

Sunshine Coast Council
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Submitted online via council website

14 December 2012

To whom it may concern,

RE: Draft Sunshine Coast Planning Scheme 2012

As the State's peak business organisation, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland (CCIQ) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the development of the Sunshine Coast's Draft Planning Scheme.

CCIQ represents over 25,000 businesses across all industry sectors in the State many of whom operate on the Sunshine Coast. It is important to note the strong local chamber movement across the Sunshine Coast.

The Sunshine Coast business community is represented by a strong regional collaboration of local chambers. The Sunshine Coast Chambers of Commerce Alliance Inc. consists of the following participating chambers; Caloundra Chamber, Coolumb Business and Tourism, Cooroy Chamber, Kawana Waters Chamber, Maleny and Districts Chamber, Glass House Country Chamber, Maroochydore Chamber, Mooloolaba Business Tourism, Nambour Alliance, Noosa Chamber, Sunshine Coast Business Women's Network.

CCIQ has had the opportunity to work in part with the combined submission provided by the Sunshine Coast business Council, Property Council, Master Builders, UDIA and other professional organisations. CCIQ endorses the general thrust of the combined submission. However due to the significance of the issue and potential effect on the local economy and business community, CCIQ felt it was necessary to further expand upon some of the concepts raised in the joint submission independently.

Accordingly, CCIQ is well positioned to outline what opportunities the local business community sees for improvement in Sunshine Coast's planning system.

1. Existing Shortcomings of the Sunshine Coast's Planning Schemes

At CCIQ's recent Regional Breakfast on the Sunshine Coast (Your Business, Your Region, Your Voice) in November 2012, local businesses were overwhelmingly of the view that the Sunshine Coast Council through a reinvigorated planning system has a unique opportunity to create a competitive business operating environment that will attract investment and lure big projects in the future.

Planning issues are of fundamental importance to the economic wellbeing of the Sunshine Coast. If the Coast's planning laws are working efficiently, then essentially economic development has little impediment other than demand considerations.

However the previous and current planning policies on the Sunshine Coast represent a significant business issue and impact negatively on investment and local decisions. CCIQ has been approached by businesses with a belief that the Sunshine Coast's planning laws over a period of time have failed to evolve with the Coast's economy.

During recent CCIQ case studies, Queensland businesses have consistently raised issues associated with planning processes as constraining business growth.

CCIQ commends the Sunshine Coast Council for the development of a revised Planning Scheme. However CCIQ believes the current Draft Planning Scheme does not accurately reflect the Council's objectives to deliver a climate for economic growth and diversification, encourage enterprise and innovation and develop the necessary infrastructure to attract more investment on the Sunshine Coast.

More specifically CCIQ wishes to highlight the following points:

2. Need for an Economic Strategy First

The Sunshine Coast must be regarded as a single region for economic development purposes; accordingly CCIQ supports the rationale for a single approach to planning across the Coast.

Building on this principle the Sunshine Coast Council has a vital role in building and sustaining the economy in the surrounding Local Government area. Sunshine Coast businesses predominantly see the responsibility of Local Government as creating an environment which is conducive to economic growth. The reality is that if the general business environment is right, the marketplace will determine the nature of economic development on the Sunshine Coast.

It is vitally important that the Sunshine Coast has a clear vision as to the Coast's economic development strategy over the next five to ten years. It is even more important that the Strategy is underpinned by challenging and achievable goals, which are measurable.

CCIQ believes it is imperative that the Sunshine Coast Council demonstrate to the business community that maintaining an environment where business can grow and employ is one of its key priorities.

The above points can and must be collectively addressed through an Economic Development Strategy for the region and this action is the vital first step before any planning policy is implemented. It is placing the 'cart before the horse' to address the planning scheme before having a clear economic vision for the region.

3. The Sunshine Coast needs a planning scheme that adapts to a changing economy and prepares the region for future growth

The Sunshine Coast economy has traditionally supported a significant tourism industry that has in turn created an over-reliance on residential, retail and hospitality industries.

The combined effects of the Global Financial Crisis and high Australian dollar have had a significant impact on the domestic and international tourism industries and the region's economic prosperity. Additionally housing affordability, rising cost of living and slowing population growth have affected the flow-through to regions that are reliant on discretionary expenditure for turnover.

Construction as the third largest employer in the region and the largest contributor to gross regional product (GRP) has also been hit hard with building approvals down and house prices stagnating.

