

A brief evening talk to WRA, 9.2.26

By Phil Harris, Troppo Architects

I get the feeling from Mike & Catherine that I'm meant to be talking about matters planning that might affect us here in the fine town of Walkerville. So I *kinda* will...

Thought I'd start at the beginning: where has the notion of 'Planning' come from? Obviously it comes from us, and, as far as we are concerned...

There are 3 core things we humans need and do: Food, Sex and Shelter.

What I'm purporting is that these are *natural* things.

In the beginning I imagine the need for **food** gave us cannibalism – and more genteely the art of hunting and a love of fruit and nuts. As we gathered in bigger aggregations, organised communities, villages, towns, states and nations we created hierarchies of roles and power – and we created coin and jobs and whole economies to enshrine those hierarchies. Food soon became commodified, with monetary value – and a means to wealth or expense. It's now packaged, a consumer item, a fair way from our own direct gathering/ growing/ winning by skill.

Sex – as you all know, we're wired for that. It enriches our bonds with another. It's a familial glue. We've used it transactionally, too, including to grow dynasties in our own likeness. Now we have an industry around it. And, by listening to those in advertising, it sells.

To **shelter**. It's an uneven thing the atmosphere that wraps our planet. Though our body temperature demands a constancy for our even operation, our atmosphere is constantly challenging us. Heat, cold, wind, rain, sleet and snow must all be ameliorated. When it's not the perfect calm 23 degrees, clothes can help, but shelter does better, enabling us to be together to continue activity.

And of course our wild planet is full of other creature types – that in a trice would threaten us, irritate or even devour us. Then there's our own creature-types who wish to steal from us or to trounce us. We need a retreat and barrier for safety from of all of this danger.

...So shelters of mud, stone and wood came to solve our problems in interacting with our planet and its wild collection of creatures. We'd build shelter ourselves, with family, with community – and, as our civil hierarchies grew, with conscripted or hired labour. By now shelter is also commodified. We buy building. And we buy rather than inherit or simply occupy property. (Although in 1836, occupying was fine.)

Though we cherish it, pour our heart and soul into it, it's now difficult to express our innate drive to shelter ourselves, except through the wallet.

So there we have it: all 3 natural needs and urges by now seriously commodified.

But I'm here to talk about the shelter drive, so I'll let the others slip by...

As we go along, please hang onto this rather base introduction. For in discussing the future, perhaps we can find a way into re-igniting and nurturing this shelter drive by remembering that building is a verb, a process – much more than a consumer object...

Perhaps we can seriously integrate community in shaping responsive public realms – our collective shelter making – through weaving in community knowledge and artistic skills. And at the dwelling level – be it apartments or an individual abode – maybe there’s a way to affordability through users joining in in building, as managers of construction, or as owner-builders; in arranging componentry, in personalising our builds. But can we get past developers? Can we get off our sofas?

Before we get to ‘bigger picture’, we also need to be mindful, become learned about detail that makes for good shelter...

We shelter builders have always jostled for space, for elbow room to be able to get on with our caring for family, our economic tasks and managing our social interaction. Let’s dwell on the detail of that for a bit. And rather than thinking about all the commercial, public and industrial kinds of building, by example I’ll just focus on our personal shelter – we could call it our housing, our domicile, our home... At troppo would say that, for success in creating a decent home, there are 10 patterns of activity that need to be accommodated:

I’ll flick through them fast – and yes they were created when in Darwin – but the principles stand anywhere. We’re trying to be a little abstract here, so as not to pre-determine answers. But, in our book, a dwelling – be it at density or in a paddock – is not a decent dwelling without them all being ticked off.

[images > > >]

This is important, for, in addition to the obvious accommodational and functional layers – you’ll note that there also social, economic and environmental opportunities that good housing might bring.

But we also need to organise beyond the individual project.

...And so we slowly arrive at the purpose of this talk.

When many shelters, many site developments come together, the organising of our communing becomes much more complex. To maintain some sense of calm, of order, we’ve invented the notion of ‘**planning**’.

