

# Pursuing Planning in Regional Tasmania

## The Case of Devonport 1915-1945

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**By World War One the north-western coastal town of Devonport had begun to develop into the third most important town in Tasmania. It possessed a small but growing industrial economy and port and an increasing population, causing the town to expand. These developments, while welcomed, underlined how badly Devonport had originally been laid out. The 1915-16 lectures by visiting British town planning advocate Charles C. Reade stimulated much interest in town planning, especially how to make the most of Devonport's natural beauty before the town grew further. For ten years town planning was widely discussed in the Devonport Municipal Council and the regional newspapers, largely motivated by the need to attract tourists. From the mid-1920s, without a town planning association to assert the power of public opinion, interest in town planning was confined to individual enthusiasts and waxed and waned until World War Two. From 1943, in the expectation of a new society promised in the post-war world and the need for more housing once war ended, town planning assumed greater importance. A new force, the Devonport Chamber of Commerce, became a vocal proponent of town planning to stop the town developing haphazardly and halting commercial and population growth. The Municipal Council responded positively to the Chamber's lobbying. The State Government also saw the need for town planning and passed the Town and Country Planning Act 1944. Finally, the interests of the Municipal Council, the State Government and pressure groups had found a common purpose. This paper shows that discussion of town planning was not confined to Australian capital cities by examining the progress of town planning in the growing regional town of Devonport between 1915 and 1945.**

**Keywords** — *Devonport, Tasmania; town planning; regional cities; Town and Country Planning Commissioner.*

### INTRODUCTION

In his survey of the richness and diversity of Australian planning history from 2002, Freestone argued that some themes “remain underdone”, including “rural planning” and “places marginalized for planning”.<sup>1</sup> He pointed out that “metropolitan dominance” had been “weakened somewhat by studies moving from the big state capitals into more peripheral urban centres” such as Darwin, regional cities like Albury-Wodonga and Launceston, and country towns and remote places like Woomera. This paper seeks to further weaken the metropolitan stranglehold on planning history by

1 Freestone, 2014, 10.

examining the impact of planning ideas before 1945 on the small regional town of Devonport located in north-west Tasmania. Taking Nichols injunction on the Melbourne experience to heart, this paper, while focusing on the Devonport Municipal Council, gives full play where it occurred to the crucial “input of the general public”, local newspapers and interests groups into planning.<sup>2</sup>

Planning theorists have stressed how public inclusion and collaboration are crucial to the success of planning action. Based on his analysis and activism in Aalborg, Denmark, Flyvbjerg concluded that for planning to be effective local government must more actively co-operate with interested participants and facilitate their involvement with a planning committee with the aim of “ensuring that discussions and decisions would be as democratic and have as wide support as possible”.<sup>3</sup> Healey argues that, when planning ideas and advocates are fragmented among an ad hoc assortment of individuals and groups, planning can make little headway. When planning processes become more collaborative and inclusionary of major stakeholders, then planning was more likely to become a practical reality.<sup>4</sup>

Arguably, collaboration and inclusion were more likely to be achieved in small towns than in larger urban centres, but the current state of research on Australian planning history does not enable us to make that point with confidence. Indeed, we may be pardoned for thinking that town planning was only of import to residents of capital cities and perhaps some larger regional cities, but not to residents of small regional towns in Australia. Certainly, planning historians have not shown much interest in those towns before 1945. An examination of the populations of major centres in Australia between 1911 and 2011 reveals that in 1911 nine regional towns had populations of between 4,000 and 6,000: Albany, Bunbury, Bundaberg, Cairns, Devonport, Dubbo, Geraldton, Mackay and Wollongong.<sup>5</sup> Of those towns, only Mackay in Queensland, which developed a city-wide plan in the 1930s, has been closely studied.<sup>6</sup>

This paper provides further evidence that town planning was seen as relevant to the needs of small regional towns and that in the case of Devonport town planning attracted the attention of influential residents and interest groups, especially during the two World Wars. A crucial catalyst during World War Two was the Devonport Chamber of Commerce, formed in 1940, which was keen to collaborate with local and State government and community bodies to initiate planning. Concerned not to repeat past mistakes arising from unplanned development and keen to facilitate population and economic growth, town planning enthusiasts pushed at different times for better transport infrastructure, more open spaces and recreational grounds, civic improvements, town beautification, and a city and regional plan. Most of these desiderata were beyond reach, not least for financial reasons, until the passage of the Town and Country Planning Act 1944, which provided necessary powers, and the subsequent appointment of the first Town and Country Planning Commissioner Ronald Alison McInnis, who provided the expertise and guidance that had been badly lacking in Devonport. McInnis also adopted a collaborative and inclusionary approach with both the Council and community groups.

