

ISSUE 1918

# "In Support of Progress" Newsletter

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## Breaking News

## Building Heights

### **Breaking News**

Well well well. It has finally happened. The Premier has bitten the bullet, and the Health Minister is no longer the Health Minister. It was inevitable, it was just a matter of time, The Ministry was in a mess, the public had lost confidence in the way the Ministry was being run, and the situation had become terminal.

Now there is a relatively new face to manage this extraordinarily difficult portfolio, and no doubt there will be a honeymoon period while she gets her feet under the table. A person who may well have talent, but essentially inexperienced in governing. It's a tall order, a complex portfolio, emotionally charged. A huge task awaits her, and I wish her well. There will be a honeymoon period, but it won't last long. The demands are too immediate for that, and allowing more of the same is simply not an option, for her or for the government.

The former Minister remains in Cabinet however, and has been given the job of Infrastructure, Transport and State Growth (as well as Science and Technology – a strange choice considering his outlook on life). Let's hope he doesn't do to the economy what he did to health! The Premier has taken over Advanced Manufacturing and Defence Industries from the Deputy Premier, handing him Mental Health. So two senior leaders will have an ongoing interest in these major portfolios.

More news! Another Minister has resigned due to ill health and one more comes off the backbench to take on Local Government from the Treasurer. We might as well say "Farewell" to any rapid progress on the State Wide Planning Scheme.

One who was not given a Ministry was the Speaker, who has expressed her deep disappointment at being overlooked a second time. She is now considering her continuing membership of the government. Challenging. However, as talented as she may be, Cabinet is a team play, and the Speaker has allowed her independent streak to shine through time and time again. Ma'am, when you decide to be on the outer, you are on the outer. If you want to act independent, then be independent.

And once again it strikes home at the absurdity of a 25-person Parliament. The government is now very thin on the ground. A government elected with 13 members, promising stability, now struggling to hold itself together. And only two southern Ministers. Anyway, there goes the government's majority – uncertain times ahead.

### **Building Heights**

The issue of building heights has become a significant issue, with a poll of electors of Hobart asking 3 questions:

- 1 Do you support the Council's Planning Officer's recommendations re building height limits?
- 2 Would you prefer the building height limit in AREA 1 to be less than 60 metres?
- 3 Would you prefer no change?

Confusing questions in themselves.

Adding to the confusion is the fact that the poll only involves people on the Hobart City Council roll, it's voluntary, and it is not binding on the Council. In fact one Councillor has already come out and said he will take no notice of the result.

The Council has been forced to run this poll, at a cost of over \$200,000, because a petition calling for it was signed by a requisite number of voters (1000).

So what is this all about? It has come about because of proposals (by the Fragrance Group) to build high rise buildings in and around the city centre. Council rejected these proposals, but concern was expressed that there appeared to be a degree of discretion available to Council in making such decisions.

Central to this issue is a recommendation from the Hobart City Council's Planning **Committee** (NOT officers) that the height of all buildings should be restricted to 45 metres. There are buildings which already exceed that height and the fear expressed by many is that an uncertain and/or uncontrolled height limit will destroy the fabric of the city. Council rejected this recommendation.

The Council back in **2016** sought advice from Leigh Woolley, an architect and urban design consultant, who advised on the need to take a range of factors into account, such as form and density, as well as landform characteristics.

These concepts were accepted by Council and were written into the Council's Interim Planning Scheme as amendments to the Scheme, and these amendments were subsequently approved by the State's Planning Commission.

Council then sought further advice from Mr Woolley, who in **2018** provided a very detailed Building Height Standards Report, which took into account what could/should be built in particular parts of the city. **It truly is a seminal piece of work, and a vitally important planning document.** It is a must-read.

In particular he noted Hobart was not built on a flat landscape, but existed within a basin that reached up into the hills beyond. He expressed the view that there were 5 discrete zones ("cove floor", "escarpment", "cove face", "hill face", and "edge") and that developments in each of these zones should be sensitive to the specific characteristics of the site, as well as to their form and substance (eg height, bulk).

He emphasised in his Report the concept of a "central" zone lying between the "cove face" and the "hill face" zones (basically AREA 1), and of the type and form of developments that could occur in this zone, analysed block by block.

He made a specific recommendation that within the CBD the building height should not exceed 75 metres, due to visual amenity issues, and this recommendation has been taken up by supporters and critics alike without reference to other factors. Council officers, in a report to Council, recommended that this figure be reduced to 60 metres (a figure recommended by Woolley for different areas) and that recommendation was amended yet again by the Council's Planning Committee to 45 metres, (a figure also suggested by Woolley for yet other areas).

Council has yet to make a final decision on this matter. In fact Council has deferred a decision and called for more reports. Shambolic. The Woolley Report is more than sufficient. And the vacuum they have created is now being filled by this poll.

I support the Woolley Report recommendation. I believe further development can occur in the CBD without affecting the character and charm of the city, and that such guidelines, if accepted, would give proper guidance to developers.



This diagram, from the Woolley Report, shows the zones as outlined in the Report, together with existing buildings that already exceed his recommended height limits. *The full Report can be accessed on the Hobart City Council website.*

Before addressing the questions in the poll, allow me to make a further point.

The issue is not simply one of height. Form, structure and density also play a part, as does visual impact and visual amenity (described by Woolley as “view cones”). All are essential ingredients in this debate and these factors are at risk of being overlooked or discarded in a desire to set an overall maximum height limit for the city, and have been ignored in this poll.

The “K” block development at the Royal Hobart Hospital is a case in point. This monolithic structure is a 10-storey building and stands 68.5 metres tall. It abuts Campbell Street and dominates the surrounding landscape. But just imagine if a similar structure had been built in the middle of the block behind a three or a four-storey building. In such a circumstance the impact would be far less intrusive from a streetscape point of view, and its height would be a far more minimal intrusion.

In other words the nuance that was the driver behind the Woolley report is in danger of being lost altogether.

So to the poll. First, one should respond. A lack of response suggests a lack of interest, even if you don’t like the questions.

To question 1 YES – it supports the Woolley recommendations  
 To question 2 NO – Wooley’s recommendation is for a 60 metre height limit  
 To question 3 NO – Woolley’s recommendations are about change.

(NOTE: My thanks to Devine Real Estate for permission to reprint parts of an article that appeared recently in their monthly magazine.