And in the history of urban development, in the history of planning – in our city, our nation our globe – Walkerville is no different – the same sorta song as sung everywhere, but, sure, to our own melody twist and orchestration.

Here, too, like everywhere in Colonial Australia, we came and squatted.

Here, too, we came to formalise title. And other people came to see it was a good place to be.

Here, too, we came to subdivide; and to develop; and to densify, to go tighter and higher. And so the jostling started, and the idea of local governance and 'Planning' to bring order began; and so it became bureaucratised, at first localised – but by now Planning sits with Big Brother.

As canvas has moved to mud, brick, stone, timber and tin; to steel, concrete and glass – so, too, all the while we've been gathering devices as aids to living – especially as we've had less space to directly supply our needs for water, food and making, and less space to defecate, to manage our waste. We've arranged for community water, gas and then electrical lighting and organised waste systems and managed dumping places.

That has taken quite a bit of planning – and as we densify more and more planning – or is it more and more 'playing catch-up'?

And as a part of all this densifying, and for all this order we've bought, paradoxically 'time' seems to have become shorter – so we've also steadily arranged to apparently more efficiently move ourselves and our things.

Our moving devices of course initially were our feet; and if we were lucky we were able to draft a mule or a horse. Then we cut down the trees to co-opt steam for train engines; and devised fuels to generate electricity for trams; and we discovered the power of confined combustion to take us anywhere on 4 wheels. Now it's to flying, and within cities, droning.

Post-squatting, our means of fulfilling our needs have moved from a dray-ride to town, to a walk to a corner shop; to a drive to local business on a High Street that covered for everything; and thence to a 'centre' that absorbed High Street activity from an entire quadrant of the city...

Now it can all happen from one's sofa, on one's phone, on-line, and with drone delivery to a front door that stays firmly shut to the outside world.

No value-judgement meant there – it's just where we're at.

So, as we race forward in time, how do we plan – not just for the contemporary, but for the future? How do we scramble to shape our massed shelter future, so as not to be playing catch-up, but, rather, anticipating, creating fabulous places in which to live, work and play?

In Australia, in Adelaide, will our Planning & Design Code guide us there?

And how do we do this in the Town of Walkerville?

*In the face of all this change, will all our Heritage Surveys save the built fabric we know and love?
Will our Community Land Management Plans ensure our green spaces are secured?*

For starters, what is this Town? Is it only a town of the mind – a portion of an amorphous, sprawling city?

Or, is it definable? Of its own character? With its own way of being?

Be happy: I'll contend that, indeed, it has what a town takes.

...But we needs be careful, or it won't.

Our times are full of wild energy, of swirling concerns and diversions, brought through a Tower of Babel 24/7 news cycle, of global communication and immediate entertainment at fingertip.

Our consumption is immediate, immense and with a high level of waste.

We pollute; we idly watch as our neighbourhood's, our region's, our continent's, our planet's biodiversity shrinks. We've moved a long way from Genesis and the Garden of Eden.

We are – or is it we have been – the Age of the Anthropocene.

James Lovelock would have it that we are now in a post-Anthropocene Age, the Novacene, an age in which AI leads and effectively becomes us.

I think the creators of the Jetsons foretold of this in 1962. [image]

Whilst AI is bringing it to us in seriously imagined detail... [image]

Saudi Arabia is bringing it to us in the fresh-start realities that are The Line and The Blade. [image]

The thinking person, the sensually alive – the sensitive soul – wonders if this runaway scenario can be arrested – and, if not, executed with best human values. In this context of immense technological change, physically, in our material surrounds, can we quickly organise ourselves to do things responsively and well – for all who share in our massed togetherness?

Got to admit that taking up that mantle feels a little like a snail trying to cross the Main North Road in peak hour. Or like trying to walk out into the midst of a cyclone to retrieve your hat. But...

Chin up, let's take it on! C'mon heads out of the sand! Instead of collapsing in a heap, let's begin to imagine a Walkerville that acknowledges and grows by these emerging pressures...

