

Supersized Sydney



How we can thrive
with a population
of eight million



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With the Greater Sydney Commission's draft district plans now off exhibition and everyone from community groups to hard-nosed developers having made their comments, it is a good time to contemplate just how Sydney might change as it grows from five million people to eight million — the current size of London and New York.

There are some clues in the draft plans that seem to prefer jobs over housing just at the time that housing affordability has become a hot topic.

Sydney's housing, according to the Demographia 2017 survey, is the second least affordable city in the world after Hong Kong. So something must be done about housing costs and this will involve boosting supply.

But jobs are also important for Sydney's future. Clearly we need to drive both jobs and housing and the ideal is to develop a mixed-use cosmopolitan approach to urban living.

There are already some good examples in Sydney of mixed use areas. The Surry Hills area is a good mix of creative industries and apartment liv-

ing. Even the Sydney CBD is moving away from the "B meaning business" towards a mixture of high-density living along with the jobs a global city needs.

The most respected commentator on cities was American urbanist Jane Jacobs who thought a CBD must be bad if it only contained business uses. In her famous book *The Death and Life of American Cities*, she included a chapter titled "The need for Mixed Primary Uses" that suggested city centres were too much dominated by work uses. She called for diversity with "good mixtures of primary uses".

Danish urbanist and frequent Sydney visitor Jan Gehl in his book *Cities for People* calls for dynamic and diverse cities: "Fortunately, interest in building dynamic, mixed-use urban areas instead of conglomerations of freestanding single buildings is growing."

Gehl often criticises the sterile modernist buildings that came from architects following functionalist principles and from planners keen to separate differing uses into coloured zones on city maps. Back in the days of noisy, polluting industries, separate

zones were understandable but the workplaces of the digital age are quite compatible with urban living and urban retail. As Sydney grows and becomes more dense it is important the planning rules encourage dynamic, cosmopolitan, mixed-use environments where the 20-minute walk becomes the measure rather than the 30-minute drive.

Now that the Greater Sydney Commission (GSC) has received the submissions on its draft plans we need a strong vision to be generated for just how Sydney will feel as a city approaching the size of London or New York. The city must become denser as there are limits to horizontal spread but this density can have a more cosmopolitan character with more amenities. And just like London or New York, we will need an efficient metro rail network that connects the multiple urban centres that are evolving across metropolitan Sydney.

Importantly, the GSC plans must proactively support the mixture of jobs and dwellings rather than revert to old-style separation through single-use zoning.

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