In the next section, I will briefly trace the history of Devonport as a town and discuss how it was laid out. The following two sections will show that there was no shortage of discussion about planning during World War One and the interwar period, but different planning objectives were raised by isolated voices who failed to join forces and interest in planning waned. In the final section on World War Two we find much greater emphasis placed on collaboration and inclusion, which made the Devonport Municipal Council more confident about proceeding with planning.

2 Nichols, 2004, 55.

3 Flyvbjerg, 2002, 364.

4 See generally on collaboration in planning Healey, 2006.

5 ABS, 2014; 7 other towns had populations of between 6,000 and 9,000 in 1911.

6 Petrow, 1997.

## DEVONPORT TO 1915

In 1850 two townships were set aside as reserves on either side of the Mersey River in north-west Tasmania.<sup>7</sup> On the east was the township of Torquay comprising about half a square mile and on the west Formby covering about one and a half square miles. Torquay developed into an administrative centre and grew more quickly until 1885 when the railway, the main driver of development, arrived at Formby, which for farmers in the region became “the most readily accessible outlet for consignment of produce”. The two townships finally amalgamated in 1890, but were not physically united until a bridge was built in 1902 when the small settlements of Wivenhoe and Appledore were absorbed into the town of Devonport. From 1890 Devonport was governed by a Town Board, which improved the esplanade, water supply and town hall, introduced sanitation and electric lighting, and spent most of its money on streets until achieving municipal status in 1907.<sup>8</sup> By 1900 Devonport had developed into “one of the leading centres of trade, commerce and population” in Tasmania, the main shipping port on the north-west coast and an attractive tourist resort.<sup>9</sup> Devonport’s population growth was steady but not fast: it was 4,859 in 1911, reaching 6,577 in 1933 and 9,100 in 1947.

Town planning was not much in evidence before Devonport became a municipality. McInnis’s 1945 investigation revealed that both townships were “laid out in squares and rectangles with a general width of eight chains, separated by streets one chain wide”.<sup>10</sup> Surveys made between 1850 and 1860 conformed to “this remarkable design, in spite of the fact that the blocks were surveyed as farmlets”. Thereafter, as each farmlet was “subdivided to be absorbed in the town, the owner surveyed as he wished” and without “co-ordination”. For example the 500-acre farm south of Formby known as Wenvoe Estate was subdivided into town allotments in 1887 without properly made streets. The “piecemeal” and “haphazard” growth of Devonport was typical of towns and cities throughout Australia and left the Devonport Municipal Council (DMC) with unwelcome planning problems that became larger in time, such as “congested living conditions, bad access, and indirect communication”. To these problems was added “the railway cutting across blocks that were never designed for it”. The merits of town planning were barely mentioned in Devonport before World War One.

## PLANNING DURING WORLD WAR ONE

Interest in town planning in Tasmania was stimulated by the visit of Charles C. Reade, who represented the British Garden Cities and Town Planning Association on an Australasian town planning tour.<sup>11</sup> Reade’s lectures were well received in Hobart and Launceston and Devonport Councillors enthusiastically accepted an invitation from H.D. Flannagan, Secretary of the Southern Tasmanian Town Planning Association, for Reade to give a free public lecture. Businessman and long-time supporter of progressive urban causes Councillor Henry Hector McFie, the most consistent advocate of town planning in Devonport, thought it an “excellent” idea in view of proposed town improvements.<sup>12</sup> Councillor William Jeffrey lamented that Reade had not visited twenty-five years ago and wondered whether it was “too late now to make alterations”. The North West Post agreed about the mistakes of the past, but thought “the future progress of the town should be on sound lines”.<sup>13</sup> The Post was convinced that Reade will show that town planning was “one of those real live movements”, which will make poorly planned towns like Devonport “much more useful, efficient and attractive