Walkerville is definable. It is shaped by its inner patterning, its edges, and its position within Adelaide, on a very particular geographic strip of the Kaurna plain.

For starters, let's note our **High Street** – Walkerville Terrace – and also note that it's not very high, nor very long.

Let's strategise to boost it. Let's promote activity that acknowledges retail and commercial realities, that, alongside remnant thriving shops, lets create new ones – perhaps as yet unimagined – that serve to deliver for on-line shopping and drone delivery, and that is autonomous vehicle and robot friendly. And that promotes more and more socialising spaces – cafes, restaurants and markets, for if escape from the sofa is easy and ready, we'll adopt it.

And we do love the way Walkerville Terrace extends on east, bending, staggering up Lansdowne and onto Harris to keep to good land. In this sense it's the *artery* of our town. Let's keep it strong, thematic – and forever green and shady.

Let's note, from the heathen North East Road, the **Procession of Civility down Smith Street** – church, school, oval, recreation centres. Let's enshrine those things and support their ability to adaptably cater for diverse types of gathering, of our being together. Let's draw Walkerville Primary in as a flank to conjoin with that Procession.

...Remembering all the time there's a great view of the Hills beyond, and our River in the foreground.

To clear our immediate angst, let's right now just **accept our 'talls'** – built (the Watson), and unbuilt at the Buck – and let's decide how we might positively spin off from their being.

Maybe we augment them even: with neighbouring friends; or even add more elegant towers atop, towers and spires that riff on older Walkerville. The Buck probably remains problematic in this way. However, the Watson edges the epicentre of our High Street. Another tall – a thin one there – might anchor us even more proudly.

And as a part of going further at these spots, we should integrate futuristic public transport, modular – stackable – electric vehicles and interchanges that fold in with an expanded and well-detailed adjacent public realm – all for improved wider community amenity and mobility. At the least, local densification promoted in this way should be compensated for by tightening bounds on densification elsewhere.

Let's also love our **rich-on-display** precincts – for there will always be those wishing spaciouly, ostentatiously spend in this way. Medindie and Edwin Terrace are state treasures. Their elevated position with outlook, and their connections with Parklands and Wilderness prestige are synergistic, and un-replicable. And spaciousness means the future can easily be accommodated.

On the other side of the coin, is **micro-shelter and temporary shelter...**

Walkerville subtly contains pockets of shelter devised for our poor, the dispossessed, those in and out of work, and our unwell. These are manifest in Housing Trust apartments, small homes and residential clinics.

A different version is Levi Park, a place for those in transition or simply travelling through. And of course there's the occasional mobile home or station wagon parked at the river's edge that is a very tiny home on wheels.

Can we find ways to expand on low cost and social housing, in low-impact, affordable ways – in oversized driveways, through backyard tiny homes, by aiding repurposing of generous suburban house into twin keys or boarding houses?

Can we preference locations for these new micro-homes to conjoin with High Street and recreational amenity? Can we assist in connecting users to access contemporary and future communications and mobility devices?

Is this approach a more affordable, and streetscape-wise, a less disruptive and (over time) redeemable alternative to the emerging **Vale Park** syndrome of 'demolish a decent detached house and build two smaller'? It certainly has a smaller embodied energy, lower carbon emissions development footprint. And it can be implemented by an owner-developer. Can we find a funding model for this?

Something's got to change. The current development pattern has reduced tree canopy – and trees lower urban temperatures and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. A more micro-scaled, nuanced development pattern has better chance to offset landscape removal.

In any case, whatever the future development pattern within Walkerville's larger lot precincts, as a community we must advocate for greener shadier streets and demand that development, if not regenerative, is at least 'green neutral', integrating intensified private landscape that's richer than lawn, and maybe includes green rooftops and walls.

Peripheral very busy roads – Main North and North East – are, to our north, our encircling town walls. Too hard to cross, but a wonderful device to keep Others at bay. By all means the city's service industries and things best seen or used from a car can congregate there – for we all need the city, too. Therefore let's amplify that purpose of them.

