

Introduction

Douglas Shire Council is in the process of preparing a master plan for Rex Smeal Park and Market Park.

During October and November 2019, stallholders, event organisers and other key stakeholders, were asked how they thought the area could be improved. The purpose of this preliminary consultation is to ascertain what the community thinks at the outset of the planning process.

Feedback was received from around 50 people covering a range of topics. This report presents a summary of comments received without offering an opinion on any viewpoints. To improve readability, comments have been grouped under headings.

Sunday Markets

Suggested Improvements

- More power outlets for stallholders, particularly food outlets. Generators detract from the ambience overlooking the inlet and Sugar Wharf.
- More reliable power as drop outs are frequent.
- Some wanted more rubbish bins, others specifically didn't, saying *"no one wants a bin next to them and it's ugly"*.
- More taps; hydration station/s throughout the area
- Improve sign at Macrossan Street, add market opening and closing times; have an additional sign at Ashford Ave; create a statement at the market entrance an instagrammable photo-opportunity.
- More seating.



Issues

Uneven Ground

- Some wanted the ground to be levelled. Uneven ground is not good for tables and chairs and after rain puddles form and when immediately in front of a stall, this impacts sales.
- Options for structured and unstructured pathways through market.
- Not all agree fearing it may lose the natural untouched feeling. *"I have my stall under a mango tree, it's a lumpy bumpy completely uneven ground, I get visits by the green ants and mangos to slip on letting me know Christmas is near.. and I love it!!"*

Dust

Many stallholders lamented about the dust. Impacts mentioned included:

- Detracts from the market experience for visitors; one stallholder said those in wheelchairs and children have been caught in clouds of dust from which they cannot easily escape.
- Dust is a health hazard as it gets into eyes and airways
- Dust settles on stallholder products, which have to be regularly cleaned.
- The dust is particularly bad from 1:30pm when cars access the market area.

A few were not bothered by the dust. *"Yes there is dust and gravel it's a market 'ground roots shopping!! It's what we are here for back to basics outdoor shopping."*

Layout of Stalls

Numbered Sites

Some wanted numbered and/or marked out sites. Proponents of this said the benefits included:

- Elimination of any angst or misunderstandings between neighbouring stallholders during set up.
- Ability to allocate site numbers 2-3 days out so casual stallholders can easily find their site.
- Some sites have immovable objects in their midst. One stallholder for example, has adapted the layout of their stall around two bollards, a cement block, and a green power box.

Size and spacing of Sites

Some thought width of frontage should be consistent, although there was no consensus as to the size with 3 metres suggested by one, and 4 metres by another.

Some want more space around the stalls. *"In the wet season, being jammed up against each other means the rain pools on top of marquees and then pours into ours and our neighbour's area. If there was space between us the water could run off without swamping each other."*

Dedicated Food Area

Many stallholders noted the value of the food and drink stalls, but expressed a wish to have a designated area for food and drink, with seating and shade provided. Benefits given included:

- It's an opportunity to create an atmosphere for foodies;
- Sprawling queues from food/drink stalls obstruct the view and access of neighbouring stalls, who lose potential sales as a result of shoppers avoiding congestion when navigating the markets.

Stages For Buskers

One stallholder suggested a small-scale stage could be created at each entrance i.e. Macrossan St and Ashford Ave, where buskers could perform and draw people into the markets. Some are wary of buskers performing inside the markets. They can draw a shopper's attention away from neighbouring stalls, and crowds around buskers can inadvertently block views to stalls.

Layout of Stalls

Lots of different ideas were submitted with a few provided great hand drawn plans. Ideas included:

- Leave a thoroughfare between Market Park and Rex Smeal Park, with stalls placed along the side instead of wrapping around at the end.
- Create a shaded area in the middle open space between stalls to entice shoppers to the end of the aisle. Currently, the lack of shade deters shoppers.
- Avoid rivalry by not having stalls with similar items close together.
- If formalised, the layout needs to be flexible as number of stalls fluctuates throughout the year.
- Please, no reduction in the current size of the market footprint

Operational Matters

We received comments on the operation of the markets. While outside the scope of master planning, it is worth noting comments:

- Market rules should be obligatory for all stallholders. Independent of the time they have attended the market.
- Some believe there are stalls selling products not made locally, others remarked on the fact they liked that it was all locally made.
- Some thought the closing time should be extended to 2pm.

