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18 COMMENT

24-hour news update



“Giving away public land for private development in competition with the private sector is totally unacceptable”

MARK HAMILTON IN MY VIEW

THERE are things to like about the Riverbank development concepts. A narrow footbridge from Adelaide Oval, connecting the Oval to the Adelaide Railway Station and the idea of creating a new civic square off King William St where the “wasteland” Festival Plaza is, are great ideas.

Moving the rotunda; constructing two office towers in competition to the city’s commercial district and providing extensive eating and drinking outlets on the Riverbank in competition to Rundle Mall and Hindley St are dud ideas. These areas are a few hundred metres away.

Giving away public land for private development in competition with the private sector is totally unacceptable.

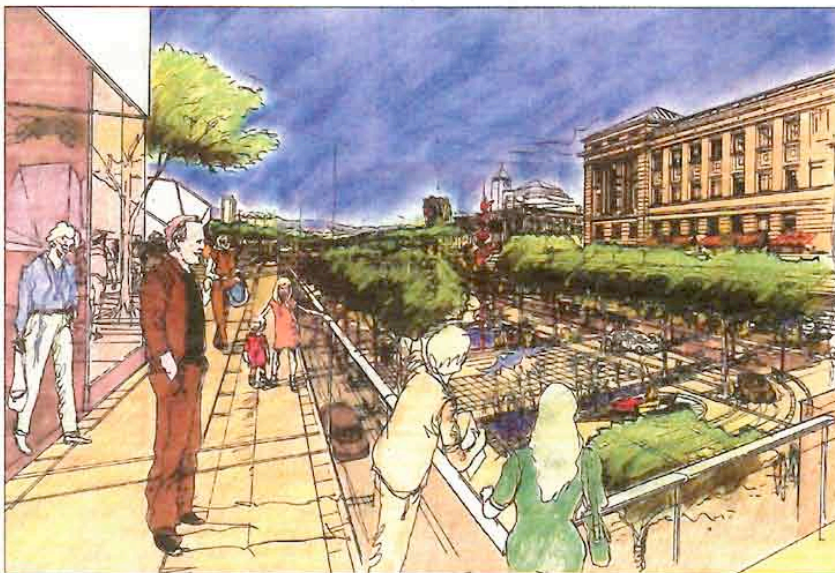
Victoria Square sits at the centre of the City of Adelaide, being the midpoint of Colonel Light’s square mile. Rundle Mall is the capital’s major shopping and recreational street. The continuing viability of Mall traders is vital not just to the traders, but to Mall property owners, and also to all South Australians who visit our capital. The office district of the city is centred on Victoria Square, running generally east, west and north of the square.

Executive director of Property Council SA, Nathan Paine has pointed to around 40 development sites in the central business district with current approvals with the potential to deliver more than 500,000sq m of office space.

That is enough space for an extra 50,000 city workers at a generous 10sq m per person, which would cater for a 35 per cent increase of the city’s existing 120,000 workforce to 170,000. That is enough office development for the next 21 years at the current population growth of 1.8 per cent per annum without one new approval.

These figures, by the way, put paid to the utter garbage being sprouted in government circles about the city height limits not permitting enough development. It will take 125 years to expire the current development potential at least.

These 40 approved sites are going



GREAT IDEA: An artist’s impression of the proposed River Torrens Riverbank precinct including a view of Arts Court.

to find it tough enough to find tenants and finance without the spectre of government competing for office development by offering free public land, government core tenants and the right to build car parking for government users as incentives. There is a significant amount of other available privately owned land.

The State Government should not use free public land to compete for office and retail development with the city’s property owners, many of whom have held properties and paid rates to the city, and land tax to the government, for long periods.

North Tce, let alone the River Torrens parkland area, is a forced march from the central business district. It is a silly place for office development.

The only office building is the Riverside building, adjacent the InterContinental Hotel, which is an out-of-the-way state government development of the 1980s, built on

free public land as part of the Acer development.

This happened last time the government gave away free land for a hotel, office development and casino at the expense of development within the four terraces – in the face of stiff opposition from the City Council as interfering in orderly city planning and property rights.

The city is planning a \$60-million upgrade of Rundle Mall to solidify the Mall as the premier shopping destination for Adelaide.

The concept of the Government establishing extensive eating and drinking outlets several hundred metres away on the Torrens is absurd. Combine and relocate the existing Festival Centre eateries and drink outlets to service both the theatre and the new civic square.

The city is also planning a much-lauded \$100 million upgrade of Victoria Square, reinforcing it as the centrepiece of the capital. Any available state government money

would be better spent helping the city to fix and maximise the existing investment the city has in the Mall and Victoria Square.

If the Government needs more office space it should soak up some existing vacant space.

Spending public money re-landscaping our magnificently presented Elder Park suggests the state is awash with money, searching for things to do.

Comments like, “The city has always turned its back on the river”, are erroneous thought bubbles which work on the false assumption that the city is a blank canvas exempt from the laws of supply and demand.

These concepts ignore the 175-year-old structure and layout of our city. They also trample on the interests of our business owners and property owners.

Mark Hamilton, a member of the Adelaide City Council, is a former deputy lord mayor of Adelaide.