

ITEM 4. GEHL ARCHITECTS – PUBLIC SPACES PUBLIC LIFE SYDNEY 2007 - PROPOSED FEASIBILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION ACTION PLAN**FILE NO: S049337****SUMMARY**

It is recommended that the “Public Spaces Public Life Sydney 2007 Study” by Professor Jan Gehl of Gehl Architects be received and noted.

Public Spaces Public Life Sydney 2007 includes a thorough analysis of the central city public domain and provides recommendations that have implications on traffic, public transport, parking, city planning, and public space design.

This report outlines the City’s proposed response to the Gehl report’s recommendations. This includes a feasibility and assessment phase that will lead to the development of a Public Spaces Public Life Action and Implementation Plan. This Plan will outline the planning, project and management actions over the short, medium and long term, key partnerships and potential sources of investment and finance. This will be reported to Council by mid 2008.

The timing of the Study provides the opportunity for the directions and recommendations to be considered in the development of the City’s ongoing strategic and policy work including Sustainable Sydney 2030, Interim Public Domain Policies, Pedestrian Strategy and Laneway Strategy.

The assessment and feasibility development phase of the project will involve Sydney Sustainable 2030, City divisional areas, and other agencies.

It is proposed to make the Study available to key stakeholders and be placed on the City’s web site for public information and discussion.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) receive and note the Public Spaces Public Life Study - Sydney 2007 prepared by Gehl Architects, as shown at Attachment A to the subject report;
- (B) prepare a feasibility assessment and implementation/ action plan of the Study recommendations for Council consideration and approval by mid 2008;
- (C) provide a copy of the Study to relevant Government agencies and place on City’s website for public information and discussion; and
- (D) endorse the Disclaimer, shown at Attachment B to the subject report, to be included with the Public Spaces Public Life Sydney 2007 Study.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Gehl Architects: Public Spaces Public Life Study - Sydney 2007

Attachment B: Disclaimer

BACKGROUND

1. By Council resolution dated 19 February 2007, Gehl Architects were engaged by the City to prepare a Public Spaces Public Life Study (the Study) for the CBD (Attachment A).
2. The aim of the Study is to develop a clear picture of the quality and liveability of the CBD public domain, and to provide recommendations for enhancing public life, walkability, accessibility and city vitality.
3. Gehl Architects' work is based on a public space research methodology developed by Professor Jan Gehl over the past 40 years based on observation and research that has been implemented in a number of cities worldwide including Copenhagen, London, Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide, Stockholm and Wellington. Work is currently underway for a similar Public Spaces Public Life study in Manhattan for 2008.
4. Key objectives of the Study include:
 - (a) providing an overview on the CBD from the perspective of people and public life based on proven research methods;
 - (b) providing a platform for advocacy at all levels of government as to the importance of public space and public life to the city's economic, social and environmental wellbeing;
 - (c) providing an external perspective on how Sydney measures up to other international cities on public space and public life; and
 - (d) providing a methodology and framework whereby City staff can assess a wide range of future urban design issues and objectives.
5. The study benchmarks Sydney with other international cities which have conducted identical surveys and have gone on to improve the quality of life in those cities based on Gehl's recommendation. Comparisons with other city areas provide insight into the public life of other comparable cities of similar size.
6. Gehl Architects were not asked to review financial implications or to undertake a detailed transport assessment of the CBD.
7. The project was timed so that the findings could be considered and integrated into the City's strategic thinking in particular Sustainable Sydney 2030.

STUDY PROCESS

8. The Study was conducted with a primary focus on the CBD and some of the major pedestrian routes that connect to the CBD including William Street and Oxford Street. Within the selected study area, 24 street locations and 23 squares or public spaces were surveyed.
9. The study process involved three main stages:
 - (a) Stage 1: Quality Analysis of Public Spaces – The Urban Spaces: *"Problems and Potentials"*.