than they are today”.<sup>14</sup>

On 25 January Reade lectured on “How to Make Devonport a Garden City”. He showed what a modern “ideal” town plan looked like with “an attractive entrance, parks in the centre, avenues, town hall, and public buildings in the higher parts”.<sup>15</sup> An industrial area should be located on “the lee side, so as to obviate the smoke and grime nuisance”. Showing views of Devonport, Reade pointed out that “the modern method of planning was particularly applicable to such lands as they had on the outskirts”. He congratulated Devonport on reserving a large water frontage area, which would become “a priceless heritage”, and predicted that Tasmania would be “the greatest tourist resort in the southern hemisphere”. If Devonport capitalized on its natural advantages and reserved more parks, people would not just visit, but Britons would come to live there. Reade urged the DMC to reserve more land for boulevards, waterfronts and recreation purposes before land values increased. Town planning “enhanced the welfare of the race as well as increased its health, strength and physique”. Judged by his well-attended lecture, Reade praised the “healthy civic spirit” in Devonport as this made town planning and improvements “possible”.

The next day Reade, Warden William Innes and Councillors McFie and William Henry Lewis drove Reade around Devonport. When interviewed by a journalist, Reade noted “the general dearth of trees in the streets” and suggested that the DMC had misjudged in planting “different varieties of trees at various intervals”, which produced a “distinctly ragged and untidy” effect.<sup>16</sup> He urged the Council to plant the same variety of tree in a street and to do so quickly as it took time to gain “the advantages and attractions of well planted streets”. He suggested that the Council employ “some expert from the mainland” to plan improvements of the Esplanade and make the most of its “unlimited scope and possibilities”. The Council should make the Esplanade and the waterfront “inviolable” and stop factories and other buildings from being built there. He observed danger signs such as building “semi-detached residences on small plots adjoining narrow right-of-ways”, which should be stopped to prevent overcrowding. Like other Tasmanian towns, Devonport would benefit from town planning legislation, which would ensure that the town developed “in accordance with modern town planning and garden city ideas”. They would thus avoid problems faced by older cities and towns, would save “considerable” sums and would “improve the health and happiness of the future citizens”.

After he left Devonport, Reade reflected that, what Nice was to the holidaymakers of France, the towns of north-west Tasmania could be to the residents of southern Australian States.<sup>17</sup> If those towns united forces and obtained “the best advice and plans for the future development and improvements” of esplanades and reserves, they would effect “one of the finest strokes of business in assuring a steady increase of tourists and the advantages that correspondingly will be gained”.

Reade’s sales pitch energized Devonport. The DMC threw its support behind a Town Planning Act “conferring on municipalities powers similar to those possessed by local bodies in England”.<sup>18</sup> The Devonport Tourist and Progress Association enlarged its scope to beautifying and caring for town reserves.<sup>19</sup> It obtained advice from Launceston’s Curator of Reserves William McGowan and the Council granted it permission to beautify Victoria Parade in conjunction with municipal staff. But these faltering steps were not built upon and, as the stresses of war began to tell, interest in town planning waned.

7 Binks, 1981, 35; Pink, 1990, 138-47.

8 Rootes, 2004, 45-6, 53; ABS, 2014.

9 *Cyclopedia of Tasmania*, 1900, Vol. 2, 248-9; Rootes, 2004, 29.

10 *Advocate*, 12 May 1945, 2.

11 Freestone, 1998.

12 NWP, 9 November 1915, 4; McFie, 1998, 81-2.

13 NWP, 27 November 1915, 2.

14 NWP, 19 January 1916, 4.

15 NWA, 26 January 1916, 2; NWP, 26 January 1916, 2.

16 NWP, 27 January 1916, 3.

17 *Examiner*, 3 February 1916, 6.

