

Rezoning submission

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It is reprehensible that the NSW Government, which claims to be committed to proper urban planning, is now forcing the spot rezoning of the Crows Nest Metro Station site to permit the massive overdevelopment of this small site. Worse still the process is a box ticking exercise and an abuse of the rezoning process because the government has already made up its mind that this will happen. Even before this rezoning process is complete, the government has lodged its concept plan for the site. The whole so-called 'community consultation' has been a farce from beginning to the pre-determined end.

The proposed spot rezoning to permit very high rise residential and car parking in a retail and commercial zone is wrong from any perspective. It is the crudest use of the power of government to finance an infrastructure project with no constructive thinking of the clever ways to add civic value.

Spot rezoning is the worst form of zoning because it is done without regard to region wide infrastructure and interrelated land use planning. We have a planning process for the Crows Nest and St Leonards region which has been proceeding for at least 18 months developing area character statements based on community input. This process has of course included the Metro site which in the context of that planning process has up until just 4 months ago, been depicted in the community consultation as a likely four storey commercial development with open space appropriate for a transport centre. The process is producing the planning brief for the area and the response period is appropriately by February 2019. Spot rezoning rips the Metro site out of that process and rushes the process with a response deadline of 3 December, a full 2 months prior.

The current zoning for this site as part of the retail and commercial medium rise district is entirely appropriate and consistent with the remainder of the Crows Nest retail and commercial district of which it has always formed a part for at least 60 years. That district appropriately stands alongside the medium density residential development to the west of the Highway in Wollstonecraft which forms an attractive and valued neighbourhood. The current zoning contributes to the variety of the retail and commercial opportunities in Crows Nest while maintaining the low to medium rise, open sky amenity of the area.

Then suddenly in July 2018 the government having massively expanded the powers of its Sydney Metro agency under the Transport Administration Act, told the community all was to change and that 80 floors of residential and commercial development were to be imposed on the small block and a half by half a block Metro station site, soaring 27 storeys and taking away the sky to the east from Crows Nest and to the west from residential Wollstonecraft. The government then set about ramming through the rezoning and development proposals at breakneck speed for this decision to build two Blues Point towers and a 17 storey hotel on the site. The egregious dishonesty of the government in this process is well illustrated by the fact that the SEARs request from metro to the Department made no mention at all of the community outrage over the proposal

North Sydney Municipality is already well ahead in meeting the targets set for it for residential occupancy and the continuing need is to sustain the commercial and retail districts against the relentless pressure to push residential development into those districts. This has been the case for a long time.

The speculative foreign money pouring into Australia would turn the whole of the commercial zoning of North Sydney, Crows Nest, Gore Hill and Artarmon into speculative residential high rise sold off the plan under national foreign investment laws which have no regard to the damage being done by that uncontrolled influx of speculative capital to the quality of life in the Municipality.

So to change the zoning and begin the encroachment of residential development into the commercial retail area is wrong as it reduces the opportunity for employment, jobs creation and business development so fundamental to both the economy and good planning. And to massively raise the building height limits is wrong because it destroys the area character of the Crows Nest retail and commercial district with its medium rise density and results in totally unacceptable overshadowing and loss of open sky.

Families and businesses have made investment decisions in the area based on the current appropriate zoning and the protection that it provides for that investment. Use and height limits are the fundamental protections. For residential areas, those limits protect the ambience and amenity, most particularly the nature of the neighbourhood and exposure to light and sky. For commercial investors, knowing they are investing in a commercial district rather than a residential area is equally important because of the value added by locating among businesses.

I will not repeat the many detailed reasons in the submissions from community groups and informed individuals. The community outrage over this proposal is widespread and intelligent. It must not be swept aside by a government out of touch with its constituents.