



**Submission on the proposed  
The City of Sydney's  
Alternative Approach to  
Waterloo Estate Redevelopment**

**Counterpoint Community Services**

**March 2019**

## **About Counterpoint Community Services INC**

Counterpoint Community Services Inc. provides a wide range of community support services in the Inner City and South East Sydney LGAs. We have operated in the heart of Waterloo since 1977, with a particular focus on working with social housing tenants and diverse communities.

We operate The Factory Community Centre in Waterloo, Counterpoint Multicultural Centre in Alexandria, Poet's Corner pre-school in Redfern and act as lead agency for many local grass root groups and services including the Redfern and Waterloo Social Housing Neighbourhood Advisory Boards.

We also are hosting the independent community development worker, and bilingual educators funded by FACS Land and Housing Cooperation to support the community during the redevelopment of the Waterloo Estate.

Our EO, Michael Shreenan also chairs the Redfern and Waterloo Groundswell collation consisting of local and peak body NGO's who are working together to resource local residents, through the Waterloo Estate redevelopment process. He is also the current convenor of REDWatch who monitors government activities for the area and share information with the community and advocates on a wide range of issues.

## **The City of Sydney's Alternative Approach to Waterloo Estate Redevelopment**

On Monday 4th March 2019, the City of Sydney Council held an extraordinary meeting to present an alternative approach for the Waterloo Estate site called '*Waterloo Estate Redevelopment – A better way for the Community*'.

We have been briefed separately by two councillors; Cr. Jess Miller and Cr. Jess Scully and the City's planning team on 1st March 2019. On 6<sup>th</sup> March 2019, our staff attended the Lord Mayor public meeting regarding the City's alternative approach at Alexandria Town Hall.

We have been asked for our comments on the City's alternative approach. This submission should only be read as an initial response.

Here, we require further detail on the City's approach and secondly, we have not had sufficient time to consult our stakeholders and the broader community whose interest we consider as priority.

## **Counterpoint's Initial Contextual Comments**

We start by highlighting that Waterloo's strengths lie in its diversity because of this, there is no overwhelming consensus or agreement of the community on the Waterloo redevelopment. There is a wide range of views and numerous debates on the estate with some community members in support, some totally opposed and others who are undecided and seeking for more information.

One of our fundamental roles as a community service provider is to support all residents impartially and ensure their voices and concerns are considered.

First, we congratulate the City planners in providing the alternative approach in such a short amount of time. It is our belief that had the City completed this alternative approach earlier and done so with more input from the community, the plan would have gathered unprecedented community support. We welcome the City's contribution to the public debate about the future of Waterloo.

It is vitally important that all options, ideas, and concepts are publicly debated thoroughly, and that the community are adequately supported to make informed views on these matters before the project proceeds to formal exhibition.

The community members who are living and working in Waterloo are the people whose support will be required if this project is going to have any success in improving amenities and places into the future. It is equally important to ensure residents' voices are not drowned out by political agendas and that it is the community's interest and needs that are front and centre to any decision making process regardless of whoever is in the position to make the final decision.

We would broadly support that the city should be responsible for planning controls and not the state in any development in Sydney.

We would support any call for the State government to reconsider progressing with their preferred plan to exhibition until the two plans are considered together and the community are given the chance to review all the relevant supporting materials and have their views on the subject heard.

However, we believe it would have been more desirable if this had been tabled during the consultation phase prior to the release of LAHC's 'preferred' plan.

We are also concerned that this alternative approach may cause confusion within the community and potentially raise 'false' hope that LAHC's plan will be changed. Therefore, we urge the City to be clear and sensitive in their communication around this alternative approach and its potential limits, and we thank the City as this has been the case so far.

Secondly, any plan for the Waterloo Estate which seeks to increase social and affordable housing is worthy of serious consideration and receives our unreserved support. Given the size of the social housing waiting list and the growing number of homelessness in Sydney, any plan that seeks to increase the provision of social and affordable housing will be supported. This is even more pertinent as the development will occur on existing public land.

Thirdly, we do not support the criticism that LAHC's consultation efforts were poor. We believe that LAHC's consultations were better than any previous work in the space, and accept that like all work, there was room for significant improvement. LAHC proactively sought feedback from NGO's and residents on the consultation process and activities and made welcomed changes. They also resourced independent staff at arm's length during the process which is the first of any consultation process we have been involved in.

