

1960

**SYDNEY'S FUTURE**

**The Job that Lies Ahead**

**By**

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The present is a time of great opportunity and of great challenge for the leading men of Sydney.

It's a time of great opportunity to re-develop those large sections of our central business district and of our inner ring of suburbs which have decayed and which are crying out for replacement. Opportunity comes at the present time because of our general prosperity and unprecedented economic expansion. Most importantly, opportunity exists today because public opinion has come to want and to expect big, beautiful and spectacular achievements in urban redevelopment.

It's a time of challenge because of the size and complexity of the problems involved. Firstly, there are forty or more thousand sub-standard or slum dwellings, mostly 50 or 60 years old, in the inner ring of suburbs around the city core. This decayed ring spreads in and around the boundaries of the City of Sydney, overlapping into Woolahra, Randwick, Botany, Marrickville, Leichhardt and North Sydney. As time goes by, even if those first forty thousand dwellings are replaced, more and more dwellings and districts, in the next concentric ring further out, will slowly but surely pass into decay and will require replanning and re-building. Therefore, the longer we delay, the larger the problem becomes.

Not only do we have a backlog of slum clearance to catch up with, but we need to put back into the cleared areas many more people than are living there today. Especially do we need to increase our inner area densities because our metropolitan population is expected to double to four million within 40 years - that is, within the time it takes to pay off an ordinary mortgage. So we have to ask ourselves, concerning each project which we plan today - will this be a good project 40 years hence when it's finally paid for and when the population of Sydney has doubled?

We are challenged also by the need for radical transformations in our commercial city core. Our downtown area needs most careful and imaginative planning if it is to preserve its long-term prosperity in the face of suburban competition and if it is to preserve and enhance those special qualities which make it attractive as a place to visit, work and do business in.

Judging from the present pace of new building in central Sydney, there doesn't seem to be any doubt that the city core and the decayed inner suburbs will in fact be largely rebuilt, somehow or other, over the next twenty years. The key phrase is that "somehow or other". The net result of all the frenzied rebuilding work could make Sydney much worse than it is today. Twenty years hence, men might look back and blame Sydney's leaders of the early nineteen sixties for their shortsightedness.

A twenty year period of imaginative and carefully considered urban renewal, in and around the City of Sydney, could transform this city into as great and as fine a place as could be found anywhere in the world. But a haphazard, unplanned rebuilding process could very easily make it one of the worst.

This, then, is the opportunity and the challenge before us.

The rate of progress and innovation in our manner of planning and building cities has been allowed to lag behind progress and change in the production of consumer goods and in the organisation of our industrial and business affairs. While business, industry, transport and communications have moved beyond anything which could reasonably have been predicted 30 or 40 years ago, our cities have not changed nearly so much. They have certainly grown in size, but have not yet been basically transformed in response to the revolutionary changes so obvious elsewhere in our way of life. Our cities are still arranged as they were in the horse-and-buggy days.

If therefore we are to face up to the job of gradually reshaping the inner areas of Sydney, we must adapt ourselves to new ways of thinking about city planning, urban design and about the organisation and financing of city development.

The old way of building one small, single structure, even a conventional limit-height office block or a tall block of home-units, on a relatively tiny lot, wedged in between two other small structures, all facing onto a hopelessly outmoded street, is as obsolete as the hansom cab. The motor-car has come to stay. We have to provide properly for it with ring and radial expressways such as are planned for Sydney, with a ring of major parking stations around the city core such as are now beginning to be provided by the City Council. Having provided properly for the motor car we must then keep it firmly in its place, by setting aside special networks of spaces purely for the use of pedestrians. We can only do all these things properly by designing large pieces of a city to a co-ordinated plan.

Regardless of who ultimately builds a particular building, regardless of how or in what stages we finance and construct these large comprehensive developments, we must plan and design them as a whole. We face the same necessity for large scale design and comprehensive planning in both our commercial centre and in our adjacent living areas.

So far, town planning in N. S. W. has not been pushed past the stage of two-dimensional zoning. This type of coloured paperwork is too simple to have any real relevance to the problems which

arise in a metropolitan centre like the City of Sydney. The only element in the present City of Sydney Planning Scheme which has positive significance is the network of expressways which are now being analysed and designed in detail. Why should not our housing problem receive the same comprehensive and detailed analysis and overall design as is given to our expressways system?