- (b) Stage 2: Survey of Pedestrian Patterns- *“How is the city used?”*
 - (c) Stage 3: Recommendations for Quality Improvements – *“How can the city be improved?”*
10. Pedestrian counts, stationary observations, and age and gender counts were carried out in summer and winter periods this year. The summer survey was carried out by students from the University of NSW Masters of Urban Design program under the guidance of Gehl Architects.
11. A week long workshop and information gathering program attended by City staff and UNSW Masters of Urban Design graduate program students was also conducted in May 2008 by Gehl Architects.

STUDY FINDINGS

12. Key findings include:
- (a) The Sydney CBD has many positive attributes such as a wonderful public foreshore, great landmarks such as the Opera House and Harbour Bridge, extensive parklands, and a characteristic topography. Much has been achieved with our heritage preservation, streetscape upgrade and tree planting programs in improving the amenity of the CBD.
 - (b) The city grid configuration provides the potential to allow walking to be a viable mode of transport.
 - (c) There are few traffic free zones for pedestrians within the CBD. Most available spaces are well used by pedestrians but they are unconnected. There is no clear and legible network of pedestrian streets and spaces that culminate in a pedestrian heart to the city.
 - (d) There are relatively few people engaged in stationary activities in public spaces with most people using the public spaces only for pedestrian access, rather than a range of passive recreational activities such as sitting.
 - (e) There are excessive waiting times at crossings for pedestrians.
 - (f) Large proportions of people were observed using the underground pedestrian network.
 - (g) Major problems identified include disruptive road infrastructure creating poor links to the water edge; the domination of streets by vehicular traffic; lack of street hierarchy; cluttered streetscapes with frequent footpath interruptions; high noise levels; poor linkages between public open space; and poor microclimate in some areas due to high buildings.
 - (h) Most of the CBD is relatively quiet in the evenings, with main entertainment and night activity areas confined to the southern area of the city. The lack of pedestrian activity in many areas after 6pm indicates a city centre used predominantly for working and shopping and a lesser extent for supplementary activities such as culture, outdoor dining, and recreation etc.

- (i) Age and gender surveys reveal young children and old people are poorly represented with the majority of pedestrians being of working age.

STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

13. The Study recommendations are arranged under the following strategic directions.

A Waterfront City

14. The Study recommends the celebration of Sydney as a unique waterfront city through increased access and views to the foreshore and the reintegration of Darling Harbour into the CBD fabric. The importance for the Barangaroo development to be connected to the CBD was also raised for consideration by SHFA.

A Green City

15. The Study reinforces the current directions of the Sydney 2030 project of developing a green and sustainable identity for the city that includes improved connectivity and a continuous network of linked public spaces and parks.

A Better City for Walking

16. The Study recommends the development of a high quality pedestrian environment that includes a connected pedestrian network, pedestrian priority streets, inclusive access, reduction of clutter and provision of high quality street furniture.

A Better City for Cycling

17. The cycling recommendations complement current directions contained in the City of Sydney Cycle Strategy and Action Plan 2007 – 2017, including the need to provide a well connected network of safe, dedicated cycle lanes that is supported by bicycle parking facilities and promotional campaigns.

A Strong Public Transport City

18. The Study advocates for a simplified quieter central city public transport system that includes George Street as a dedicated public transport street.

A Traffic Calmed City

19. The study advocates a radical intervention to limit through traffic by restricting east-west vehicle movement, reducing parking availability and to limit vehicle speed to 40km/hr.

A Strong City Identity

20. A key idea in the Study is creating a strong city identity by developing George Street as a central civic spine that is linked to three significant public squares at Circular Quay, Town Hall and Railway Square. Recommendations are also made to increase the activities within the laneways and other smaller city spaces so that they become desirable connections within the pedestrian network.

An Inviting Streetscape

21. The Study recommends the preparation of a CBD public domain plan that provides a strong street hierarchy, diversity of high quality public spaces, public art and active street frontages.

