

20 May 2009

Brisbane City Plan Review
Brisbane City Council
GPO Box 1434
Brisbane Qld 4001

To whom it may concern

Re: Submission in response to the formal Statement of Proposals for the Brisbane City Plan 2000 Review

MDA is a lead specialist settlement, advocacy and community development organisation with highly respected credentials in the provision of services to refugees and a strong organisational track record in systemic advocacy for the last 10 years. We belong to a consortium with MATCH Housing and QPASTT (Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Torture) which delivers a range of settlement services for refugees and migrants.

MDA broadly supports the general thrust of the Statement of Proposals, however we believe it needs to explicitly recognise and take account of the immense cultural diversity of Brisbane now and, even more so, into the future.

We are concerned that the Statement of Proposals contains almost little recognition of the immense cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity which is part and parcel of this modern city, let alone how best to encourage and make use of this enormous asset or take into account the presence of more new and emerging communities that are starting to take their place in our metropolis. Therefore, we should be clearly reflected in this Statement.

We are also concerned that there appears to be no recognition of the place of Indigenous Australians on whose land this great city has developed and evolved. More explicit recognition of Aboriginal peoples' history and support for their continuing presence and role in the future in Brisbane would benefit all residents of this city into the future. MDA has formally adopted a Reconciliation Strategy within our agenda and believe it is an integral part of Australia's culture and history and should be appropriately acknowledged.

MDA recognises that the eight themes in the Statement of Proposals reflect those contained in the *Living in Brisbane 2026* document. We do not seek to divert from those themes, but we believe these existing themes/visions should explicitly reflect and encourage the reality that Brisbane is and should strive to build on its inclusive and harmonious cultural diversity. There are many strategies which can be employed, however MDA's overarching view is that any future Plan should explicitly incorporate and reflect the reality of a city that will become ever more culturally diverse, including a clear recognition of the place of the Indigenous peoples of the region.

Vision Theme 1 – Regional and World City

The claim of a city to be a "world city" of the future must encourage and highlight its cultural and linguistic diversity of its population. This mustn't just be a marketing exercise, but rather a reflection of a city which celebrates, encourages and makes use of the immense value which such diversity provides. Urban design should recognise cultural needs for adequate open spaces and meeting places. Housing styles and sizes should recognise different family and cultural needs. Brisbane's culturally diverse heritage – including its Indigenous heritage – should be reinvigorated and better

protected. This includes many of community halls and building developed by different ethnic groups over Brisbane's history.

Vision Theme 2 – Smart and Prosperous City

Brisbane needs to make better use of its immense cultural and linguistic diversity which resides within its boundaries. Encouraging and enabling better participation of people from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds should be a key part of this vision.

The home businesses, emerging enterprises and cottage industries mentioned in this section are given far greater impetus by the participating of newer arrivals and emerging ethnic communities. MDA believes there should be explicit recognition of the benefits of enabling and encouraging the participation of as wide a range of cultural backgrounds as possible. These enterprises can go towards assisting, and removing the barriers to, full participation of people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds which can enhance the economic and employment benefits from particular regions within the city in situations. Access to lower costs premises is a key part of enabling newer arrivals to get the crucial first foot hold in genuine business activities.

For example, paragraph 2.4 should explicitly recognise the role cultural diversity could play in adding value to a specialist employment cluster. The more socially and economically engaged Brisbane's highly diverse population is, the more prosperity it will generate.

Encouraging and enabling full participation of all members of the community and effectively tapping into the limitless talents they possess is a key pathway to maximum prosperity. Explicitly encouraging and enabling the participation of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds can increase the economic viability of employment centres.

Vision Theme 3 – Well-designed, subtropical city

In designing a growing city for the future, explicit recognition should be given to the enormous cultural diversity already present and the inevitable further increase in that diversity. In designing the city of the future, the differing cultural and family needs of minority groups should be explicitly recognised.

Part of designing a city for the future should be to ensure that all its residents from all backgrounds are able to find a place within it where they can feel comfortable and productive.