The simple, two-dimensional zoning technique may work in less complicated suburban areas, but it breaks down badly in a metropolitan centre.

In the centre of a big city, rigid separation of land-uses in different zones is often undesirable as well as impracticable. The Astor home-unit block on Macquarie Street is not less desirable because it stands between a government block and a row of professional offices, facing the Conservatorium of Music. Similarly, the State Government will allow a mixture of residential, commercial, warehouse, retail, hotel and cultural uses to be included in any redevelopment scheme for the Rocks area, provided that the area is "predominantly" residential and that all the buildings are built according to a single comprehensive design.

To take another example of mixed uses, Woolloomooloo could be redeveloped as a whole by terracing out from the high land along William and Victoria Streets. Concrete platforms could be built which would create a new ground level at a height making it possible for anyone to walk easily from flats on Woolloomooloo to the shopping centre at King's Cross. This new raised ground level could carry a mixture of tall and low residential flats and row houses, set among pedestrian spaces and gardens.

Underneath the platform, all vehicular service and parking facilities could be located, together with a large number of commercial and light industrial businesses, and perhaps also stores, even Naval Stores. Such a scheme would fit neither pure residential zoning nor purely commercial or industrial zoning; yet if it were designed well, it could satisfy all the practical, financial and aesthetic requirements of city development. Such a scheme would represent a series of land-use zones stacked on top of each other. It could save an enormous amount of resumption expense if many existing commercial and light-industrial businesses could be relocated inside Woolloomooloo without hurting the amenity of the new residential area.

There are many other districts around the Sydney city core where a comprehensively designed redevelopment scheme could reap benefits and savings which could never be achieved through

the old-fashioned, haphazard way of allowing bits and pieces of isolated building on individual lots. These districts of the City include Paddington, Darlinghurst, Surrey Hills, Redfern, Waterloo, Darlington, Camperdown, Newtown, Forest Lodge, The Glebe and other special areas such as The Rocks, the Haymarket, the University, the Technical College, the State Government block between Macquarie Street and the Domain, and the Civic Centre area around the Town Hall and the Queen Victoria Building.

Areas such as these form natural districts, often separated from one another by expressways. Each can only be treated effectively as a whole, as the natural land-development unit that it is. Each requires intelligent and detailed survey and analysis to determine which buildings should be demolished, which ones can be renovated, how many people would need rehousing, what kind of new housing they would prefer and where they would like to have it, what rents they could afford to pay, how many extra residents could be brought into the area, what sort of extra community facilities would be required and many other items of information which must be made available before any kind of intelligent decision can be made about what to build and where to build it.

The next step is the replanning and redesign of the district as a whole, in outline fashion, marking the major traffic routes to be improved, the minor streets to be closed, setting out a network of pedestrian ways and spaces, and showing the location, spacing, shape and approximate size of major buildings to be built for different purposes.

Such a neighborhood rehabilitation and redevelopment scheme would cover a large area. In Woolloomooloo, for example, it would cover about 30 or more acres. Actual implementation of such a large scheme would be divided into stages so that the rehousing of existing residents and businesses, the demolition and reconstruction works and so on, can proceed in orderly stages, with separate sections being financed and managed under different sponsors. This kind of dividing up of a neighborhood project into different sections and stages would normally be a division into separate superblocks, separated from each other by important roads. But in the case of the scheme for Woolloomooloo which I described to you, where different things were planned for different levels, the construction and financing of the whole project could first be divided into two parts, one being the commercial part below the new ground level platform, the other part being the residential structures and gardens above the platform. In that case, the lower part might be done by private enterprise, and the upper part by, say, co-operative societies, the City Council, an insurance company or a private developer.

But notwithstanding the gradual nature of actual rebuilding and notwithstanding the participation of several different sponsors and developers, (some governmental, some institutional, some private) each neighbourhood should be planned as a whole from the beginning. Only this kind of overall thinking and organising from the beginning can produce an efficient and economical development. Only in this way can we stretch our slender resources to cover the large area involved. Only in this way can we achieve finally a truly "model" neighbourhood which will be worth boasting about, worth looking at and worth living in. Only by careful planning can we ensure that we don't make the existing residents of these inner suburbs more unhappy than they ever were before.

