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**Item No:** 9.2  
**Subject:** **RESPONSE TO THE NSW GOVERNMENT'S DESPERATE RAIL AND HOUSING PLANS FOR WOOLLAHRA**  
**Author:** Sarah Swan, Councillor

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**Purpose of the Report:**

The purpose of this Mayoral Minute is to respond to Sunday's announcement by the NSW Premier on the opening the abandoned Woollahra rail station and forging ahead with developer-led plans for 10,000 new homes in Woollahra and Edgecliff, without any community consultation or adherence to good metropolitan planning principles.

On behalf of Council I intend to use all available powers to lobby on behalf of our community for the best possible outcome and a seat at the planning table so we can demonstrate our willingness to respond to housing supply challenges in a way that does not sacrifice local heritage, infrastructure, environmental and social benefits for the community and the long term future of our local government area.

I intend to seek answers to questions relating to the lack of strategic planning and consultation and to ask how the Government intends to deliver such an increase in dwellings in a heritage conservation area in a way that will also make these apartments affordable for young people and their families.

**Recommendation:**

THAT Council:

1. Endorse the Mayor seeking an urgent meeting with the NSW Minister for Planning and Public Spaces to advocate for our position and secure a seat at the planning table.
2. Requests the Premier and Minister for Transport and Roads release the business case and details of public funds to be used for the construction of the Woollahra station including the relevant Government P90 cost estimate.
3. Requests the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces immediately turn off the Low and Mid-Rise Housing Policy plans for Edgecliff and Double Bay, noting that it is the policy of this Government to turn off the Low and Mid-Rise Housing Policy (LMR) where a transit orientated development is proposed.
4. Requests the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces immediately puts a hold on the progress of any state significant development within the proposed areas to be rezoned.
5. Requests the Mayor and General Manager seek legal advice on our avenues to challenge the proposed plans.
6. Requests the Mayor write to the Member for Vaucluse, the Member for Wentworth and the Member for Sydney for an urgent meeting to discuss the government's announcement and its impact on our local community.

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**Discussion:**

## **The Premier's announcement**

Yesterday's announcement by the Minns Labor Government to redevelop the abandoned Woollahra railway station and rezone land around the site and Edgecliff station was a reckless and clear indication the Government has handed over its housing density challenges to developers to fix. The suggestion that 10,000 new apartments in these locations are going to address housing affordability for young people and families is laughable.

Today the NSW Minister for Housing, the Hon. Rose Jackson MLC said on Sydney radio she was open to having a conversation about how the Government's plans would be rolled out. An ongoing dialogue before a Sunday morning press conference announcement would have been good. But here we are.

## **Blank cheque for developers**

The only people excited about this announcement are the developers, who by the Government's own admission will be leading this project, giving them a blank cheque to build luxury apartments in Sydney's East. To achieve 10,000 new apartments, we could be looking at 50 apartment towers of at least 30 storeys in a relatively small and already heavily built-up area, which is a disastrous abandonment of metropolitan planning principles.

## **No guarantees on housing affordability or diversity**

The Government has confirmed that only 1,000 out of 10,000 homes will be mandated as affordable housing, locking out essential workers from most of the dwellings. This is simply not enough, and we need to advocate for more affordable housing, and for affordable housing to be made in perpetuity.

Due to market factors, apartment delivery in the Woollahra LGA is already biased towards larger dwellings. Whilst it is important that these demographics continue to be catered for, it is also essential that smaller, lower cost dwellings are mandated for couples and singles. Only 12.5% of dwellings in the LGA are studios and one bedroom dwellings. As such, any provisions must contribute to diverse housing and not continue to cater to the luxury market.

## **The numbers don't stack up**

With the average price of 2-bedroom units in the Woollahra area priced at \$1.5-2million and rent at around \$4,000 a month, how will young people be able to afford these new apartments?

Premier Minns needs to do his homework to make sure the numbers stack up more for young renters and homeowners than they do for developers, otherwise the only train tickets being purchased from this station will be one way out of Sydney. In fact, we are hearing that \$193 million may not even cover the cost of the rail station. If the rezoning takes place and the station is not delivered, it will be disastrous for our community.

I am keen to hear how spending \$193m plus on reviving an unused train station 800m (90 seconds by train) from an existing one at Edgecliff is a good use of public funds in the context of the needs of all communities across the state.

I would like to see the evidence from Sydney Trains and Transport for NSW that confirms the Premier's promises that there will be no impacts to weekday travel through the construction period.

## **Capacity and targets**

I agree we need more housing and better transport and I understand the Government is looking for a Plan B after its failed Rosehill project, but this seems desperately rushed, with no thought given to the impact on existing traffic congestion, infrastructure, hospitals, schools, potential tree canopy loss and parking, all with a total disregard for the community or character of our area. Extensive re-

zoning in this area comes with challenges absent from an open racecourse.

Adding another 10,000 apartments and double or triple that in terms of population in one of Sydney's most densely populated areas requires careful thought and planning. The Woollahra LGA is already at 80% mid to high density. We have exceeded previous Government housing targets and were on track to deliver what was expected.

Minister Jackson told Sydney radio there are 200 vacancies in most if not all our local schools to accommodate the 20-30,000 population increase. This is news to me and perhaps news to our local schools. It would be interesting to know where all these families will be sending their children for an education when I am hearing schools have wait lists and there are no Government plans for a public high school.