18 NWA, 12 September 1916, 2.

19 NWA, 12 September 1916, 2.

In June 1921 the *Advocate* bemoaned the gap between the “town-planning ideal and the position as it exists in Devonport to-day”.<sup>20</sup> The lack of a central park for visitors to meet in and the failure to widen streets proved that Devonport was not “preparing for the day when it will have assumed the size and importance of a city”. The Council’s main interest was where to locate industries in Devonport and it commissioned a report from Municipal Engineer George Davy Balsille.<sup>21</sup> Balsille was trained in New Zealand and worked in different parts of the world and Australia before his 1920 arrival in Devonport. He reported that the Devonport Municipality was 40 square miles in size and the town itself occupied 2000 acres. Devonport’s adequate water supply, convenient railway and port facilities, large areas of “eminently suitable” cheap land and forthcoming “cheap power” made it “an ideal manufacturing centre”. Although most streets were well-made, Balsille later reported that “hardly any of the streets cross at exactly right angles and very few are straight for more than a few blocks”.<sup>22</sup>

Outside the DMC a correspondent called “Ratepayer” wrote a series of letters to the *Advocate* in support of town planning. As the first stage in “the beautification of Devonport”, “Ratepayer” recommended that Council buy the block in front of the courthouse and town hall to remove a dangerous corner at the junction of Rooke, Oldaker and the Parade to avoid accidents.<sup>23</sup> The rest of the land could be turned into “a beautiful garden, with circular flower beds” and in the middle a monument to the fallen in World War One. “Ratepayer” repined that Devonport was “sadly deficient” in parks and playgrounds and most were “placed as far out of town as possible”, forcing children to play in the streets.<sup>24</sup> Land was still available west of Fenton Street and north of Oldaker Street for recreational purposes. All the land from the northern boundary of Victoria Park to the Bluff could be planted with grass and trees and would add to “the beauty and attractiveness of Devonport”.

“Ratepayer” suggested subdividing the block bounded by Best, Rooke and Stewart Streets and the Esplanade by a street to open up the land for “commercial purposes”.<sup>25</sup> This would also improve the town’s health and provide better drainage. “Ratepayer” was prepared to override “vested interests” to further “the welfare of the present and future citizens” of Devonport. “Ratepayer” attacked avaricious property owners who had “permanently disgraced the town by inflicting on the community a network of narrow lanes, called streets”.<sup>26</sup> He wanted the Council to resume land so that narrow streets like Steele Street could be widened. If property owners did not in the future build streets in accordance with municipal requirements, the DMC should refuse to “connect water or light to houses” they built.

Disappointed that Devonport lacked “public-spirited men”, “Ratepayer” hoped his letters would “awaken that public spirit” so that more leading men would do something for “the public well-being”.<sup>27</sup> He suggested that monthly meetings be held to discuss municipal subjects such as water, parks, and sanitary conditions. “Gumsucker” supported the idea of meetings and the formation of an association of “Town Improvers” or a “Civic Development League” with senior and

junior sections for both sexes.<sup>28</sup>

Despite these urgings, little was done about town planning in the 1920s. Balsille’s appointment to the Launceston Municipal Council in August 1923 deprived Devonport of much-needed expertise.<sup>29</sup> In March 1924 the Council passed McFie’s motion that the Works Committee report on a “town planning system on garden city lines, to include zoning”, but no evidence of this report has been found.<sup>30</sup> It appears that civic and business leaders put their spare energies either into the Devonport Tourist Association, the North-West and West Coast Tourist League after it was established in 1927 or the North West Municipal League from 1922, but not into town planning.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the DMC struggled in the 1920s and depressed 1930s to collect enough revenue to fund increasing municipal needs, not least for road maintenance, and municipal spending faced scrutiny from ratepayer associations.<sup>32</sup>

Before 1939 three main areas attracted town planning attention from different quarters. One was streets. The Council straightened Upper Rooke Street, which cost more than expected due to “the strange opposition of landowners who stood in their own light as well as that of their town”.<sup>33</sup> Esplanade improvements were made “in the teeth of protracted opposition” and its widening came at “considerable cost”. As motor-car use increased in the 1930s, Devonport’s narrow streets were “a distinct menace to life and limb” and detracted from “the value of the adjacent property”.<sup>34</sup> In Steele Street the Council passed regulations to require new buildings “to be placed back so as to give a reasonable roadway”, a decision which would take time to take effect in that “desirable suburban area”.