Land-uses in the new projects must be properly related to each other; opportunities for good views must be created and protected; traffic and parking facilities must be co-ordinated and residential groupings must be insulated from heavy traffic flows. The ultimate loadings on underground public utilities must be forecast in advance of land clearance so that proper adjustments can be made to them early and at the least cost.

Existing tenants and owners will need to be consulted on problems regarding their relocation. Some will want to find a permanent new location somewhere else, others will want temporary accommodation until they can move back into the redeveloped area. Before any demolitions can take place, it may be necessary to find or to build a housing project specially to accommodate those people who are temporarily displaced by a redevelopment project. This special accommodation would then house a new batch of tenants each year, as block by block demolition and redevelopment took place. The whole problem of rehousing could be overcome early in the process if a big enough surplus of new dwelling units could be provided in the first project ... sufficient to rehouse all those displaced from the original substandard houses and also sufficient to rehouse permanently those displaced from the next project as well. Then each new project should provide sufficient housing to accommodate those displaced by demolitions preparatory to the construction of the next one.

Great care will have to be taken to satisfy diverse groups of people of diverse income levels, by providing different types of row houses, low and high flats, small and large dwellings, so that the varied and interesting character of the inner city areas will be preserved. Above all, we must avoid the kind of dreary layout and dreary design which the Housing Commission has perpetrated in Redfern, for there the variety, stimulus and interest of the old area has been lost.

This brief run-through of some of the factors to be watched in

redevelopment planning is sufficient to show that there is a big and complex job ahead. Reshaping a city is not an enterprise to be entered into lightly or carelessly, because there are plenty of traps lying about for beginners. But fortunately for us here in Sydney, just about every mistake which can possibly be made in this sort of operation has already been made in Europe and the U.S.A. over the past 15 years. All we have to do is to learn from the record of experience, of success and failure, which has been laboriously compiled overseas. In this talk, the recommendations I am making are based on a study of similar operations in many parts of the world.

So far I have tried to indicate what needs to be done, to set a standard of achievement at which I feel we should aim. Now we must move on to discuss the political and financial ways and means of reaching those high objectives.

The job before us is a big one. The only way we can tackle it, with any expectation of reasonable success, is to mobilise all the resources of power, ability and money that we can find in our community, putting them to work in an orderly and imaginative fashion, in pursuit of a common goal. The job of planning and designing, followed by the job of programming, financing and building, are both of a larger scale than any single authority or private developer can do, or can be trusted to do, alone.

The Americans call this job "Urban Renewal" and they define it as "the systematic application of all the powers of government, in partnership with private enterprise, to the reshaping of the urban environment to better meet the needs of modern society, with special reference to the obsolete and decaying areas of cities, where the immediate need and opportunity is greatest."

I now propose to give you some actual examples of what this definition means in practice. I would like to tell you briefly what has happened in two U.S. cities where private business leaders have gone into partnership with local government in sponsoring and organising urban redevelopment.

One, in New Haven, is an example of urban renewal where the leadership came from and remains with the Mayor of the city. The other, in Baltimore, is one where the initial leadership and the real work have both been given by private citizens and businesses. These two cases are typical of others throughout the country.

Mayor Richard Lee of New Haven was the first U.S. city mayor to make urban renewal the cornerstone of his career. In the early fifties he decided that here was an issue capable of winning elections and building a reputation. He proved the first point in

1953 by winning election as Democratic mayor of New Haven, the first Democrat to win for many, many years.

He then set up a Citizen's Action Commission, which has a small executive committee and six sub-committees. The sub-committees deal with:

(1) Metropolitan planning, (2) Human values -- health welfare, recreation and social problems, (3) Industrial and Harbor development, (4) Housing, (5) Education and (6) The Central Business District, traffic and parking.

Members of the professions, union representatives, clergy, managers and executives, newspaper men, and minority groups are on these committees, each of which has a membership of about 100 people!

The central committee comprises nine presidents of banking, insurance and business corporations, the President of Yale University, the Dean of the Yale Law School, district leaders of the A.F.L. and of the C.I.O. labor organisations, two civil servants, three lawyers, and a high school headmaster. Each of the sub-committees is represented on the central committee.