And let's push and push for electric vehicles to keep down their noise. And push and push for better public transport along them.

And 'cleft' roads – Nottage, Stephen and Lower Portrush – carve transversely through Walkerville. They divide us, but offer us nothing in terms of services. They carry Outsiders through.

But let's not ignore them. Rather, let's own them, mark them, calm them. Let's impose Walkerville upon those who pass through. How? I imagine we can;

- Turn them into forest groves
- Emblazon their surfaces with town colours
- Turn their power and light poles into beacons, and a procession of Walkerville interpretive art.

The cleft roads are there because they're river crossings. Crossing any river should be a thoughtful, mindful act – and one that reflects on our environment, our seasons, our flood and food stories. Rivers sustain us, but also cause us angst. River crossings demand respect. And, after all, this is Adelaide's reason-for-being river. These crossings – these Welcome to Walkerville moments – need a strong, brave, storytelling, urban design boost.

Maybe these crazy good things can come about as a co-product of better accommodating pedestrians and bikes, of accommodating future transport, of accommodating future holographic communications, perhaps.

And so to **our River**. Yes, the Colonel loved it, based a city around it. For Kurna, Karra-wirra-parri always was, and still is, of vital cultural importance.

The westward stretch of the river from Walkerville to Gilberton is of deep Kurna meaning.

The high ground south of the Stephen Terrace bridge – where the servo is – was a burial ground; and at the Hackney Bridge were Tarntanyangga's ochre pits. (Our colonists found them to be good for brickmaking.)

Beyond Hackney, the Botanic Park was a favoured camping place.

Between all of this, on the Gilberton side, just north of the deep waters of the former baths, a canoe tree stands to testify to this ancient significance.

Of course the permanent water of the River would also come to draw settlers along it. But its proximity to the city also meant its desirability for 'sit-on-it-a-bit' venture-capitalist subdivision.

Eventual real development by real people at a reasonable urban density would take 14 years for much of Walkerville and 40-odd years for Gilberton. In the meantime, in the early days of the Colony, farm production was a good fit for the lands that became our town.

In Walkerville the River has always been sharply defined – the last bastion of solid banks before the flats of the city and western Adelaide. Here, those sharp banks pursue a dizzily wending course – and one that threw our whitefella geometricians and surveyors into a spin. In the step-by-step subdivision of Walkerville, the replicating grid of elsewhere in growing Adelaide went out the window. And so we have these streets that angle and merge and collide, creating twists and turns to a journey – and some curiously shaped allotments.

Aside from demanding knowledge and ingenuity to forge its crossing, the river spawns ecosystems that are a haven for creatures that fly and swim, that are not of the ordinary plain.

It also gives us what is now an enshrined linear park, good for diverse recreation – and, like for rivers the world around, a transport corridor. To our town, Adelaide's O-bahn is a foreign object that dips in to Walkerville at moments, slipping through without belonging.

The river of course also promotes bounding high value real estate. More and more we greedily push toward its edges – but we must hold back. Or, do we democratically densify such a high amenity fringe?

In the future what will our River come to offer us – and what will we come to offer our River?

Will O-bahn 2 engage with us townfolk? Will it enable us a commute to the city from within Walkerville? Will it intrude less within our Linear Park? Will the line incorporate carriage for segmented electric vehicles that join in? And, tearaway e-bikes, perhaps?

Can we deftly populate the linear park's bounds with housing that is small-footprint and thereby somewhat affordable, but of low visibility, permeable and ephemeral, rather than a barrier to the river?

And, meanwhile, on the **North Bank**...

From the town walls that are those northern peripheral roads down to the river, the land, the earth that is Walkerville is effectively a **slope**. And that slope has meaning, holds stories. By comparison the River's southern side – Saint Peters Norwood – is flat. There it's more arable, siltier land, and criss-crossed by minor creeks. (Home of the Redlegs.)