Counterpoint was present at all consultations and community engagement activities; including focus groups, workshops and community days and the consultation report reflects our own independent and impartial observations. The consultation report completed by independent consultants, Elton Consultants, accurately and honestly reflected what was heard from the community during options testing. However we did note that the Minster's presence and their engagement in this process has been severely lacking.

Although the options testing consultations and the subsequent report should be commended, the 'preferred' plan released by LAHC does fall short of many of the community's expectations and opinions as expressed during the government consultations process; such as building heights and density.

Despite the City addressing some of these points (see last point), the City's alternative approach did not however consult with the Waterloo community. This is particularly crucial as the Waterloo community has fought for adequate consultation for many years.

For this reason, we would encourage the City to continue to sensitively consult with the community on their alternative approach in partnership with the relevant stakeholders. For example, the City's approach includes one large park rather than two, a concept that Counterpoint would generally support. However, LAHC's consultation showed that the majority of participants preferred a large park in the north and another smaller park in the south of the estate.

It is our understanding that LAHC's consultation team worked within the parameters of the current government's Communities Plus policy, including the government non-negotiable preferred ratio of social mix, the economic restraints of seeking a neutral cost development amongst other criteria which limited how effective the State government's consultations could have been – this is an opportunity where the City's approach can do better.

We strongly argue that public housing should not be delivered at a neutral cost and that value return and social benefits of public housing far outweigh any real terms costs of the actual stock. Successive Governments have constantly failed to value or invest in our social housing system resulting in significant cost to our human services system. It is appalling that we can find funds for needless stadium replacements and WestConnex type projects and yet not invest in our citizen's basic housing and social needs

Fourthly, we note that some of the economic benefits of the City's approach and reduced costs through retention and refurbishment of some existing stock. However it is unclear what the economic model the city is using nor if the City would support the retention of all public land and explore a land lease based model. Furthermore, the City's amendment to the original proposal to increase social and affordable housing during the council meeting was not accompanied with modelling on how this would be financially supported. Although Counterpoint supports this without reservation, it is important for the community to be honestly consulted with plans that are financially viable and tabled.

Finally, we welcome the details of the City's alternative approach and in particular, the way the City illustrated how the alternative approach conclusions were reached.

The State government have only released very limited information relating to the preferred plan, particularly the technical studies sighting that such information will become publicly available once the plan goes on statutory exhibition. We have advocated strongly for further information to be released and it is regrettable that this advice has not been taken on board with the decision to wait until exhibition. The government should release all of the details regarding their plan so the community can debate the issues raised with all the information rather than only being provided with a draft summary of their 'preferred' plan.

In our view, this has been unhelpful to all concerned. For example, the City's claim that shadowing in the State government's plan imposed on the green space to unacceptable levels is hard to respond to as the State government has not release further modelling and information to accompany the plan.

Thus, we only have the assumptions of the City's planners on the matter. Therefore neither we nor the residents can make an informed view on the matter and we hope that the City's alternative approach will persuade LAHC to release further information on the preferred plan prior to going to formal exhibition.

## **Summary**

To conclude, Counterpoint does support the following aspects of the City of Sydney's alternative approach:

1. The lower density of a maximum of 5,300 dwellings, compared to LAHC's 6,800.
2. The lower heights proposed by the City including buildings up to 13 storeys around a large park with most buildings in the estate being 7 to 9 storeys and some as low as 4. This is compared to LAHC's proposal of 60% of buildings between 1 and 7 storeys with 6 buildings up to 40 storeys tall.
3. The City's proposal for more social and affordable housing is welcome with 20% affordable, 50% social and 30% private. LAHC has proposed 5% affordable, 30% social and 65% private. If the Government adapted this ratio their proposed density levels might have been be more acceptable.

Still, it is difficult to comment further without further detail of the preferred plan by LAHC. We look forward to continuing to work with all stakeholders, including the City and LAHC in ensuring the best outcomes possible for the current and future residents of Waterloo.

## **THANK YOU**

*For further info, kindly contact:*

Michael M Shreenan; Executive Officer  
Counterpoint Community Services INC  
c/o The Factory Community Centre  
67 Raglan Street, Waterloo NSW 2017

Email: [MShreenan@counterpointcs.org.au](mailto:MShreenan@counterpointcs.org.au)

Ph: 9698 9569

Mobile: 0413124615