Market gardener Benjamin Horton criticized “the want of foresight” of those men who had allowed subdivision of paddocks without properly made streets.<sup>35</sup> They had “let things drift without any thought” for Devonport’s “future welfare”. Although Horton knew that ratepayers were reticent to support large schemes that raised municipal rates, he urged the DMC to show “vision” and buy the existing showground of twenty-five acres on which could be built 125 “modern dwellings”, thus raising over £1,000 a year in rates, “adding value to adjacent properties” and improving the flow of traffic. He conceded that such an idea was too big for current Councillors, but lived in hope that “some day perhaps future residents will have broader views on town-planning”.

The second aspect of town planning to receive attention from the Devonport Progress Association was beautifying the streets with trees.<sup>36</sup> Not everyone favoured planting trees alongside narrow streets. “Pedestrian” was concerned about cars “skidding in the sand or mud” to avoid a collision and instead causing death “by running into a tree guard or later into a timber tree”.<sup>37</sup> “Pedestrian” suggested that trees be planted on river banks and the Bluff, where there was “ample room for trees to be grown in all their beauty instead of the scarecrows in our streets, which cost so much for their annual trimming”.

20 *Advocate*, 20 June 1921, 5.

21 Municipal Engineer Reports, 1921, MCC7/5/1/1, TAHO; Daily Telegraph, 20 August 1924, 4.

22 Municipal Engineer Reports, 1922, MCC7/5/1/1, TAHO.

23 *Advocate*, 24 June 1921, 5.

24 *Advocate*, 10 August 1921, 1.

25 *Advocate*, 2 July 1921, 2.

26 *Advocate*, 18 July 1921, 5.

27 *Advocate*, 25 July 1921, 6.

28 *Advocate*, 28 July 1921, 1.

29 *Daily Telegraph*, 20 August 1924, 4; *Advocate*, 9 February 1926, 3.

30 *Advocate*, 8 March 1924, 4, 12 March 1924, 3.

31 Rootes, 2004, 124-6, 131-3.

32 Rootes, 2004, 143-150, 168-70, 196.

33 *Advocate*, 31 October 1934, 6.

34 *Advocate*, 3 November 1934, 12.

35 *Advocate*, 21 August 1939, 8.

36 *Advocate*, 3 November 1934, 7.

37 *Advocate*, 30 August 1937, 5.

The final aspect of town planning, taken up by McFie as part of his National Fitness campaign, was providing children's playgrounds and recreation grounds.<sup>38</sup> Such open spaces were "the lungs of the town", which could be beautified by trees and shrubs. He suggested that the DMC outlay £100 a year to purchase land where building had not yet occurred and swings, tennis courts and even hockey grounds could be built. The Council should develop "a long term scheme of improvement", which would attract new residents to Devonport, prevent disease and produce "a virile nation". Too much time was spent in improving the "ornamental" look of existing parks and reserves and not enough in creating new ones.<sup>39</sup>

## PLANNING DURING WORLD WAR TWO

The circuit breaker for Devonport came in June 1940 when the Devonport Chamber of Commerce (DCC) was formed and worked energetically with all members of the community to further "common interests" not just the more narrow interests of business and primary producers.<sup>40</sup> In January 1943 the DCC began to show "a progressive interest" in town planning and offered to co-operate with the State Government and the DMC.<sup>41</sup> The Advocate welcomed this development as planning would be needed after the war "to build a better world, with more amenities, taking fuller advantages of the amazing triumphs in applied science".<sup>42</sup> If no attempt was made to plan, that would prove that the people were "not subject to change. That would be fatal to ... communal wellbeing".

In August 1943 Commonwealth Bank manager and DCC member Edwin Chester Gifford took up the challenge and presented the Rotary Club with a town-planning scheme to meet Devonport's needs for the next fifty years. He canvassed the need for modern shipping and wharfing arrangements, resurfacing the Spreyton-Don Road so traffic did not unnecessarily run through Devonport, a modern Town Hall with library and museum, a youth centre, more parks and playgrounds and "a modern hospital ... on the hill overlooking the Bluff".<sup>43</sup> Gifford's vision was too ambitious and seems not to have garnered support.

