

## Placemaking for nervous people: Engaging communities in a post- pandemic world



Report from NGAA webinar 28 October 2020

### Presenters

- Ludo Campbell-Reid, Director City Design and Liveability, Wyndham City Council
- Kylie Legge, Director, Place Partners and Place Score
- Nick Stawarz, Manager Place Management, City of Wanneroo
- Moderated by Bronwen Clark, Executive Officer, NGAA

What will placemaking mean for people in growth area communities after the COVID-19 pandemic? Our presenters shared their different experiences and stages of the recovery process and the future impacts on what growth area communities will build, how they'll live and how they'll connect.

### Four post-pandemic insights for growth area Councils

- The COVID-19 crisis is a golden opportunity for change that will disappear fast if we don't seize it now - Ludo Campbell-Reid
- In WA, an increasingly community-led approach to placemaking is on the rise, with a greater focus on local connections; parks and open space; active transport options and infrastructure - Nick Stawarz
- Better data is important so that local government doesn't waste time, money and resources on things that aren't going to have a positive impact on people - Kylie Legge
- Three types of cities are emerging post-pandemic with some changing for the better and others getting back in their cars and heading towards "carmageddon" – Ludo Campbell-Reid.

### ***Never waste a crisis - Ludo Campbell-Reid***

Before COVID, Wyndham was the fastest growing municipality in Australia, soon to be the size of the Gold Coast. The impact of COVID in Wyndham has been brutal – affecting health, wellbeing and livelihoods. For many months the highest number of cases in Australia was in Wyndham. It has the highest number of mortgage deferrals.

We have a golden opportunity now to reimagine our cities and continue the environmental and other benefits that we have seen during lockdown. Never waste a crisis – they are a chance to think differently and to change habits. Compare this crisis to an Olympics – an invited crisis – that can be a positive, a way to mobilise change that otherwise wouldn't happen.

Some cities around the world are using this crisis to change for the better – for example, in Paris, a thousand kilometres of bike lanes are being rolled out; outdoor dining is booming in Boston; in Germany, railway platforms are being extended and more trains put on. Others just want to go back to the way things were – getting back into our cars and heading towards “carmageddon”.

Imagine if we designed roads the same way we design footpaths and bike lanes – just suddenly stopping with no connection to another road, for example, putting poles in the middle of our streets – yet we accept this for pedestrians and cyclists. This is not a war on cars – it's about building smart transport systems, not just one element.

Wyndham is taking a four-pronged approach following consultations including round-table meetings with local business:

- Reimagining the future: `most of Wyndham's urban development currently happens in greenfield areas, car dependent. We want to change that around so that more is happening in the urban areas. Council has a 20-year future-focused plan.
- Economic recovery plan: a five-million-dollar program for local businesses; supported by other initiatives like a Buy Local campaigns and an Innovate to Celebrate program for business
- Urban Recovery Plan: receiving many enquiries about starting up local businesses and companies, how to adapt homes for a better working from home environment.
- Public life recovery plan: adapting to more outdoor dining, less car parking, including a Mobility Plan for recovery: active transport strategy plan with a 'missing links' component. Trialling pop-up bike lanes

There is an opportunity for change that will disappear fast if we don't seize it now.

### ***A community-led approach - Nick Stawarz***

COVID-19 has brought an intense local focus. In Wanneroo, the sense of community solidarity and connection has continued since lockdown. Wanneroo's population is projected to double in the next 20 years, so big changes were already happening. COVID has accelerated some things – a more community-centric approach, with the community taking more of a lead role. Online engagement has increased, with a big interest in local matters like planning. Social connections have increased in many ways; creative expressions like local art initiatives and a teddy bear trail; parks and open spaces heavily used.

Now in WA there is an increased prominence of places, spaces and everything local, particularly parks and open spaces. Wanneroo's research shows that parks and open spaces are where local audiences most want to see events in future. In response, Council has flipped the event plan - from providing four big events per year, to 12 smaller, more local events.

Having activation projects ready to go is important to capitalise on the range of short-term funding opportunities that are available.

In new, car-centric communities with big houses on small blocks, there are generally not a lot of opportunities to interact with neighbours. We need to make it easy for the community to do things for themselves. Residents have been contacting Council about placemaking – something previously unheard of – with suggestions for things like markets, food truck events. There is a long way to go – we are still in process of enabling those positive outcomes to happen.

Focus on finding local residents who want to change things; our approach has not been to do it for the community, but to take a very personal approach, meet with as many local people as possible and explore what they want to do.

Business impacts are different. It has been really difficult to reengage the business community after COVID. Wanneroo's economic recovery plan identifies place activation in response. Local businesses need time to readjust in this time of transition.

COVID has highlighted the importance of local places and spaces and it's important to be ready to harness that positive initiative in the community. In general, the sense of nervousness in Perth seems to have gone.

### ***People telling us what is important, not us telling them - Kylie Legge***

How do we know what people want these days?

We look at why we want better places – to attract more people; to get them to stick, stay, spend and share. We are working at two scales – self-sustaining streets, and more liveable neighbourhoods.

Placemaking is not just about making a “place” magnet and hoping people will come, it is about removing the barriers. And if the barrier for people walking to a community hub is a six lane highway, that's very difficult to overcome. Look at what are the barriers to simple things – like a lack of safe, connected bike paths being a disincentive to more active transport.

Better data is important, so we don't waste time, money and resources on things that aren't going to have a positive impact on people. Place Score captures data on what communities' value, to help government to set priorities.

We need people in neighbourhoods telling us what is important, not us telling them. This helps us to define unbiased place priorities and how a neighbourhood is performing on those priorities.

Understanding shared values and differences is important. Values around access and connectivity have changed post-COVID – being locally connected is critical. Placescore's snapshot of 70,000 datasets across the country shows two big priorities: maintaining and caring, long term, for our natural environment. A big change is the increased importance of walkability. Another priority is having more social neighbourhoods.

#### **Are the changes we're seeing permanent?**

**NS** – We are still in the early stages of a journey. We need to capture what people really valued from the pandemic experience. Some things can be quick fixes – connectivity and local access, others are more complex.

**KL** – People have rediscovered their local neighbourhoods and homes. We are seeing a new level of openness from government; we've learnt more about our systems and agility to deal with crisis. Yes, we have changed for ever. Not just physically, but there has been a social and psychological impact.

It's important to recognise the personal and professional trauma that many have been through. The fear of illness is a new element impacting people's decision making on going to shopping centres and other spaces.

**Bronwen Clark** – After recent natural disasters like the 2020 bushfires and this pandemic, there has been a big shift in the way local government responds to crisis.

**LCR** – We need to keep building resilience - cities are really complex and can't be solved with binary solutions. We are seeing the emergence of three types of cities post COVID, impacted by the extent of a city's lockdown:

- Minimally affected cities, unchanged
- Affected cities have changed temporarily but will go back to old ways
- Smart cities have learnt, asked and will use this biggest opportunity in our lives to build sustainable communities.

Yes, a big shift is needed - working from home has been legitimised. The future is about more agile cities, more localism. Now is the time for political and professional leadership.

