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The Need for A Broader Civic Vision Rather Than Just Considering One Developer's Proposal - letter to the editor

As a visitor to Newport, and as an experienced conservation architect, I was interested to read the proposals for the redevelopment of the Casino Property. My professional interest compelled me to visit this large site, which provides a wonderful opportunity for macro-planning, urban design, architecture, and exciting mixed-use activities. Being on the city edge, and near other land development opportunities, a careful analysis of the needs of the broader community needs to be assessed. The city planner should be empowered to bring in talented professionals to assist with this macro planning, with a clear long term strategy articulated.

My concern is also that the proposed development might miss a major opportunity for design excellence. Despite the developer praising their approach stating that "rooflines tip the hat to the colonial experience" of Newport, and incorporates "design elements with a nod to traditional architectural features found throughout the city", what the images show is an unimaginative proposal of rectangular boxes set amongst a sea of car parking. The good news is that the proponent has stated "nothing is set in stone...we will go through modifications of the project as we go through neighborhood meetings."

Newport is an international destination of outstanding historical significance, and this proposal should incorporate cutting edge design and planning which also references the unique fabric of the city. Liveability is critical - designing for people, not cars, should be the focus. Car parking should be underground, to provide more pedestrian friendly and linked landscapes. Bicycle networks should improve connectivity and advanced trees and creative landscaping established to build a greener environment. Pocket parks, play areas and shared community gardens would facilitate a greater connection to the place. The use of the latest sustainable design elements, such as solar power, green roofs and other initiatives, could make this a benchmark project.

A well-balanced design should provide variety, not sameness across the site, with sub sections displaying different design approaches, and greater attention paid to contextual Newport-inspired elements. The use of a wide palette of materials and color gradations will assist in this. The proposed mix of activities and uses is commendable, but there are also many other more modern opportunities to explore, such as shared co-working spaces that provide small start up businesses a chance to thrive. I hope that staff in the local planning department and the elected officials of the Newport City Council grasp this opportunity and discuss with the applicant these ideas, and insist on a creative, innovative and place-based outcome, rather than a "Big-Box" development which is homogenous and does not do justice to the heritage of the city.



Elizabeth Vines,

Elizabeth Vines, from Adelaide, Australia is an architect, recipient of Medal of Order of Australia for her contribution to heritage management in Australia and Asia, a recent Getty Scholar, visiting Professor HK University and Deakin University Melbourne, and an international consultant to UNESCO and the European Union. Her special area of interest is the fit of new development into existing special historic districts and is the author of three "Streetwise" books her latest being "Streetwise Design" (2018).