More promising were the discussions between the Chamber of Commerce and DMC. The Chamber's President, engineer and manager of the Goliath Portland Cement Works Stanley Purves, met with the Council to discuss the Transport Commission's road proposals and post-war reconstruction.<sup>44</sup> Purves thought Devonport was "arriving at a stage when comprehensive town planning was called for". A sub-committee of the DCC was appointed to draft proposals for submission to a conference with the Council on post-war planning.<sup>45</sup> The Warden of Devonport, Edwin Ingledew, a produce merchant and accountant, told the Commonwealth Housing Commission in December 1943 that Devonport faced "many difficulties" in town planning and estimated that it would cost £50,000 to resume lands for street widening and rounding off corners, but felt planning "should be attempted".<sup>46</sup> He was also aware that Devonport needed 200 houses and 50 "urgently".

Not since Charles Reade's visit had town planning received so much focused discussion and support, which raised hopes for real advances in dealing with Devonport's urban problems. However, progress stalled when the Cosgrove Labor Government drafted a Town and Country Planning Bill, which engendered strong municipal opposition throughout Tasmania.<sup>47</sup> The Bill was submitted to a Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament, which sought comment on its provisions from interested parties. The Bill demonstrated a change of attitude by State Government on the need for town planning and optimism about the future population and industrial growth of Tasmania, but who should take responsibility for planning?

The DMC was one of a number of councils to argue that town planning should not be under the control of a board centralized in Hobart and should remain a municipal function.<sup>48</sup> While the Advocate acknowledged that the Bill required amendment, Devonport needed "some scheme of town planning" and the Council should respond with "an open and sympathetic mind".<sup>49</sup> As too many councils had failed to implement town planning, then perhaps an independent board was the only way to progress this "important matter". One correspondent doubted that the DMC had expertise to ensure that South Devonport would be turned into "the model suburb it should be" with "houses of attractive design".<sup>50</sup> Horton wanted the model of the garden city of Letchworth to be followed in the lay out of future residential and factory sites.<sup>51</sup>

On 24 February 1944 Warden Ingledew represented the DMC, seven other municipalities and the Municipal Association of Tasmania when giving evidence to the Joint Select Committee. Ingledew was aware of community support for town planning in Devonport and thought town planning "for the layout of new areas" was "most desirable".<sup>52</sup> But Ingledew realised that correcting past mistakes was "a more difficult matter, and in some cases an impossibility on the score of expense for compensation if property is acquired" and roads and buildings had to be reconstructed. He condemned the "money making schemes of landowners", who evaded their "obligation" to build roadways, footways, and drainage. He cited the example of the Wenvoe estate being carved up under the Town Board with streets only half a chain wide.<sup>53</sup>

Ingledew opposed the proposed Bill because it displaced local government with "a bureaucratic Board, which carries no financial responsibilities" and endowed it with "all-powerful" and "arbitrary authority". All councils denounced the betterment clauses, "tantamount to a denial of the right of private ownership", as "impracticable", "harsh" and "confiscatory".<sup>54</sup> He was concerned that, once a town plan was approved by the proposed Board, it would be "sacrosanct" and the DMC would not be able to do anything "contrary to the plan".<sup>55</sup> He pushed for State Government funding "to assist in town planning" and agreed that the Council, Railway Department, Public Works Department and Marine Board should work in "co-ordination".<sup>56</sup>

Municipal opposition was largely successful. The Town and Country Planning Act 1944, gazetted to be operational in

38 *Advocate*, 19 July 1938, 9.

39 *Advocate*, 25 November 1940, 4.

40 *Advocate*, 13 June 1940, p. 2, 9 July 1941, p. 4.

41 *Advocate*, 20 January 1943, 2, 26 January 1943, 3.

42 *Advocate*, 21 January 1943, 2.

43 *Advocate*, 5 August 1943, 4.

44 *Advocate*, 2 May 1938, 2, 10 November 1943, 2.

45 *Advocate*, 17 November 1943, 2.

46 *Advocate*, 6 December 1943, 3, 6 July 1951, 4.

47 Petrow, 1995, 205.

48 *Advocate*, 11 January 1944, 3.

49 *Advocate*, 2 February 1944, 2.

50 *Advocate*, 5 February 1944, 4.

51 *Advocate*, 18 February 1944, 3.

