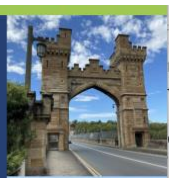
NORTHBRIDGE

PROGRESS ASSOCIATION



19 August 2025

NPA Submission on Proposed Reclassification of Northbridge Plaza Car Park

Summary

The Northbridge Progress Association Committee agrees with Willoughby City Council that the current situation with the Northbridge Plaza car park site is unsatisfactory and that our community could benefit from an appropriate redevelopment that better utilised the site. The Committee has previously been unwilling to agree to a reclassification of the Plaza car park site (and extinguishment of important covenants) without visibility of the redevelopment that was envisaged for the site. However, the Committee recognises the complexities inherent in dealing with multiple stakeholders and the complicated sequencing issues involved in reclassifying and rezoning the land, undertaking commercial negotiations with potential developers, responding to planning proposals, and so on. Accordingly, we are keen to discuss with Council whether there might be some specific ways in by which the Committee could be formally and closely involved in any subsequent planning and development discussions to represent the interests of our community. If we can be satisfied that we will be able to properly represent the interests of the community, we would be willing support Council beginning the process of reclassifying the site.

Background

The Northbridge Progress Association (NPA) is a 105-year-old, not-for-profit, volunteer association which advocates on behalf of Northbridge residents to preserve or improve the amenity and environment of our suburb.

The NPA Committee has a strong interest in planning and housing issues. The Committee has engaged over many years with councillors and staff of Willoughby City Councill (WCC) regarding the Northbridge Plaza car park site. The NPA has also commissioned analysis of the type of development that would be both economically feasible and welcomed by our community, drawing on relevant examples, such as the commercial centre of Lane Cove.

The Proposal

We appreciate that the proposed reclassification from community to operational land is just the first small step in a likely long process. The proposal would amend the WCC Local Environment Plan (LEP) but it does not change the height, scale or type of uses permissible on the land and it does not permit any specific development on the land. We note, however, that the proposed reclassification would also extinguish the covenants which state that the land must be used as a public carpark or public baby health centre. The possibility of a significant reduction in parking has in the past been a concern to our community.

Once the reclassification process is complete, we understand that Council would have more flexibility in how the land might be used and that Council might either

- Begin the process of further updating the LEP, with new planning controls (maximum building heights, maximum floor space ratios, etc) that would apply to any subsequent development by interested parties;
- Or, more likely, begin negotiating with parties that have interest in developing the site, with a view to agreeing to terms that could then feed into a planning proposal for a subsequently updated LEP.

In either case, we understand that there would be significant consultation with the community and assessment of potential benefits and impacts. And while it is not explicit, we proceed on an assumption that – notwithstanding the proposed removal of the covenant preventing uses other than car parking – any development would continue to ensure that community parking is available on the site.

Our Position

The NPA Committee agrees that the current car park is unsatisfactory and that the current utilisation of this well-located land is not optimal. Indeed, as noted above, we have engaged over many years with WCC councillors and staff regarding the site and have commissioned analysis of the type of development that would be both economically feasible and welcomed by our community.

We believe that the redevelopment of the Northbridge Plaza car park site offers an unprecedented opportunity. Redevelopment could contribute to a regeneration of our struggling commercial centre. It could also increase the diversity of housing in Northbridge and help fill the 'missing middle' in the existing dwelling stock in our area. It could enable more affordable housing for key workers and younger families, and housing suitable for downsizers to free up single-family homes for others. It could reverse the falling enrolments in our primary schools which have seen reduced teacher numbers at Northbridge Public School and the sudden announcement of the closure of St Phillip Neri Primary. A redevelopment could potentially also include retirement and aged-care components similar to those in the well-received Hyegrove (Willoughby) and Pathways (Northbridge) developments.

But any redevelopment must be 'density done well'. It should respect the nature of our suburb, in both scale and form. In addition, any agreement with developers should ensure developer contributions to the community that are commensurate with the benefits they are receiving from the agreement and any LEP changes. If this occurred, we believe that our community would be supportive of redevelopment of the Plaza car park site.

Accordingly, the NPA Committee is keen to be collaboratively involved in discussions about the future of the Northbridge Plaza car park site. We believe that it will be in the interests of the WCC, the owners of the Northbridge Plaza, and any potential developers to engage closely with the NPA to take advantage of the opportunities offered by a progress association that is open to progress and change. We note that the recent experience with the Quadrangle shopping centre in Castlecrag shows the very poor outcomes that can arise when efforts to reconcile the interests of the community, the owner/developer and the Council are not approached collaboratively.

The Committee has previously been unwilling to endorse WCC proposals to reclassify the car park site in the absence of (i) an acceptable LEP and (ii) a development agreement between Council and a developer who is willing to deliver a development in accordance with a Council-approved LEP that

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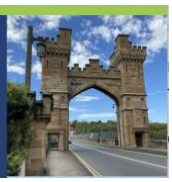

meets community expectations. We remain wary of the risk of agreeing to a reclassification without reassurance on those elements. However, we recognise that there may be intractable sequencing issues that may prevent successful negotiations on the various issues required to get a good outcome for our community.

Accordingly, we would be willing to modify our earlier position and to support Council commencing the current process if Council was able to provide reassurance that the NPA Committee would be invited and permitted to be closely involved in the subsequent planning and development discussions to represent the interests of our community. We would be happy to engage immediately with Council of a specific and formal role for the Committee, which we would propose should include representation in:

- Any developer tender committee that is formed
- Any design review panel that is formed
- Any other significant forums where the future of the site is discussed.

The NPA Committee looks forward to engaging with Council, ideally ahead of the Public Hearing on the reclassification on 24 September.

Best regards,

Rachel

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