In addition to the pressure on schools, hospitals will also be burdened. The already congested main and feeder roads are set to get even busier. Only through ongoing consultation with the Government about these already significant infrastructure constraints will help to avoid a massive fail on housing affordability and a disastrous legacy of soulless apartment towers that will cast a permanent shadow on Sydney's bright future.

### **Tree canopy and character**

We agree that there is beautiful green space all around our area – which we have worked hard to preserve. With almost 80% of our residents living in medium to high density dwellings, with minimal or no communal open space, our parks and green, open spaces are fundamental to the liveability of our area and must not be eroded, but we must also ensure that new green spaces are delivered. However, how beautiful will these green spaces be if they become overshadowed by towers throughout the day? What kind of trees and urban greening will be incorporated into these new plans? Or are we going to be faced with a concrete jungle? We would like to see this modelling.

As always, the devil is in the detail and I am pretty sure there are no details – this is policy on the run as the Premier attempts to save face after the embarrassment of Rosehill. All of us here know that this will be a disaster if it ever gets off the ground without a rigorous planning approach and developers are given free reign.

The majority of land between Edgecliff and Bondi Junction train stations along the ridgeline and the proposed development area is within a Heritage Conservation Area and we are curious to know how this will be managed, or will it be abandoned too?

### **Infrastructure**

We support the suggestion that contributions will be charged to the developers. However, we are unclear how these contributions are going to be managed. These contributions should be paid to us, so that we are able to plan upgrades to our essential infrastructure to accommodate the kinds of numbers anticipated. However this should not prevent the Government from making the necessary state infrastructure investments that will be required to provide for the increase in population growth.

We are also waiting to hear what plans the Government has in relation to active transport, and whether it will incorporate our existing strategies into their plans.

We request that the Premier and Minister for Transport and Roads explain how the residents of Vaucluse, Watsons Bay, Rose Bay and Bellevue Hill can continue to access the city, Bondi Junction, local businesses, and visit friends and family in the area without sitting in traffic gridlock.

### **Turn off the LMR for Edgecliff and Double Bay**

The policy of this Government is to turn off the Low and Mid-Rise Housing Policy (LMR) where a Transit Orientated Development is proposed. In light of this, I am calling for the Minister to turn off

the LMR for Edgecliff and Double Bay immediately. If we are going to be faced with 10,000 apartments around Edgecliff and Woollahra then we do not need the equally baseless LMR planning policy. We are also calling for a hold on all state significant development in the Woollahra LGA until we understand the cumulative impacts of the Government's proposals.

### **No consultation or transparency**

Despite recent reassurances to Woollahra Council from senior staff at the NSW Department of Planning, Housing & Infrastructure that there was no plan for the Woollahra Station site, this has clearly been in the pipeline for some time. It is about time the Government properly engages with Council, which is the most appropriate level of Government to undertake local planning.

We have been kept in the dark, even at recent meetings we have had with Government departments on LMR, and related planning and infrastructure issues. Last week's Estimates Committee was another example of a complete lack of transparency on plans and funding from this Government.

We are fundamentally concerned that the State Government is not engaging with the Council or the community as they progress their ill informed ideas. Demonstrated recently with the further erosion of community participation for State Significant Development by proposing a reduction to the exhibition period from 28 days to just 14 days. A 14 day exhibition period for such significant development is woefully inadequate.

### **Representing our community**

I will be contacting both the Member for Vacluse, Kellie Sloane and the Member for Wentworth, Allegra Spender to organise a meeting to share suggestions, questions and concerns to relay to the Government if we are afforded the opportunity for input on one of the largest developments Sydney's East will have ever seen.

As the three community leaders across all tiers of Government, we have a responsibility to represent the local community and to advocate for an outcome that acknowledges the national and state housing crisis. We must lobby for the best possible planning solution for the local area as the bulk and scale of this kind of development will leave a very permanent mark on the future of the LGA.

I have had conversations with the State Member over the weekend, and she has shared community feedback to date – noting she and I both currently have more questions than answers.

The issue of housing shortfall and housing affordability is a national issue and this is why we need our local Federal Member to have a clear position of advocacy on this important issue.

It was difficult to reach the Federal Member over the weekend as I was trying to establish if she had been briefed. Clearly the Opposition and local State Member had not been. It seems that the Federal Member did have advance notice of the proposal and announcement, but I am yet to establish what information was shared and most importantly what her position is on it. I have not had a substantive response from the Federal Member for Wentworth outlining her position on the proposal.

Today our staff reviewed the land that could be included under the Government's proposal, and, interestingly, the area extends into adjoining Council areas. I am unsure if our colleagues in neighbouring Randwick and Waverley Councils are aware of these implications. I will ensure that our staff share their findings with our colleagues so they can make representations to the Government.

## **Legal Advice**

Whilst I have significant concerns about the impact the Woollahra train station and the proposed rezoning will have on the surrounding areas, it seems as if the Government is committed to proceeding.

As such, I believe it is prudent for Council to consider what legal avenues we may have to limit the negative impact of this proposal.

## **A seat at the table**

In summary, we would welcome the opportunity to be part of the planning discussions as the local planning authority. Council already has plans in place for Edgecliff to meet housing pressures and we do have well informed planning principles to bring to the table. Having a practical planning conversation that acknowledges what the Government is chasing in terms of housing stock and affordability and discussing how this might work in a largely Heritage Conservation Area would be a more favourable approach. This is unless the Government has already handed over the roll out of this massive project to private developers, who will clearly be motivated by commercial return rather than the best practice planning principles and housing affordability for Sydneysiders.

Cr Sarah Swan  
Mayor of Woollahra

## **Attachments:**

None