52 MOE, 160-61, 182.

53 MOE, 179.

54 MOE, 162.

55 MOE, 185.

56 MOE, 191.

1945, omitted a centralised Board and strengthened local government responsibility for planning.<sup>57</sup> Councils were required to submit a town-planning scheme to the newly-appointed Town and Country Planning Commissioner, Ronald McInnis. Once provisionally approved, the plan remained open for public inspection. McInnis had developed plans for Brisbane and Mackay, which had more than twice the population of Devonport in 1933.<sup>58</sup> His experience was to prove invaluable to Tasmanian municipalities intent on implementing town planning and Devonport was quick to exploit McInnis's expertise.

Buoyed by the new legislation and McInnis's appointment, support for town planning intensified in Devonport. Town-planning enthusiast McFie, advocated co-ordination between the Councils of Devonport, Latrobe, Kentish and Ulverstone to develop a "plan for 50 years ahead", not least plotting roads "through all vacant lands and farm land that would facilitate travel between these centres".<sup>59</sup> Co-ordination was desirable but unlikely given the "petty parochialism" of towns on the north-west coast.<sup>60</sup> The DCC believed strongly that "commercial development was entirely dependent on properly planned development" and they needed to act quickly to make the most of the current "rapid expansion".<sup>61</sup> The need for an aerodrome, a new Town Hall, a civic centre for government and municipal departments and a new railway station all reinforced the need for town planning.

A citizens' committee was formed with Gifford prominent and in September 1944 produced a wide-ranging report into Devonport's town-planning needs.<sup>62</sup> It covered transport, public works, industrial, residential, educational and recreational requirements. The DCC supported the citizens' committee's proposals "unanimously". In November the DCC and members of the citizens' committee sent a deputation to the DMC and urged the appointment of a special committee of interested parties to prepare a town-planning scheme for submission to McInnis.<sup>63</sup> The DMC agreed that a committee should be appointed "without delay" and should comprise two members each from the Council, Chamber of Commerce and the Tourist Association.<sup>64</sup> Later two Rotary Club members were added.<sup>65</sup>

In February 1945 the new Town Planning Committee (TPC) decided to meet twice a month and focused on the sites for public buildings and the subdivision of property.<sup>66</sup> The committee wanted all plans on such matters to be scrutinized by the building surveyor and to be submitted to the committee "for consultation". The committee would then provide its recommendations to the DMC. The Advocate felt that the TPC, "while it remains active, will do much to prevent mistakes in the construction and lay-out of new streets".<sup>67</sup> Warden Ingledew told McInnis that the members of the TPC showed "considerable enthusiasm" for their work and invited him to Devonport to advise on the preparation of a town plan.<sup>68</sup>

McInnis and Minister for Lands and Works Edward Brooker met with the DMC on 22 March. Brooker asserted that

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57 Petrow, 1995, 207.

58 Petrow, 1997, 290-91.

59 *Advocate*, 24 June 1944, 8.

60 Rootes, 2004, 18.

61 *Advocate*, 19 July 1944, 2.

62 *Advocate*, 20 September 1944, 2.

63 *Advocate*, 14 November 1944, 2.

64 *Advocate*, 29 November 1944, 2.

65 *Advocate*, 31 January 1945, 4.

66 *Advocate*, 13 February 1945, 3.

67 *Advocate*, 23 March 1945, 4.

68 Devonport Planning Scheme 1945, AA236/1/1/73, TAHO.

no town in Tasmania needed planning more than Devonport, which he believed was "destined ... to become the most important centre" in the north.<sup>69</sup> Although it "promised great development", McInnis could see "considerable difficulties in planning at Devonport" and he was willing to help the DMC to "the utmost of his ability". He urged the Council to proclaim the municipality as required by the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act and work with surrounding municipalities, including in the joint employment of one engineer to oversee town planning.

The DMC unanimously proclaimed the municipality on 28 March and this was confirmed by Brooker on 4 April.<sup>70</sup> McFie hoped the Council would not be bogged down in small details about rounding corners or correcting past mistakes.<sup>71</sup> He threw his support behind an enlarged vision for town planning covering an area from Port Sorell to Ulverstone "with an arc swung from those points to 12 miles inland": "you can then say you are planning for a city of the future". He thought Devonport had "everything in favour of town-planning, if the council is only big enough to tackle this most important work".

