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Draft Environment and Liveability Strategy Submission

The Organisation Sunshine Coast Associations of Residents (OSCAR) appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Draft Environment and Liveability Strategy and congratulates Council on this initiative. The comments contained within this submission are in no way intended to discourage Council from continuing its integrated approach to this topic and strategy and OSCAR intends its comments to be constructive. For so long these issues have been seen in isolation from each other, so it is timely that Council has taken this integrated approach.

General Comments in relation to the Draft Strategy document

Part A Strategic Directions

OCSAR endorses the concept of an “integrated framework” to “set strategic directions to guide the actions of Council and its partners”.

The strategy document is easy to read and not too bureaucratic, however at times it does seem to reflect a “marketing approach”. It is acknowledged that as a draft it has not undergone rigorous editing to address any issues relating to sentence structure, meaning and “spin”.

The Preface (Paragraph 2) makes reference to a “regional city”. We would seek clarification from Council as to whether the concept of a “city” is one that sits comfortably with the community or is or has been endorsed by the community.

In the section **Sunshine Coast Context** for the strategy one of the “Drivers of change” identified is **Population growth**.

OSCAR requests that Council clarify whether any of these growth numbers are attributable to Queensland State Government projected numbers under the SEQ Regional Plan and if so why Council feels the need to accept them without question.

OSCAR notes with great concern the concept on page 21 under the heading “How the strategy will be used” where it states that it will:

“Inform Planning

- drafting, review and amendments of planning schemes and local laws.

and

Guide decision making

- inform investment and land use planning decisions”

Given the Sunshine Coast Planning Scheme 2014 is relatively new in its implementation and underwent considerable consultation and engagement in its development and has been widely accepted by the community, OSCAR is concerned that this clause gives Council an excuse to make more changes without the need to engage the community widely.

OSCAR is concerned in relation to the number of amendments already approved by Council. If the Planning Scheme is so poor according to the current Council and requires so many amendments then Council should take it back to the community for reconsideration.

The document consistently refers to the term “resilience” in reference to the community and the natural environment. As well as supplying a positive definition (which does not appear in the glossary), a note should be made of where resilience may be limited owing to a “tipping point” having been reached and beyond which there is “no recovery”. There appears not to be any concept of recognising limitations to growth.

Although not having been able to match the 6 strategies being replaced by this integrated strategy, OSCAR would have some concern that information contained within those strategies in many instances has been condensed to 1-2 pages. OSCAR would like some assurance from Council that valid and important information and evidence has not been omitted in the integrated strategy.

SCRC, despite being a creation of state Government, is the representative of the community which elects it. It is concerning that there is very little concept of “partnering” with the community or “listening” to the community, which includes the many duly elected community groups actively supporting many elements of this strategy and the environment and liveability of the Sunshine Coast as a region.

Despite Guiding Principle 2 **Connect** - “connecting, partnering and integrating, we draw on the collective skills, knowledge and strength of our region”, the strategy takes (and this may be unintentional) a “deficit model” approach to the community. Constantly throughout the document reference is made to “empower and equip” the community and asks questions about the “ability and skill” of the community to deal with some issues. Only in one instance does the document refer to “resilience “being enabled (Page 66 - Adaptation and Resilience Policy Position). Neither Council nor its officers can “empower” the community. They can only act be enablers, empowerment comes from within the individual or group but Council has a role to play as an enabler of empowerment.

Council, its councillors and officers, have the greatest level of interaction with the community of the three jurisdictions (National, State and Local Government). The document would be enhanced and greater recognition given to the community if the words “we engage” were added to Guiding Principle 1 to read: “Leading by example, we listen, we engage our community, we make the difficult decisions and inspire, and enable community empowerment”. This may also be enhanced by substituting the word “opinions” for “views” in point Table 1.3 (b) on page 28. The word views, given the context of the strategy, could be confusing.

The targets proposed by the strategy (with one or two exceptions) are unmeasurable and often meaningless, eg “increasing the mix of housing types”. Adding a “tent” to the mix and there is an increase! Not what Council would want to see on the Sunshine Coast I am sure.

The **Part B Five-Year Implementation Plans** appear to be very detailed and clearly presented.

OSCAR seeks advice from Council that plans and actions include those contained within the six relevant strategies which this strategy will supersede. OSCAR would also like to be informed of any

that have been made redundant and are therefore not represented in this strategy and those that are new and only appear within this strategy.

Community groups commenting on this draft strategy do so in a voluntary capacity and do not necessarily have the time or the information to be able to compare the actions as per above. Some advice from Council would assist in this area.

Melva Hobson
Secretary