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RAINBOW 2000[®] - A REGIONAL PLANNING STRATEGY FOR ALBANY & THE GREAT SOUTHERN (Western Australia)

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PREFACE

When people ask what a Planner does, I suggest “They should be able to identify opportunity and put it together with motivation to produce outcome for the general benefit of the community.”

As a community, we need to empower our elected representatives with the knowledge and understanding of what we are trying to achieve, and for them in turn to lead – vision set – and make effective decisions on our behalf having due regard for the environment. Sustainability Planning (urban, rural or remote) is the consideration of all relevant issues, emphasising at any point in time economic, social and ecological factors within a political framework, with attendant provision for finance as a process of implementation.

There are several politically challenging propositions built into the Rainbow 2000[®] Project for :

- ❖ Federal Government (phasing out unemployment benefits over five years)
- ❖ State Government (the privatisation of State government assets and processes)
- ❖ Regional Government (commercial competition in the strategic planning sector)
- ❖ Local Government (organisational reform & commercial competition in the strategic planning sector)
- ❖ Australians generally (resolution of the Native Title issue via regional S.21 agreement).

THE RAINBOW 2000 STRATEGY

Smithson Planning of Albany, consultants in Organisational Management, Media, Town Planning and Environmental Assessment, prepared a conceptual approach to the review of future planning for the amalgamated Albany City Council and the lower Great Southern Region of Western Australia. Published in November 1997, the Rainbow 2000[®] Project is a most interesting investment proposition, but also questions the hypothesis – is planning the antithesis of politics.

The regional strategy comprises six main elements being :

- ❖ A planning policy statement (framework for investment programs)
- ❖ A regional planning initiatives statement for the Great Southern Region
- ❖ A metropolitan Albany planning initiatives statement
- ❖ An Albany central business district planning initiatives statement
- ❖ Albany Anzac 2014-18 Re-enactment[®] – a major event (marketing / promotional strategy)
- ❖ Albany 2026[®] – a Bicentennial Celebration of European Settlement in Western Australia.

Some of the main aspects of the regional strategy include a population by Year 2029 of 250,000 permanent residents spread across Albany (150,000), Denmark (30,000), Mt.Barker (30,000), Bremer Bay (30,000) and Cranbrook (10,000), representing a conservative annual population growth rate of 5% in the region.

Albany is at a key point in its development. The community has reached a permanent resident population in the town of 35,000 with a wider regional service population of 65,000 plus. There are signs of major industrial expansion; however, there is inherent growth scepticism, and a perception of fear of loss of individuality as a regional rural community.

The residents and visitors alike seek improvements in lifestyle, education, housing choice, retail convenience and employment opportunity, but not at the expense of crime, traffic congestion, pollution, etc.

ALBANY ANZAC 2014-18 RE-ENACTMENT

If the community of Albany is prepared to adopt Rainbow 2000[®], then the task requires presenting the City of Albany and the Great Southern Region to the world to encourage economic investment (capital and recurrent).

The 100th celebration of the Anzac tradition will be a five-year period of substantial tourism development, and the City of Albany and the State Government of Western Australia have both resolved to make Albany Anzac an icon event in the program of tourism events for Western Australia.

ALBANY 2026 – A BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT

The relationship between Albany and Perth in terms of the establishment of politics, economy, community and environment, is viewed as hostile and tumultuous. Development trends were profoundly changed by the establishment of the Swan River colony by Captain James Stirling in 1827, and the proclamation of Western Australia in Perth as the capital city in 1829.

Further, Lord John Forrest as the Governor of Western Australia orchestrated the construction of the Port of Fremantle in 1897 by a notable engineer (C.Y.O'Connor), and the transfer in 1901 of the mail route from Albany to Perth as a function of federation, better communications and state development.

Sustainability is an emerging currency in Australian urbanism, and considered debate would suggest that all cities exhibit their relative strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. In our opinion however, change is a fundamental prerequisite for growth and development.

However, what happens when the State Government is non-committal to regional development, and the political horizon to resolve an issue central to the future urban development of a smaller regional city is extremely contentious, and extends beyond the election cycle of four years.

PLANNING – A BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TOOL (or not)

There are two principal Town Planning Schemes guiding subdivision and the development of land in the City of Albany (the Town and Shire of Albany voluntarily amalgamated in 1998), being the :

- ❖ City of Albany Town Planning Scheme No.1A (former Town area), which was gazetted on 30 December 1983 (~22 years old) – and to date, the Albany City Council has resolved to initiate 150 amendments
- ❖ City of Albany Town Planning Scheme No.3 (former Shire area), which was gazetted on 15 February 1980 (~26 years old) – and to date the Albany City Council has resolved to initiate 250 amendments.

The Town Planning & Development Act 1928 requires a comprehensive review of a District Planning Scheme every five years. The age and condition of these two planning instruments should be considered unacceptable in today's economic circumstances, and it is suggested that this situation has severely hampered business development and reduced investment confidence in the lower Great Southern Region over the last decade.

