

CBD pays high price for parking meters

It's time that Newcastle City Council listened to the community it serves, writes **Paul Murphy**.

DEPUTY lord mayor Sharon Claydon and other councillors should be congratulated in their attempt to extend free inner-city parking on a Saturday.

However, in case you haven't noticed, parking fees in Newcastle's CBD have just jumped from \$2.30 to \$3 an hour at several on-street and off-street parking areas in the CBD.

Most disappointing is that Newcastle City Council has not consulted with the public, the Newcastle business community or groups such as the Hunter Business Chamber, its own Newcastle City Centre committee and the Newcastle Alliance on its plans or intentions for the ticketing rise.

To have parking officers working on the weekends, issuing fines to people visiting our foreshore, beggars belief in my opinion.

And we feel for the business owners and staff on Darby Street, in The Junction and surrounding areas where meters are proposed to be introduced. The fact that meters have never been introduced into these areas before immediately signals a detrimental impact to their customer flow, with no real gain or return.

The council must provide the businesses and public who visit these areas with a written guarantee that a justifiable financial compensation, in the form of infrastructure or beautification improvements, will be delivered back to the city. When parking fees were reintroduced in the late 1990s, the community was told it would go towards beautification work within the CBD.

The results speak for themselves. Where is this money? It certainly hasn't been spent on the CBD.

Apparently, the plan for the new increase was included in the council's management plan and had been on public exhibition during May this year. However, the council



COUNTING COST: The council is making it harder for businesses, especially small business, to prosper.

made no real attempt to inform or communicate with the community about this public exhibition period. The council documents show further planned increases, with rises to parking to jump to \$4 in 2012-13, \$5 in 2013-14 and \$6 in 2014-15.

Our own council is making it harder for businesses, especially small business, to operate and prosper within the CBD.

These parking fee increases will provide an enormous income to the council and now, with an expanded number of meters being introduced throughout the Newcastle LGA, the question must be asked: how much revenue will they deliver?

In the council's end-of-financial-year report for 2010, on-street and off-street parking fees generated

more than \$9 million of income with an expenditure close to \$4 million.

To me, this expenditure seems extraordinarily large. How is this expenditure exhausted? And, more importantly, where does all the net profit go? What goes back into the community and where? Is it possible that the council wants to turn parking into a viable asset, and then sell it off to private business to make a profit?

Newcastle businesses operating within the council area pay one of the highest council rates in the region, possibly the state. In comparison to rates in Charlestown, for example, Newcastle businesses are paying much more, but do not get any better service. You just need to look at the \$3 million City Centre Revitalisation Plan.

We have seen no timelines, no commitment, yet this seems to be an ongoing issue with no measurable outcomes. As chairman of the Newcastle Alliance, and a business operator within the Newcastle community, I urge the council to show the reasons for this parking fee strategy.

We want consultation, we want to know why these increases are happening, and we want to see action and results. We as business owners, and the community, deserve more from Newcastle City Council, so it's over to our councillors. Don't forget the local elections are on in September 2012.

Paul Murphy is chairman of the Newcastle Alliance.

Creativity is behind all great museums

The arts must connect to an audience, writes **Elizabeth Ann Macgregor**.

THE Museum of Contemporary Art is a unique institution – the only museum in the country that is dedicated to collecting, exhibiting and interpreting the work of living artists.

Attendances rose to over 578,000 in 2010, which is more than a five-fold increase in 10 years. But when I first took on the director's role in 1999 it was an institution with low attendance figures, low morale and on the verge of insolvency.

When I arrived in Sydney, there were all sorts of views on what should be done to make the museum viable. For me it was simple: we had to reconnect with our audience. We needed to challenge the notion that art is only for the elite.

Of course, a key factor in our success was the removal of the entry charge. People were much less critical of contemporary art if they were given the opportunity to get to

know more about it, and above all, made to feel welcome.

