

# NO TOWERING VISION FOR PARRAMATTA



**CHRIS JOHNSON**

**T**wo events will potentially change the shape of Parramatta city. The first is the sacking of the councillors who had been robustly promoting a high-rise vision of Parramatta with tall slender towers. The second is the arrival of the Greater Sydney Commission and the throwing out of the previous council's vision.

The trigger for what could be a dramatic reduction in the growth of

Parramatta came in a determination by the Greater Sydney Commission which effectively reduced a 60-storey proposal to 20 storeys, by eliminating a 45-minute rule for the time a shadow passed over a public square in midwinter in the middle of the day and reimposing stricter regulations.

The determination also said the elimination of the rule related to overshadowing of all public spaces.

Now most people would think a bit of sunshine on a public space is pretty good but the sun tends to move during the day so shadows are inevitable.

There are now three public spaces that must not have shadows, Parramatta Place, Jubilee Park and Lancer Barracks, and it looks like the Greater Sydney Commission will add Centenary Square.

When taken together, these four public spaces stretch across the

middle of Parramatta and therefore have the effect of reducing the height of all buildings to their north. Already a second tall tower has been effectively reduced from 80 to 20 storeys and is therefore unlikely to proceed.

Greater Sydney Commission chief commissioner Lucy Turnbull has come out firmly backing sun access and equating these public spaces to medieval squares in Rome. The implication is that if Rome doesn't overshadow its piazzas then Parramatta should follow suit.

The difficulty with this is that the Piazza Navona and the Campo de' Fiori are surrounded by four-storey buildings. Rome is generally a low-rise city with a character very different from the tall slim towers the now-sacked council aspired to.

So will the New York tall-tower vision prevail or the romantic terra-

cotta roofs of low-rise Rome be the future for Parramatta? What is needed is a repositioning of public space to where it supports future growth.

Indeed, there is a funding stream the City of Parramatta can access to build public infrastructure. The only catch is that the funding comes from allowing the tall towers to be built.

The NSW government is promoting Parramatta as the second CBD for Sydney. The difficulty is that Parramatta is a quarter of the size of Sydney's CBD so every bit of development is essential.

And how the Greater Sydney Commission manages growth in the Parramatta CBD will indicate how they will be managing growth across the whole metropolitan area.

Chris Johnson is CEO of Urban Taskforce and former NSW Government Architect.