The State government through the Western Australian Planning Commission (and former namesakes) has coordinated a number of planning strategies in order to advance development, including :

- ❖ Albany Regional Rural Strategy – October 1991
- ❖ Albany Residential Expansion Strategy – June 1994
- ❖ Albany Regional Strategy – June 1994
- ❖ Albany Commercial Strategy – August 1994.

On 11 April 2000, the City of Albany resolved to prepare a new comprehensive Town Planning Scheme to replace and update their District Planning Scheme (covering the entire municipality – Government Gazette 25 January 2001), but that process has come to a grinding halt for reasons that will become apparent.

In the interim, the City of Albany have published three informal strategic planning documents :

- ❖ Albany Local Planning Strategy (2001)
- ❖ Albany 2020 – Charting our course (2001)
- ❖ Albany's 3D Future (2003).

With the change of State government in 2001 (Labor replaced the Coalition), Albany elected a Labor member for the first time in 27 years) and Stirling retained their National member with support from the Greens.

The current Minister for Planning & Infrastructure – the Hon. Alannah MacTiernan MLA, then directed the WA Planning Commission to prepare a new Regional Planning Strategy for Albany and the lower Great Southern region.

Interestingly, the Council of the City of Albany formally resolved via its Town Planning Scheme Review Advisory Committee not to investigate the prospect of sea-port relocation, and the Minister for Planning & Infrastructure respectfully declined to be briefed on the Rainbow 2000[®] Project.

More recently, the Western Australian Environmental Protection Authority recommended to the then Minister for Environment & Heritage – the Hon. Judy Edwards MLA, that an informal level of assessment (non-statutory community consultation) should apply to the transport of woodchips by various independent forestry groups between various Great Southern timber plantations and the Port of Albany.

That decision was appealed by the Hon. Dr Christine Sharp MLC (Member for the South-West Region and WA Greens Party) and various other individuals, but supported by the City of Albany in the face of mediocre community opposition.

The Minister for Environment & Heritage dismissed the appeal, and upheld the level of assessment, acknowledging the cumulative impact of port related transport operations and the strategic planning work being carried out by the Minister for Planning & Infrastructure to facilitate future heavy haulage in the region.

A port access solution comprising two rail lines and a four-lane grade separated controlled access road is the minimum acceptable risk management standard to any industrial port in Australia. Based on this expectation, there are several specific constraint points between travel modes that will require short or long-term traffic management solutions, but in the mean time pose a risk management threat.

If the State Government continue to support Road Transport B-Trains and Triples and introduce Quads, it should be self-evident that given the nature of some of the volatile products, there is substantial potential for a even a minor accident to give rise to a major transport incident with attendant need for emergency management.

We could ask industry and the State & Federal Governments to spend millions of dollars to make a bad location workable, but why should they – Albany is the original hard rock and a wall.

PORT RELOCATION : THE CENTRAL INITIATIVE

There are more than 118 commercial propositions identified in the Rainbow 2000[®] planning strategy; however, the single most important outcome influencing the intensity of future development is the relocation of the Albany sea-port industrial handling facilities (tourist facilities to remain where they are and enhanced significantly).

Harbouring an historic image, and presuming that the Port's industrial service activities can successfully be relocated to Vancouver Peninsula, the Albany CBD would assume a San Francisco waterfront with an 'English Quarter' cultural status similar to the 'French Quarter' in New Orleans (USA) and the 'Portuguese Quarter' in Malacca (Malaysia).

The current deep water berths would be retained for visiting Cruise Liners and Naval Warships, as these would essentially involve tourist interaction with the town area, and resupply of provisions. The existing grain handling facilities would be converted into two major five star hotels with attendant casino, exhibition space, entertainment, cultural, and convention centres, and commercial service outlets.

The proposed location for the industrial port facilities on Vancouver Peninsula is approximately ten (10) times larger in land-backed area and considered more cost effective to service than the existing port location, providing a one hundred (100) year growth path for the Port of Albany.

It is estimated that to relocate the existing industrial asset will cost in the order of \$1.0 billion. However, once these aspects of the port are relocated, the entire city foreshore is made available for redevelopment, which is conservatively estimated to be worth in excess of \$2.0 billion (1997 estimates but CPI variation applies to both sides of budget).

Under Rainbow 2000[®], the proposal is to partially privatise the Albany Seaport / Airport / Outer Ring Road, and form an Albany Port Corporation, with private investment taking a sixty (60%) percent share holding in the business through the sale of State / Local government asset (estimate minimum subscription of \$400 - \$600 million).

The Rainbow 2000[®] regional planning strategy effectively separates two conflicting land use activities and provides for more efficient use of land / water resources, using the commercial process to facilitate relocation and development.

There is sufficient room in the existing port area for current anticipated port development activity. However, the largest weakness is the highly constrained narrow land-bridge corridor across the city foreshore to the rural hinterland (road & rail), which is directly opposed to potential future town development and expansion.