A Diverse, Safe and Lively City

22. The Study advocates the provision of more diversity in the city centre in terms of functions and activities accommodated, and to encourage fine grain mixed use development at street level to create a safer and interesting environment for the pedestrian. The continuance of a regular and ongoing events program is encouraged to promote social interaction and sense of community.

CITY RESPONSE – WHERE TO FROM HERE?

23. Some of the report recommendations are complementary to current City policy directions such as the cycle network implementation.
24. However, other recommendations present greater challenges and require a robust review and assessment phase to fully ascertain feasibility and implications.
25. The Study was timed so that the findings could be considered in the development of Sustainable Sydney 2030 which will define directions for the next 20-25 years.
26. The feasibility and assessment phase will lead to the development of a Public Space – Public Life Action and Implementation Plan that will outline the planning, project and management actions in the short, medium and long term timeframe, key partnerships and potential sources of investment and finance. It is proposed that this will be reported to Council in mid 2008.
27. The Study provides data and information on the present state of public life in the CBD. An ongoing research and evaluation program will provide empirical evidence on the extent of quality of city life improvements and will also be a powerful tool for advocating change. In Copenhagen Public Space – Public Life surveys have been conducted every ten years throughout the past forty years. Follow up surveys provide updated information and inspiration for further development of urban spaces. Gehl Architects have also conducted follow up surveys for Melbourne in 2004. It is recommended that the Public Space – Public Life Action and Implementation Plan include an ongoing monitoring, research and update program using Gehl methodology for Council consideration and approval.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

28. The Public Space – Public Life Action and Implementation Plan will assess financial implications and funding sources for report back to Council in mid 2008. Funds will be sought in the 2008/09 budget to engage Gehl Architects for ongoing advice and support in the development of the Study's recommendations.

CRITICAL DATES / TIME FRAMES

29. The Study has been delivered in time for the consideration and assessment of Sustainable Sydney 2030, which at this stage will be publicly exhibited in March 2008.

30. A Public Spaces Public Life and Public Spaces Action and Implementation Plan will be reported to Council for draft public exhibition approval in mid 2008.

OPTIONS

31. The Study presents the findings and recommendations of Gehl Architects. The City may choose to accept or decline further consideration of these findings and recommendations in the development of a Public Space – Public Life Action and Implementation Plan.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

32. It is proposed to provide a copy of the Study to relevant Government agencies such as the Department of Transport, Department of Planning, SHFA, and RTA, and to place on the City's website for public viewing and discussion.
33. It is proposed to include a disclaimer on the Study (refer Attachment B). The purpose of this disclaimer is to ensure that the Study is for viewing and discussion only and to convey that the Study is the findings and recommendations of Gehl Architects to the City of Sydney.
34. Jan Gehl's visits to Sydney in May and September, which included a successful City Talk on 11 September 2007 *Creating a Great Pedestrian City*, generated substantial positive interest from print, radio and television media. This provided wide public awareness of the Study and promoted debate on the pedestrian and public life amenity of the CBD.
35. The numerous Sydney Sustainable Sydney 2030 consultation forums regularly raised the importance of pedestrian and cycle connectivity, and the desire for interesting public spaces and public life.
36. Professor Jan Gehl briefed senior representatives of the state transport agencies in May and September 2007 outlining the significant transport, environmental, economic and amenity benefits gained by making public spaces and streets more pedestrian friendly and better used. Meetings in September were also held with representatives from SHFA on the Barangaroo development, the Design Advisory Panel and the Sydney 2030 project team.
37. It is expected Sustainable Sydney 2030 will be publicly exhibited in March 2008. This will provide the opportunity for public comment on the public domain proposals for the CBD which have been largely influenced by the directions set by the Gehl Study. Further, the Public Spaces Public Life and Public Spaces Action and Implementation Plan will be placed on public exhibition from mid 2008 for public comment.

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