The problems of the current building, which was not built as a museum, were not something to resolve in a piecemeal manner. When the news that the iconic sandstone clad building which dominates West Circular Quay might be demolished leaked out, it brought an avalanche of criticism. The then premier realised that he simply couldn't let it happen.

Fast forward 12 years, and here I am presiding over the major expansion of the MCA. This expansion is taking place within the context of the success of the museum, financially and artistically, and the redevelopment is a response to its needs.

No longer the preserve of the elite, art museums, and especially those with a contemporary focus, have seen a huge increase in attendances in the past three decades and a consequent demand for better facilities, including those for education.

Everybody will be familiar with

the success of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, with its substantial proven economic benefit to a city which had previously lacked any tourism potential. People now talk about the "Guggenheim effect".

In the UK the strategy of investing in good buildings was given a major boost by the birth of the National Lottery in 1997. Tate Modern has been a success beyond all expectations.

But there have been some notable failures in the UK. The biggest fiasco of all was the Millennium Dome in Greenwich.

The successful projects in the UK were led by people who were steeped in their business: making culture interesting and relevant to their local community, however defined.

The second problem is the transporting of one model into a different context and assuming that the same success is possible. For example, how realistic was a proposal for the Geelong Guggenheim? Bilbao's success is based on the fact that a large percentage of the population of Europe is within a two-hour flight.

Trends indicate that investment in modern and contemporary facilities have even more potential because of the young audience they attract. Two-thirds of the visitors to the MCA are under 35. Our building must cater to their needs in a changing world of new technology.

Fostering creativity is no longer an esoteric concept – it is vital to our economic future. We need to find ways to engage our artists as well as architects in the creation of good public space and good buildings.

I look forward to seeing how your plans for the Newcastle Region Art Gallery develop. Here we have an excellent gallery with a strong community support, which needs some further investment in the building to realise its potential as a major centre for the region.

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor is the director of the MCA in Sydney. This is an edited extract from her Newcastle Art Gallery Society Annual Lecture speech on Thursday night.



Coin for carparks

PAID parking again dominated the online comment stream as readers responded to the first stage of Newcastle City Council's on-street parking plan. This proposes extending paid parking in the Civic precinct until 9pm as well as paid parking around Markettown.

One minute they are telling us the city is dead and the next minute they are telling us that we are at risk of insufficient parking spaces. Well, if that is the case, we need to stop the university development.

eyes wired open

To be honest, as a Cooks Hill resident, I welcome paid parking in my area.

sanchez

Firstly, what is the population of San Francisco relative to Newcastle? Secondly, did the council send someone to San Francisco to research this idea? If yes, how much did that cost?

Barry

If Newcastle City Council stopped the practice of dishing out 200-odd ratepayer-sponsored cars to employees, Newcastle would have 200 more parking spaces, reduced peak-hour traffic congestion, a lower carbon footprint and, best of all, some \$2 million.

2b

I do not park where there are parking meters. If there were paid parking around Markettown I would go elsewhere.

Daniel Duggan

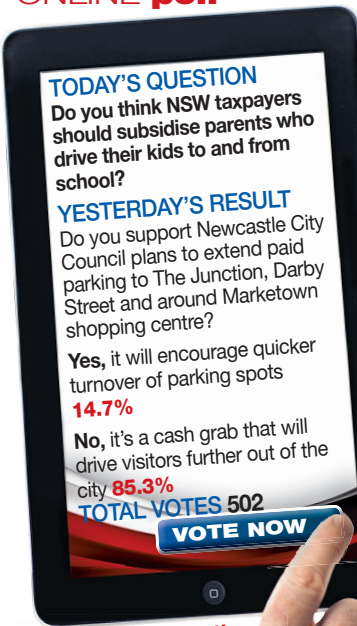
Can't we build multi-storey carparks?

bk

As someone who spent his working life in Sydney, I find Novocastrian complaints about parking and traffic laughable. Get over it, and get out and walk.

Colt

ONLINE poll



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