With a change in State government came the commitment from the new Member for Albany – Mr Peter Watson MLA, that a \$12.8m marina / small boat harbour would be established on the Albany foreshore to service various aspects of maritime development (eg. Fishing fleet, private yacht / cruiser pens, commercial harbour tours, HMAS Perth dive wreck operators).

After two years of community consultation (and angst) over project development culminating in Council endorsement in July 2004 of version 1 (including provision for non-residential short-stay accommodation), the Minister for Planning & Infrastructure unveiled an entirely new version 2 in August and version 3 in September 2004.

POLITICAL PROCESS

The Rainbow 2000[®] Project started as a challenge from Smithson Planning to the business community to “take off the blinkers and have a really good look at what might be achievable”. More than two thousand actions have now taken place to facilitate community participation and promote the Rainbow 2000[®] Project (refer R2000Participation).

Over the last seven (7) years, relevant political groups in the community have rationalised into three dominant philosophical areas :

- ❖ Pro-Port – advocating rural issues as the major focus for the future
- ❖ Pro-City – advocating urban issues as the major focus for the future
- ❖ Anti-development – advocating no development as the future focus.

The Albany Chamber of Commerce & Industry on 10 August 1999, did resolve unanimously to encourage Smithson Planning to refer the Rainbow 2000[®] Project to both the Albany City Council and the State Government of Western Australia for a comprehensive technical and financial evaluation (whilst referred : it didn't happen that we are aware of).

There is correspondence on file from the former Premier Richard Court dated 10 November 1999 stating in part “Albany City Council as the appropriate body to present the Rainbow 2000 Strategy to State Government for consideration look forward to the City's approach to me about this matter.”

There is correspondence on file from the Premier Geoff Gallop (then Opposition Leader) dated 15 June 2000 stating in part “Regional economic development on a sustainable basis is an important issue for us all and I await with interest the technical and financial evaluations that are being done of the Rainbow 2000[®] concept.”

The Council refused to refer the Rainbow 2000[®] Project to the State Government, and no evaluation was ever undertaken.

There is a further letter dated 10 July 2000 from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson stating “it is encouraging that visionary ideas are being proposed for regional Australia”. Most recently, a scheduled briefing to the Great Southern Area Consultative Committee was cancelled due to the 2004 federal election, and the Great Southern Development Commission has refused for the third time to hear a briefing on the project.

On 20 July 2005, the Premier Dr Geoff Gallop MLA, has written again acknowledging the role of Smithson Planning in the development of the Rainbow 2000[®] Project stating “Long term planning is an essential component of good governance ...” and “Regional strategies such as Rainbow 2000 should receive the imprimatur of the Great Southern Development Commission and the Regional Minister (*Hon. John Bowler MLA*) before consideration by State Cabinet.”

It is proposed to settle the question via referendum so that no political party in State or Federal government can ignore the mandate. In this way, there is a decision relating to the future of development of Albany regardless of which way the community vote, and a direction to all levels of government as to the priority between conflicting land-use activities.

FINAL ANALYSIS

In suggesting that the port relocate, it was simply a matter of maximising the opportunity (and investment return) to the community of Albany based on predictable development patterns, and providing a long-term growth path for a range of export / import industries related to the region.

Since the port has constructed six new hectares of prime waterfront real estate on the city side of Princess Royal Harbour, this means that either it gets an effective transport access route along the city foreshore, or it has a limited operational life for industry. More recently, port groups have invested an estimated further \$175 million at the port as a function of leverage and necessity rather than endorsed strategy we suspect.

Looking to the future, it is the Port that is under threat, not the City. There is case evidence around Australia where eighteen cities have had to negotiate port relocation because of urban encroachment in situations that were far less ‘delicate’.

The railway corridor serving the current port location passes between two buildings that are listed on the register of the National Estate and the State Heritage Register, and together form an integral part of the oldest European heritage precinct in Western Australia.

While local politics changes periodically, both Labor and Liberal Governments in Western Australia have supported Albany foreshore development (noting that the National Party has never formed government in its own right but essentially opposes any activity that would compromise port accessibility).

SUMMATION

Our industry group talk about triple-bottom-line evaluation in the political framework, but which is more important to the community over time.

Will Albany and the State Government of Western Australia ignore central place theory and the process of land economy by sacrificing its CBD, heritage and foreshore to urban blight associated with the transport of product to the isolated port, or will it pursue foreshore development and compromise future port heavy freight accessibility.

Both paths have had a dramatic impact on the regional economy and society, but will the governance advocate or support industrial port relocation to a pristine ecological area (implications for coastal management) as the only means of reconciling the competing industrial sectors of agriculture and tourism.

Needless to say, this is a very challenging proposition, but one requiring a solution that should prove very interesting.

More information is available at www.smithsonplanning.com.au, and recommended reading includes :

- ❖ Albany Sea-Port Relocation Plan
- ❖ Albany International Airport Plan
- ❖ O’Connor MHR pushes new port
- ❖ Rainbow 2000 10th Anniversary Project Evaluation.