

MERCURY

Vision needs consultation

SOME issues are so politically charged it is difficult to make out the forest for the trees.

So when people with no particular political agenda speak out, it is important to listen.

The case for skyscrapers in Hobart is a vexed issue.

For starters, we don't want to shut the doors on international investment when Tasmania is clearly flavour of the month.

The Fragrance Group has come here and likes what it sees. It sees potential. It sees the capacity for growth. Its interest is a vote of confidence in this state.

So much so that it recently entered into a contract to buy a large slab of prime land off the University of Tasmania, which includes the main conservatorium building, a warehouse, three brick buildings in Heathfield Ave, three heritage-listed conjoined cottages in Wilmot St and a communications tower.

Equally, it is vital that we, as a community, ensure that any development enhances the culture of our city — something which often enables us to stand apart from other capitals.

When politicians speak, so much is driven by a short-term perspective, the imperative of politics. Decisions about the shape of our city affect generations. A longer perspective is critical.

When Richard Flanagan and Essie Davis, two of Hobart's highest profile ambassadors, speak from the heart about their concerns regarding the impact of skyscrapers on the city's heart, we need to listen.

When architects such as Robert Morris-Nunn and Peter Walker, who have added so much to the aesthetics of this state, express deep concerns, we need to listen.

Developments by the Fragrance Group can and will work in Hobart. But a cookie-cutter approach which merely transplants developments from overseas won't.

And when some of the very people who have built our strong tourism industry, such as pioneers Simon Currant and Greg Farrell, express vehement opposition to high rise plans, we need to listen.

The Fragrance Group needs to listen too.

This is not some kind of far-left greenie campaign to stop development in Hobart.

It is a simple and, to date, sensible and democratic discussion about the city we want to become from (at least judging by the names above) all sides of the political spectrum.

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They will divide a community and never, ever garner widespread public support.

The group needs to engage with and use the expertise of some of the very names mentioned above; people who have helped to build this state.

And the people who make Hobart such a special place need to be given their voice.

It is clear from the response to the Fragrance proposals and from the State Government's planning proposal that the residents of Hobart are intensely passionate about their city.

There is a need for leadership and for consultation which has a chance of making a difference, and a synthesis of the ideas and aspirations we hold — a democratic vision of Hobart as a unique city, a mix of the best of old and new.

Such an approach will provide Fragrance — and Hobart — with a genuine path forward.

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