

KURILPA IDEAS FORUM: AN INTRODUCTION TO PURPOSE AND PROCESS

The Kurilpa Futures Campaign Group (KFCG) applauds the timely decision by the Queensland State Government to send back, to the drawing board, the draft Kurilpa Master Plan, with its proposals for nearly twenty thousand new residents and office workers crammed into a phalanx of high tower blocks marching over 25 hectare of riverside land. In support of this good decision, the KFCG has initiated a process of innovative consultation to voice the real community preferences and priorities for this significant site.

Judging the best styles and scale of activities for future development brings together the values and needs of neighbouring residents and future users, with technical understanding of the available and emerging options. This kind of consultation requires exchange and evaluation of ideas and the reflective review of options, much more than conventional market research techniques of counting consumer preferences. To make informed choices, people need to speak, listen, and consider each other's views.

A Community Forum was therefore designed for these purposes, combining the following activities:

1. Contributions from development, design and environmental practitioners, professionally recognised for their experience and expertise.
2. Discussion in numerous small facilitated and recorded Focus Groups to identify objectives and explore options. Thirteen different aspects of balanced urban development were selected, ranging from planning densities and land uses, to natural environment and government.
3. The opportunity for members of all groups to view and rate each other's ideas.
4. Evaluation and proposal by Mixed Interest groups, mixing membership of Focus Groups, to consider the best overall developments and principles for the Kurilpa site and neighbouring areas of West End, South Brisbane and the City Centre, and for the overall city.
5. Individual choices of the importance of different land uses and activities in the light of the Forum's discussions and priorities.
6. Review of outcomes and explanation of the next steps, and further community involvement opportunities

The Place of the Forum within the Consultation Process

The Forum was devised as a major step within an ongoing process of community consultation and engagement. Announced in the KFCG website in February 2005, and timed for mid May 2006, it was publicised by

1. Use of the KFCG website, with an Ideas Forum page, sharing organisational and participation details
2. Use of email circulation lists of the group, the local councilor and other interested organisations such as the Brisbane Development Association

3. Distribution of leaflets in key West End locations on Saturday's mornings and weekday evenings.
4. Three rounds of Media releases and associated interviews on radio, television and in the print media.

The Forum Process

The Forum commenced with brief keynote contributions from prominent practitioners in architecture and urban design, transport, communications & creative arts and community planning.

The 167 participants then moved into 13 facilitated and scribed Focus Groups of approximately 13 members each. Each group included a resource person with expertise in administration and governance; community development; organisation and services; ecology; economics; Indigenous culture; landscape architecture; law; literature; social; transport; urban and regional planning; or Indigenous rights and opportunities. Each group produced its three highest priority objectives for its particular aspect of urban development in Kurilpa. These were then made available for subsequent scoring by the whole Forum.

During a refreshment break all Forum participants scored all 39 objectives, making use of 10, previously distributed, adhesive red dots.

The Mixed Interest groups then considered the kind of overall development that would be most beneficial for Kurilpa and neighbouring areas, as well as the wider Brisbane area. To enable even distribution of Focus Group members, across the Mixed Interest groups, allocation to these groups was undertaken by the use of chocolates. Thirteen different types of chocolates were distributed evenly amongst the members of the Focus groups. These were then used for allocation to the Mixed Interest groups with the latter assuming identities such as "Smarties" and "Turkish Delight".

At the conclusion of these discussion individuals were asked to make informed decisions about the priority which they wished to accord to a number of different land uses and activities, in the light of the discussions and deliberations of the preceding two and a half hours.

Interpretation & Conclusions

While the comprehensive range of comments and rich level of detail, resulting from the Focus Groups, confer a sense of validity upon the Forum's outcomes, the actual scores, resulting from the Mixed Interest groups, are largely indicative rather than providing statistical precision. Their merit is that equal weight is given to each participant's judgment, informed by exposure to the ideas and responses of others.

Participation at the Forum was open, free and well publicised, unlike the preceding Stakeholder Consultations conducted behind closed doors, and often with expensive attendance costs, by the City Council. The scores attached to different activities indicate the priorities that a group of well informed and interacting participants, drawn from both the local areas and the wider city, reached in a process of free and facilitated discussion.

The outcome of the Forum thus represents a well-informed and coherent combination of the views of a reasonably representative, but self selected, cross section of community

members, motivated by a wide range of interests and concerns. Though less statistically representative, their conclusions are more deliberative, better integrated and therefore more potentially workable than would have resulted from the collation of an extensive set of online, phone or email responses, selected to fulfill a sampling frame.

Community Planning is not an activity that can be conducted by referendum or popularity poll, because it requires integration of the many aspects that go to make up a satisfying human experience, and therefore community life. Individual preferences must take account of the values and needs of others, just as community life must bring together many different contributors and consumers if it is to be sustainable and satisfying.

A community forum such as this, open to all, widely publicised by web, media, poster, leaflet distribution and public place discussions, offers an effective means to develop overall policy directions to shape a community vision, development guidelines and design briefs.

The pathways to these steps are indicated in the accompanying Table of Mixed Interest Group Scores of Preferred Activities and Diagram of Highest Priority Land Uses.

The Table indicates that Transport and Connectivity are seen as being the single most important priority for the development of the site, linking it to neighbouring areas, the riverside and the city centre, and ensuring that active and public transport maintain the health and vitality of resident populations at the same time as limiting the health hazards and increased congestion of massive increases of private vehicles in a site forming part of the cul de sac of a natural peninsula. However, only 5% of the site area was proposed for transport developments, and while this represent a sophisticated distinction between priorities, expenditures and spatial allocations, the necessary space for walking and cycling paths, public transport routes and boulevards might require upward review of this proportion. Together the members of the forum were adamant that half the site should be occupied by natural environment and play and recreation space, with 20% being available for medium density and medium rise housing, limited to 8 storeys in height, with special mention made of the need for affordable housing.

The Diagram, of synthesis of preferred activities, indicates the ways that the various priorities accorded to no fewer than 15 different significant land uses could be related and linked to each other, with the bracketed figures indicating the order of priority attached to each land use. This diagram will form the basis for the proposed Kurilpa Vision. The numerous detailed Discussion Points listed for each of the 13 Focus group topics, amounting to over 369 in all, provide an invaluable source of detail and insight into the solution requirements and design characteristics of the future Kurilpa.