All these points highlight the essential need for the diversification of the Sunshine Coast economy and the imperative that a Planning Scheme does not impede this diversification.

There are a number of major projects underway that will add to the region's infrastructure including the new Sunshine Coast University Hospital, the Sunshine Coast Airport Master Plan and the new Maroochydoore Capital City plan.

These investments will position the region to take advantage of opportunities for growth in both the public and private sectors, through medical precincts and the education and training industry. CCIQ believes the draft scheme is too much a reflection of the past economic drivers and not the future possibilities available to the Sunshine Coast.

Furthermore, population growth stimulates economic activity for the economy and generates community prosperity. Accordingly, CCIQ wishes to highlight that it does not support the comments provided in section 3.3 in the combined submission (referred to earlier). Population growth generates much needed activity and demand for housing construction, the property market, it stimulates consumer spending benefiting the retail sector and creates significant demand for the services sector. Population growth also helps address the embedded problem of skill shortages being reported by many Queensland businesses. For these reasons population must be at the centre of a Sunshine Coast economic development strategy and in turn, planning scheme.

4. Consistency in controls - one state - one planning system - one language

CCIQ strongly believes that consistency, transparency and efficiency hold the key to a successful, streamlined planning policy across the Sunshine Coast. As such, CCIQ is keen to ensure that the proposed Planning Scheme addresses these three key planning principles.

Firstly Queensland needs consistency. Consistency between and within councils and planning schemes is of critical importance, particularly to businesses that operate across council boundaries. It allows developers and businesses to operate anywhere in the state with a degree of certainty in terms of regulation. Secondly, it helps to demythologise the planning process. Suddenly businesses do not need experts to help translate or even find the relevant parts of a planning scheme. Standardisation helps empower ordinary users of the system.

CCIQ notes that it is right to pursue the implementation of a new planning scheme for the Sunshine Coast that seeks to rationalise the Maroochy, Caloundra and Noosa Planning Schemes. However CCIQ raises the question whether this process should be paused whilst a bigger state-wide approach is implemented.

At the very least the Sunshine Coast Council should champion the push for consistency of planning schemes across Queensland. The plebiscite relating to an independent Noosa Council only serves to reinforce the case for a temporary pause.

5. Transparency in process - knowing what is expected before you start

Applicants need to be aware of the complexity and number of different approvals that are required by government i.e. planning approvals; building approvals; heritage approvals, environmental approvals, etc. They are all important but what the Sunshine Coast needs is as much simplification, integration and lack of duplication as possible. This can be achieved in part by State Government and the Sunshine Coast Council ensuring that the legislation controlling each of these is integrated as much as possible and where common processes can occur they do.

6. Efficiency in operation - regulation - where it is not required remove it - where it is required refine it

Often good regulation (Planning Scheme) has unintended or unforeseen consequences. The role of a Planning Scheme is to drive economic growth and provide certainty and transparency for future investment as opposed to controlling, managing and preventing those developments that are inconsistent with minority group expectations. Planning must be performed in a manner that does not unnecessarily encumber those developments which are essential for the ongoing economic development of the Sunshine Coast.

Any new planning strategy should consider how it can maximise the retention and attraction of investment to the Coast. The fact is that Sunshine Coast's current planning policy is seen as a minefield of complexity that is restricting business growth and acting as an impediment to future investment in the State.

At present the draft circulated for comment is too complex. CCIQ recognises the good intentions behind the draft planning scheme, however the complexity of the document will act as a disincentive to future economic growth and may even drive current businesses away from the region to other municipalities that offer simpler, easier planning processes.

Furthermore whilst reviewing the Sunshine Coast planning scheme is merited, CCIQ wishes to note that it must be done in the context of a broader review of the councils approach to development assessment processes and costs. The planning scheme does not operate in isolation of the development assessment system and accordingly without improving the efficiency by which the Sunshine Coast Council undertakes development assessment, the planning scheme will not be successful and business and economic growth will be prevented.

CCIQ notes that running concurrently with the review of the sunshine coast planning scheme is a broader state-wide agenda to reduce, streamline and/or simplify the business regulatory environment and accordingly we encourage the Sunshine coast Council to give due consideration to associated red tape and regulatory efficiency when drafting the new planning scheme.

In closing CCIQ would be delighted to meet to address any questions you may have in relation to this submission

CCIQ avails itself to present to the Sunshine Coast Council in January 2013. To this end, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0420 961 171 to arrange such an opportunity.

Yours sincerely



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