

Submission on the Glenfield to Macarthur Corridor Strategy

I moved to the Macarthur region in 1976 with my family when I was 10 from the southern suburbs of Lugarno and Penshurst where I was born. Macarthur was country then – open fields, small shopping villages, acreages, and small regional centres like Campbelltown. Over the years, the area has grown and developed its own personality. It is now one of the most residually diverse communities in Sydney, including Housing Commission, fibro cottages, townhomes, million dollar acreages, upmarket housing estates, and club houses.

The exhibition documents clearly demonstrate the changes that the NSW Government are intending and, in principle, they will add value to the Macarthur region. Granted, many areas in Macarthur need refurbishment as they have not been upgraded in thirty or forty years. However, there are I feel important concerns that may not be addressed in reality.

Macarthur Region

Macarthur is a well-established region and encompasses all suburbs under the control of the Campbelltown and Camden councils. In fact, with the growth of upmarket housing estates, Wollondilly is now generally considered Macarthur. Glenfield is the start of the Macarthur region.

Macarthur's role in Australia's Colonial History

Macarthur played a critical role in the colonial history of Australia. The area was a blue blood region complete with an Old Boy's Network and a King's School. The area is dotted with historic homes that were owned by the English upper class and early explorers who were granted land there in the 1800's. Most homesteads still exist though in disrepair.

Socio-Economic status

Macarthur consists of varied socio-economic groups as a result of its colonial English blue blood history. There are impoverished communities and inexpensive housing much of which exists around the railway lines. The rest of Macarthur is working and middle class with upmarket housing estates and acreages. The most expensive residential housing averages \$1.5 million with rare \$5 million + offerings. Macarthur is a mixed region job wise also – industrial, retail, administrative, self-employment, and white collar. Most white collar professionals commute to the CBD. Most people with their own businesses are millionaires. One of the greatest challenges to Macarthur is the need to serve each of these disparate socio-economic groups.

Semi-rural

Macarthur is a semi-rural community. There are many open spaces, rolling hills, and rural views. In fact, many residents choose to live in the Macarthur region for that reason – space and rural views. It is a region that provides close connection to the CBD while providing acreage and large blocks of residential land. The semi-rural nature of Macarthur impacts the region's culture significantly.

Family region

Macarthur is family-oriented. A change in this regard is positive, though the culture will remain essentially family-oriented.

Park Central

A housing estate was built in Macarthur some years ago called Park Central. This housing estate was a successful enterprise and is well considered in the local area. It was intended to be a unique local housing estate that emulated an inner-city community. The exhibition documents suggest streetscapes and buildings that are similar to those found in Park Central which diminishes its individuality, appeal, and function. The commercial professional centre of Park Central has not succeeded.

Aesthetics of Macarthur and the value of residential properties

Macarthur is not a contemporary region as a whole. The buildings are historic, generic, or red brick. Aside from upmarket housing estates, Macarthur's aesthetic is simplistic. Many residential streets do not have trees while the parks are limited or simply parcels of vacant land. Why? To keep the cost of renting or buying a home low so that people on low incomes have somewhere to live. Only upmarket housing estates are leafy with park-side allotments. The prices of residential land and homes reflect this.

High rise development

Historically, areas in Sydney's west where high rise development was approved have over time become slums. Consider the west along the Regent's Park Line and some parts of the Granville Line. The less affluent areas in Macarthur are far from slums.

Macarthur ethnicity

Macarthur has an unusual mix - Australian, English, Irish, Scottish, and a small mix of other varied ethnicities.

The future of Macarthur

Macarthur is a region that serves a valuable purpose. It provides a mix of low cost housing while also providing opportunity for those who like a semi-rural setting with beautiful homes and views to live within reach of the CBD. It holds an important place in the colonial history of Sydney and Australia. It also connects the rural regions of NSW with the CBD. On the negative side there is moderate unemployment and the residential areas around the train lines do need rejuvenation.

As I spent the second half of my childhood and a decade of my adulthood in Macarthur, I would like to see the following.

1. The banning of high-rise developments to ensure that Macarthur does not become a slum.
2. An increased emphasis on serving the less affluent and wealthier areas of Macarthur equally.
3. An acknowledgement that Macarthur is semi-rural, family-oriented, with very specific ethnicities.
4. The adoption of an aesthetic that does not impact the value of homes in the poorer areas of the region and also acknowledges that Macarthur is generally less sophisticated with a preference for a simplistic and historic aesthetic.
5. Boutique business offerings which can be addressed by the proposed development.
6. Refurbishment of open spaces with landscaping is preferable to retain the semi-rural character. Australian natives should equal non-natives – Australian Maples, Grevilleas, Banksia's etc. Colour would also be advantageous with flower tubs. Vegetation associated with wealthy communities should be avoided outside of upmarket housing estates.

7. A historic centre, not heritage centre, in the new library as is found in other libraries would be great.

In summary, the strategy proposed by the NSW Government could result in the unscrupulous over-development and commercialization of a semi-rural region with disastrous long-term consequences – high-rise slums, disconnection between rural and city communities, and the destruction of what is an otherwise pleasant region. The changes the NSW Government proposes for Macarthur will provide long-overdue rejuvenation and aesthetic improvement, while creating jobs and increasing services and recreation to the benefit of all. It is important however to ensure the preservation of local charms rather than trying to make Macarthur a city-like region on the outskirts of a growing metropolis. That is a recipe for a slum. It is also important to remember that most locals love their region as it is so effective change management strategies would be beneficial.