True to his word, McInnis visited Devonport in May. He stressed that the Council would be responsible for the actual work of planning, but that he would "act as their technical adviser".<sup>72</sup> Predicting that there would be "three times the number of cars" after the war, McInnis recommended that roads into Devonport "should be sufficiently numerous and wide" to provide for this traffic and some existing streets should be widened. He advised that town blocks "should be sufficiently deep" in residential areas "to provide for building blocks back to back". In the business district lanes behind built-up areas were "desirable" and the corners of narrow streets should be rounded off.

Much depended on the effectiveness of the TPC, but some Devonport residents doubted the committee's ability to "automatically overcome past mistakes and prevent them in the future".<sup>73</sup> So wrote District Agricultural Officer and Rotarian Leslie Herbert Radel, who wanted the committee to consult all "the numerous interests involved" and not rely on its members alone to draw up "a comprehensive and all-embracing plan". It would be more "democratic" if the committee submitted a questionnaire to business, educational, health, sporting and other bodies, which would "stimulate a desirable public consciousness and help build a better community spirit". Mirroring the backlash against government control of the war years, Radel argued that "Pushing a ready-made plan on the people without consulting them is not only bureaucratic; it is a forerunner of petty squabbling and failure to co-operate".

Radel's point was illustrated by "Wake Up", who criticised the TPC for not consulting residents before recommending the establishment of a noxious trades area with railway engine sheds and workshops and coal dumps "close to the most beautiful area we have, namely, Victoria Parade".<sup>74</sup> As the site was on the north-west of Devonport, residents would suffer from "the nuisance of coal dust and smoke". The establishment of a noxious trades area was contentious and no decision was made before 1945.

The DMC worked co-operatively with the TPC and gave its plan for a Civic Centre on the Town Hall block close attention.<sup>75</sup> The Council approved of the committee's recommendation that it should prepare a town-planning scheme

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69 *Advocate*, 23 March 1945, 2.

70 *Advocate*, 29 March 1945, 2, 5 April 1945, 4.

71 *Advocate*, 26 April 1945, 8.

72 *Advocate*, 12 May 1945, 2, 4.

73 *Advocate*, 23 May 1945, 5.

74 *Advocate*, 4 August 1945, 4.

75 *Advocate*, 14 August 1945, 5; Minutes of Meetings, DMC, 13 August 1945, 446, 458, AD815/1/1/8, TAHO; Soutar to McInnis, 15 October 1945, AA236/1/1/73, TAHO.

for the municipality of Devonport and send “a plan showing the boundaries of the area for which a plan is to be made” for McInnis’s approval, which was done in October. An advocate of community involvement with planning, McInnis was impressed by the work of the TPC and thought Devonport was “very advanced in town planning” and well ahead of most areas in Tasmania by the end of 1945.<sup>76</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This study of the Devonport and Tasmanian experience confirms the view that in Australia World War One was the breakthrough for public understanding of what town planning could do to improve urban living, but that the impetus slowed down in the 1920s and 1930s. Individual councillors were committed to planning for the bright future they expected Devonport to experience, but, despite the urgings of the *Advocate* newspaper, they did not achieve much and shied away from the cost of rectifying many past mistakes. For Devonport it was not the period 1930 to 1945, but the 1940s that “represented a watershed for planning, thoroughly changing the political climate from skepticism and apathy to at least grudging acceptance that planning had or may have a crucial function to play for the modern state”.<sup>77</sup>

What is striking about the Devonport experience is that private citizens, interest groups and business groups, most notably the Devonport Chamber of Commerce, took the initiative during World War Two and persuaded the Council to discuss planning reforms so that Devonport could exploit opportunities for post-war development. The Council wisely collaborated with key interest groups and stakeholders in its planning deliberations and seemed to sanction the evolution of planning proposals from the “bottom-up” rather than to impose a plan from the “top-down”.<sup>78</sup> The enactment of the Town and Country Planning Act 1944 and the appointment of McInnis enabled the Council to capitalize on the recommendations of interest groups. By linking town planning with post-war reconstruction, World War Two was thus a catalyst for change in Devonport and the advances already made paved the way for planning in the prosperous post-1945 years.<sup>79</sup>

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76 *Advocate*, 18 September 1945, 2; McInnis Diary, 11 May, 18 September 1945.

77 Freestone, 2009, 21.

78 Healey, 2006, 27.

79 Binks, 1981, 48-9.