At a decent level on our Walkerville slope, our town-edging North East Road, has always led on to the springs of Tea Tree Gully. For Kurna (and in our adopted place-naming) this is the 'Yatala' side of the River, the north side. A track, now the road has therefore been a longtime way into the foothills. (And this Yatala is home of the mighty North Adelaide Roosters.)

I remember the skinny old road through the fields of Gilles Plains over Holden Hill and around to Modbury 2 tin sheds and a pub opposite the oval and hall). Turn left to Modbury Heights, overlooking Torrens Island and the Gulf, and there was Grandpa's farm.

I noted the hotels along the way, the Walkers Arms, the OG, the Windsor Gardens, the Highlander. I imagined the drays and the open vehicles wending their way with hay and produce down to the city – and then wending their way back laden with supplies.

So, what of our slope?

It's a grandstand on the River. It delivers Hills views. Future development heights north of much of Walkerville Terrace should be scrutinised and crafted to enable the retention of outlook for all. Maybe we can keep any northern tallies to the defining town walls along those roads.

And water runs down slopes. How do we detain and clean our stormwater now? Can we do that better? Can we fold the attributes of a slope into a macro groundwater and landscape plan for giving back better to Karra-wirra-parri? And perhaps we can irrigate our street trees and domestic gardens along the way(?)

Finally, to our **pivotal corners**...

We bound the city at its **north-east Parklands** – ours to meld with – but we no longer can: 9 lanes of traffic to the south and 10 to the north. For a pedestrian it feels a little 'Gaza 2026'.

Can we underground this stuff, and let our Terrace once again flow to Lower North Adelaide? We'd then be able breezily stroll and cycle this journey. Can the graciousness of a tram connect the Town again with the city, stopping here to take all of the Buck's future apartment dwellers off the road? Will this be where e-vehicle pods conjoin to form their own compact singular e-train?

And whose olive grove is it. C'mon Town of Walkerville, let's curate it and get into oil production. I can see an al fresco kiosk in the middle, with cars out of sight.

Welcome to Walkerville, the first farmlands of our city!

Then there's Medindie's **Scotty's Corner**. It's visible for kilometres for city-bound Main North Road traffic. Deserves to be a tower on the Town Wall, staring down invaders. A very different kind of town marker.

What the Main North Road lacks is safe and sexy public transport. If it stays as buses, they need their own lane; and if it shifts to a tram, then maybe its aerial(?) Then a transit-oriented development (a TOD) might strew from Scotty's north and south, keeping to the Main North Road edge – with denser housing, commerce and community services, reducing development pressure on quieter streets. But of course how to buffer to residential Medindie as it is. Maybe the TOD's not actually that tall – and at scale, public realm amenity and pedestrian and cycle ways should integrate. Micro-housing, including as short term stays, could integrate, honouring the Scotty's tradition.

Of course, in detail, in delivering on all this, as I introduced at the beginning of this ramble, we should keep referring to the nuanced layers of what makes for decent architecture, that is deeply functional, socially and environmentally connecting and that offers economic opportunity.

And we must remember that in all this building that is on offer, we can be engaged as a community, as knowledge-holders, as artists, as managers of construction, as owner-builders...

Well, maybe all these visions and processes can be Walkerville 2050(?)

I'd say we should move on from the backfoot stuff that is the Planning Design Code with its zonings and various overlays that simply tell us what we already have, and that keep updating for every step out of line that is approved.

To the Walkerville Council I would add: let's move on from the base, but static work of worthy Heritage Surveys and Land Management Plans.

Instead, indeed, let's paint a vision for 2050 that understands the definition of our Town through our history and our ecology; and especially through the quirks that physically define its heart, its edges, and its intrusions.

The vision would clearly elaborate our place within the greater city fabric, and define its desired holistic character, understanding what we have and what we love.

Most importantly, the Vision would acknowledge growing contemporary pressures and a technological future that is racing ahead of us – *and* a means of positively accommodating them.

That would be a Great Town. I'd want to live in it.