Vision Theme 4 – Clean and Green city

Many recent arrivals in Australia have by necessity lived lives of simplicity and environmental efficiency. A city of the future should easily enable this simplicity without preventing access to its prosperity. A simple example of this is enabling the development of more backyard or neighbourhood food cultivation (also addressed in Vision Theme 6).

Another part of a greener city is ensuring that all residents have a proper understanding of various initiatives such as recycling, habitat protection, green energy, etc. Ensuring newer arrivals from other countries have a full understanding of these measures will ensure better involvement and engagement.

Vision Theme 5 – Accessible, connected city

No city, suburb or space is fully accessible to all its inhabitants unless it takes into account the differing cultural and language backgrounds of the people within it. More recent arrivals to Brisbane are more likely to need to use public transport to get around, but are less likely to have a clear understanding of how best to do so. Measures which assist and encourage newer arrivals to use public transport are key to achieving this vision. This could include more efforts to ensure people of different language backgrounds have a full understanding of the many public transport options available.

Adequate community meeting places – including open spaces as well as community halls – are also a key part of ensuring accessibility and wider social participation.

Vision Theme 6 – Active and healthy city

Designing the city to encourage an active, healthy population requires recognition of the many different cultural approaches to leisure and healthy living. Many different ethnic communities have skills in food cultivation and greater facilitation of local food production which is a priority mentioned in paragraph 6.7, and would be beneficial on a number of fronts.

Encouragement of adequate open spaces, local sports facilities and community halls will also go a long way to encouraging active participation by people of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Vision Theme 7 – Vibrant, creative city

MDA strongly supports creating more opportunities to “celebrate local history and culture in urban design”. The many differing ethnic communities in Brisbane, from the long-standing to the more newly emerging, have played a key role in making Brisbane what it is today. Greater recognition of this history and its cultures, and the role they play in the present and future of Brisbane would add to the attractiveness and vibrancy of Brisbane.

The vibrancy which comes from such a hugely diverse population should also be clearly recognised and encouraged.

Vibrancy and creativity are also demonstrated through food and other arts, as well as music. Properly promoting and encouraging the participation of people from newly establishing communities in creative endeavours will greatly add to Brisbane’s attractiveness for tourists and new residents alike.

Vision Theme 8 – Friendly, safe city

A key part of making our city safe is explicitly and positively recognising that it is a home to people of a huge number of differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The background part of this section legitimately notes the many hurdles that can face particular social groups such as students, young couples, people with a disability, etc.

People from differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds can also have trouble finding homes to suit their needs, not just due to discrimination and a lack of affordable housing, but also sometimes due to having much larger families than the current norm in Brisbane. While such people may be in a minority, their needs should not be completely ignored as a consequence.

Clearer public support for people who are part of a visible minority group will also make the city safer and friendlier. Ensuring greater cultural competency and awareness from as many service staff as possible is one important way of doing that.

In short, no city should claim to be a “world city” if it doesn’t specifically recognise the cultures and skills of its newer arrivals. Ensuring the social and economic participation of such people is a key step to integration for people of migrant and refugee background.

Doing all that is possible to enable people of non-English speaking background to feel comfortable and safe as part of the community is a key part of achieving the vision of a friendly and safe city. Such an approach also increases the participation and productivity of newer arrivals to Brisbane.

The City Council could consider providing more opportunities for residents of minority cultures and language backgrounds to receive explanations and give their views as the various Council planning and consultations.

Summary

Therefore in conclusion, MDA believes that explicitly recognising the differing needs, capacities, potential and cultures of various newly emerging communities in Brisbane will help make the City Plan more inclusive and effective for all residents. This should include specific recognition of the unique position of Indigenous Australians in the city’s past, present and future.

Brisbane's enormous cultural diversity will row even further in the future. This should be a key selling point for Brisbane into the future, but it will only continue to grow as an asset if it is properly recognised, nurtured and supported.

Yours sincerely

Kerrin Benson
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