Opinion

Perth deserves grand designs — and choice
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Do we follow a path of change, growth and creativity? Or do we stifle ourselves into irrelevance with
timidity? Do we chase the dream of waterfront development which creates a vibrant urban environment —
or do we please no one by trying to appease a vocal minority?

For far too long, more often than not, the nay-sayers unwittingly intent on crippling Perth’s evolution into a
modern, cosmopolitan city have succeeded. But now the next generation — the ones who will inherit the
city — are baying for something better.

Dozens of cranes now dot our city skyline. They are not only a symbol of the boom and a sign that times
are already changing, but also a warning that now is probably the best opportunity in our lifetime to create
the dynamic, bustling metropolitan city the younger generation is calling for.

We have a commuter city with a small residential population that lacks the vibe and level of depth that any
city should have. Our city closes at 5pm, cut off from all sides. The city is rapidly expanding and the face
of it will change, but where is the heart? Where is that high intensity environment that is truly urban? The
frightening truth is that there is none, and the Waterfront Project presents a perfect opportunity to rectify
this.

Earlier this week, columnist Tony Rutherford argued against the Waterfront Project, preferring
development on “a human scale”. He lauds the low-rise waterfront proposal of CityVision — a grid pattern
development for opera houses and serviced apartments, but sans major offices and apartments.

This city deserves better than a watered down 20th century proposal devoid of a critical mass that will
sustain it. This city deserves the grand civic spaces provided for in the Landcorp proposal — we deserve
the best.

We are told tall buildings are bad, the view from Kings Park will be destroyed, we need to spend money
on hospitals and that reclaimed grassland is somehow natural. How ridiculous. The youth and
progressively minded of Perth are utterly sick of the negativity surrounding the development debate.

The project is often dubbed “Dubai on Swan”. How very far from the truth this could be. Tall buildings do
not equal Dubai. The futuristic renders the public has been shown are merely concepts indicating the
scale of the built environment.
The shapes, designs and finishes will alter rapidly as different developers and the government build the different structures and spaces.

The concept that tall buildings are somehow detrimental to street life borders on the ridiculous. The European environments that Tony Rutherford spoke so fondly of have dense, inner city populations. Perth is largely suburban in nature, and our city is lacking because of that — it is expensive and time consuming to access the city. So how can a 60-storey tower filled with thousands of residents or hotel patrons possibly be to the detriment of the street life?

Mr Rutherford used King Street as an area that should be replicated, as did CityVision with Fremantle when launching its low-scale waterfront proposal. The fact is we already have a King Street and we already have a Fremantle. We also have plenty of grass. What we don’t have is a high-intensity urban environment. Similarly, the Kings Park view argument lacks any credibility. People look at the city skyline and the river when at Kings Park and as the river isn’t going anywhere and this proposal will result in more buildings, what is the issue? Again there is none.

The Perth CBD residential population is one of the fastest growing in Australia and this is likely to continue. Why? The young and professional people in this city are seeking a more urban experience. We have busy social lifestyles and Perth’s endless suburbia is incompatible with these lifestyles. We don’t need (or want) a backyard, we don’t want to drive everywhere and don’t want to live on the edge to nowhere. What we do want is a choice. There is an irrational fear in this town of height and density that is based on unfounded hysteria. The public, if given all the economic, environmental and social facts, would be more receptive of the density argument. If we can’t have tall buildings or creativity in a CBD sitting in a 100km swath of suburbia then God help us all.

The next generation of Perth’s citizens are worldly and know what they want, and are prepared to follow it. The hoards of young people moving to Melbourne are evidence of this. The Perth Waterfront Project is what the young and future generations want. It is therefore inappropriate that those from the last generation, such as CityVision and certain elected representatives, seem intent in denying the opportunity for a 21st century urban experience in our city.

From the generation who will inherit the city built by this boom we beg you, please do not waste this opportunity.

Sean Morrison is chairman of FuturePerth.