is fully funded by the State Government and has taken 4 years. That is a great example of creative, successful public open space planning.

Thirdly, some people are suggesting that there have been adverse traffic impacts as a result of Young Street Plaza, or that there were no traffic studies completed (during regular traffic periods). The plaza is supported by ample traffic flow data during normal traffic flow, prior to covid, and the rerouting of traffic has been accommodated comfortably over the past years. Single negative traffic incidents have been exaggerated and claimed to reflect regular traffic flow. One car speeding or one truck taking a wrong turn does not reflect the status quo. It is easy to find singular negative examples; we need to focus on the overall context, which is a safe, pedestrianised zone in the heart of Neutral Bay that has full solar access to the North.

Addressing any remaining community concerns

Some are concerned by Astro Turf in the current design. It was chosen for durability but can be easily swapped out for natural grass.

Some people say traffic has increased down Grosvenor Lane shared zone. There are mixed views on this, but we have control of that shared zone so let's make it residential traffic only.

Some are concerned by the container/café. It was added simply for optionality (community usage) but is non-essential and easy to remove from the scheme.

Some are concerned about talk of a 'road' running through the Plaza. For the record, there is no internal road – there is a level, emergency vehicle access way to enable emergency access if required (like we do with all public spaces, including parks). At all other times this will be blocked with bollards and that space forms part of the level plaza, for public pedestrian use.

Cr Dr Alanya Drummond