The central committee functions as a Mayor's 'Citizen Cabinet' on the City's Development Program. It meets monthly in the Mayor's office, where plans are presented and given detailed consideration. This committee is made up of influential citizens. They are non-partisan in party politics. They are accustomed, however, to large operations and quick decisions and are invaluable to the city government in assessing and promoting the various projects. Their prestige gives impressive support to urban renewal.

These men represent the real 'power structure' of New Haven. Nothing really big could get done anyway without the joint support of both the financial institutions and the labour organisations. So it's really the most practical thing to get these people into the planning process right from the start.

The Federal Administrator of the U.S. Urban Renewal Authority has described the urban renewal program being carried out by New Haven as "spectacular, imaginative, exciting and comprehensive - a model for urban renewal in the cities of America".

In Baltimore in 1954, the city's merchants realised that suburban shopping centres were draining away their trade. Downtown retail trade had dropped by 19 per cent in seven years, in the same way that Sydney's city retail trade had been dropping. A merchants' committee was formed but the head of this committee soon discovered, as he said, that "downtown decay is



not just a retailer's problem". A new organisation, the Committee for Downtown, was set up with a levy against the members of one-tenth of one per cent of the assessed value of their property. About the same time, the Greater Baltimore Committee, a group widely representative of business, commerce and industry, was being set up to advance the fortunes of Baltimore and the metropolitan area that surrounds it. The population of the Baltimore metropolitan region is about 1,700,000, only slightly smaller than Sydney.

These two organisations, one for the central city, one for the metropolitan area, got together and financed a joint Planning Council, which hired a staff of city planners. The planners set about a two year study of the central business district, and came up with a Master Plan, all for the expenditure of only \$150,000. The plan was prepared in close collaboration with the City's official City Planning Department, and other government agencies.

The Planning staff then went on to work out details of a commercial project covering nine blocks in the centre of the city, which has come to be called "Charles Center".

Charles Center covers 22 acres right in the middle of downtown, where the financial center and the shopping center overlap. Baltimore's about the same size of Sydney, so that's the equivalent of a 22 acre site here somewhere around Hunter Street or King Street.

Only 5 existing buildings are to be kept, the remainder will be replaced with eight new office buildings, an 800 bedroom hotel, a television centre, and an underground parking station for 4,000 cars.

Most of the existing streets will be closed and discarded. The area will be divided into several pedestrian precincts, with parks and malls.

The total cost of Charles Centre was estimated at \$127 million, of which \$35 or \$40 million were to be in necessary public works which would have to be done by the City of Baltimore. The remaining \$80 million is to come from private investment. Now this is commercial redevelopment, which is rather difficult, although not impossible, to have subsidised by the Federal Government. So the Baltimore people decided that they didn't want to even try for Federal help; they would rather do the job entirely themselves.

The plan and the proposal for Charles Center were presented to the public at a City Council meeting on March 8th, 1958. The Council soon agreed to back the plan and do its share of the necessary public works. The City went to the voters to gain approval of a \$35 million bond issue to finance the city's share. In November,

1958, the bond issue was passed at the polls by a resounding majority. The Council and the Committee for Downtown are now working on the details of implementing and building Charles Center.

Charles Center is a good example of the only proper way to build cities in this second half of the twentieth century. The old way of building one small structure on a tiny lot wedged in between two other small structures, all facing onto a hopelessly outmoded street, is as obsolete as the hansom cab. The motor car has come to stay. We have to provide properly for it, and then to keep it in its place. We can only provide properly for it by comprehensively designing large pieces of a city to a co-ordinated plan. And we face the same necessity for large-scale design and comprehensive planning in trying to deal with our inner-area housing and slum-clearance problems.

The planning and design know-how is there if we choose to take advantage of it. But we don't yet have in Sydney the new type of civic organisation which is necessary to sponsor, promote and then to implement and build the plans and designs. This lack of organisation is now the major blockage to the proper renewal of our city.

Let us therefore give very serious thought to that definition of Urban Renewal: "the systematic application of all the powers of government, in partnership with private enterprise, to the reshaping of the urban environment to better meet the needs of modern society, with special reference to the obsolete and decaying areas of cities, where the immediate need and opportunity is greatest."

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