

Planning for sustainable growth in a turbulent environment

The City of Subiaco is an inner city local government area of Perth experiencing growth in a turbulent planning environment.

Being an inner city town (activity) centre Subiaco is expected to accommodate an increasing population and workforce and experiences a dynamic where new medium-density buildings locate themselves in heritage and character areas. The growing pains associated with increasing population and housing diversity are a common experience.

However numerous factors complicate these experiences, creating challenges in delivering a urban form that than achieve growth whilst maintaining character.

The economic downturn has hit all of Western Australia. Aside from a general downturn in trade and discretionary expenditure, Subiaco experiences a loss of businesses who can now afford to relocate into the Perth CBD. Whilst their place is more often than not quickly replaced, it is not immediate and results in an increased vacancy rate.

Local government reform has impacted the City by reducing annual revenue by around 10%. Areas of the municipality that have transferred to the adjoining City of Perth included a major university and major hospital, one of the areas of the municipality which generated more revenue over costs. This is revenue that is no longer able to be spent on infrastructure and facilities to support the increasing population.

The closure of the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children and relocation to the medical precinct outside the municipality can be viewed as a loss of jobs in the local government. The hospital is well located for transport and its relocation can be viewed as a negative. However, as with many changes there are positives. The site is likely to become a medium-high density residential precinct which would provide an increased local population which would support local business. Similar the relocation of AFL Football from Subiaco Oval to the new stadium at Burswood can be viewed as having a detrimental impact on businesses such as cafes and bars who become extremely busy on game days. However the site becomes an opportunity to provide for lacking local recreation facilities, along with community uses and medium density residential in appropriate locations nearby. Interestingly the repurposing of Subiaco Oval has resulted in businesses being more supportive of increasing the local population in order to make their business more sustainable.

Amongst all of these pressures, the City of Subiaco has produced an activity centre plan to guide the future growth of the town centre taking account of the heritage nature of the main street which facilitating high quality development. The City has also prepared the North Subiaco Structure Plan, which sits in the area between the town Centre and Perth CBD and includes the Princess Margaret Hospital and Subiaco Oval, to guide appropriate growth in that precinct. Together with a review of the Town Planning Scheme and Precinct Planning Policies the City has managed to create a planning regime that balances growth with the maintenance of local character.

The future of Subiaco is bright notwithstanding the challenges it faces. The turbulent planning environment has created the opportunity to plan for sustainable and appropriate development and growth for one of Perth's inner city villages.