- A few suggested consideration be given to a night market mid-week in the tourist season.
- Be mindful of spending too much, which may result in increased rent for stallholders.
- Please consider reduced rates in the wet season, to reflect lower trade
- Advertise the market! You can get advice what to do on weekends every Thursday on Channel 7. I only hear "There is a great market with..... in Palm Cove". Why not mention Port Douglas markets? I have heard so many times from customers that they only heard by chance from our fantastic market. Advertise it in the hotels, signpost the market.
- Cleaning of amenities needs to be better

Events

Rex Smeal Park

- Flat, in-ground concrete footings allowing steel poles to be dropped in for rigging be installed in Rex Smeal Park. This could potentially save each client \$1,000 per event.
- Power supply in Rex Smeal Park has improved and is appropriate for events, but there should be consideration for safety when cables run through the park.
- A sound shell and stage facing away from town were mentioned as desirable assets.
- Noise raised as an issue and solutions put forward included: the creation of U shape sound shells around a couple of entertainment zones; a built up earth mound, planted out to channel noise to the event zone and ocean direction not to neighbouring homes.
- Family-friendly movies on a big screen could run from April to October. This would encourage more people into town, for shops to stay open later, and increase usage.
- Several mentioned the brown expanse of Rex Smeal Park is unattractive. One event organiser said that as the park becomes drier and drier each year, it has become less popular and is rarely looked at as an event space after August. *"Is there no way that we can irrigate using recycled/grey water?"*
- Several suggested incorporating public art in the area. With Call of the Running Tide Sculpture and Multimedia Event in September 2019, there was a lot of positive commentary on having them as permanent features.



Little Cove

- Access to Little Cove for event operators to be improved as the car park is far away from the set up point. Event delays can occur as timeframes do not allow for sufficient time to set up. Also, the loading and unloading has serious labour cost to clients.

Other Event Locations

- Dixie Park was suggested as another ceremony location to alleviate the shortage of venues in Port Douglas.

Parking and Traffic

Lack of parking and traffic chaos not just on market days, but also when big events were on in Rex Smeal Park were mentioned by many.

- When people double park on Wharf Street, escaping the heat to sit in air/con, fumes waft into stalls along that edge which deters customers.
- Open the entrance near the police station during set up and pack down time i.e. until 8am and after 2pm.
- Free parking away from the markets with shuttle bus operating continually back and forth.
- Market vendor parking allocated away from the current area, perhaps near the Community Centre a few blocks away.
- Market stall holders who have space for parking their vehicle should be allowed to do so.
- Have a one way system for entering and exiting the park on market day.
- Haphazard car parking in the vicinity of the Court House (Museum) has gone on for many years on Saturdays, Sundays and when there are special functions at Rex Smeal Park.
- The existing gravel track beside the Courthouse Museum currently used by vehicles is an issue for some. *“Traffic using this entrance creates overtaking and passing hazards with cars parked along its actual edge, it generates dust which permeates adjacent buildings and damages existing grassed areas on both sides of this access.”* The Historical Society has also advised it is planning to replace the fence around the Courthouse Museum in 2020. It is a Council requirement that the fence be on the boundary which means the fence will extend onto the gravel track.
- It is not a gazetted road and one suggestion was to close this access and open up the gazetted road located between 19 and 17 Wharf Street.



General Amenities

- There is a need for a baby change table facility in the amenities.

Landscaping - More Trees

- Most want more greenery, plants and trees
- Revegetation should include plenty of host and native plants for a wide range of insects, butterflies, and birds.
- Two specific locations were mentioned as needing trees; the corner of Wharf St and Ashford Ave, and the northern end of Market Park, where White Cedar trees were suggested.
- Shrubbery along the shore would be appreciated.
- Fairy lights in the trees; Lighting up trees.



Facilities

- More BBQs
- More taps.
- Walkway connecting Flagstaff Hill Walk to Rex Smeal, Anzac and the Market parks, Macrossan St and then on to the marina and all the way to the Yacht Club.
- More lighting; low glare for safe night use; install lights in Market Park to allow for night-time activities, such as seasonal night markets and outdoor family-friendly movies.
- Upgrade playground equipment.
- Fixtures and fittings to reflect character and heritage
- More tables – both under shelters and some in the open.

Recognition of Previous Planning

A few mentioned the Port Douglas Waterfront Plan prepared in 2009. A massive amount of work has been done in the past with extensive community consultation. This needs to be taken into account.

Do Nothing

As with all projects, there's always an option to "do nothing" and a few people felt that apart from a few minor improvements, the area worked as is. They would not welcome wholesale changes which could detract from its current charm. Comments included:

- Market Park and Rex Smeal Park are unique and highly regarded by tourists and locals in their natural form. In terms of improvements of the parks, only minimal changes would be welcome, such as the addition of water fountains.
- We don't need any further development. People who live in the shire and visit, like the relatively unspoiled aesthetic value of the area.
- Visitors remark that they love how little the markets change from year to year, and appreciate returning many years later to find the same stall in the same location.
- Some consultants may want to prove themselves and create a design that will alter the identity of the space, and create a space indistinguishable from parks elsewhere.
- I don't want too much done to the space, maintaining a low key relaxed feeling is what visitors have come to enjoy often as a welcome change from the built environment of cities.
- Retain the views to inlet and sea
- Maintain the character of the place.

Impacts from Construction

Whether or not there's any construction resulting from the master planning, people have expressed a wish to be involved in the planning process for the building event (dates/times of construction).

Have We Missed Anything?

Findings from this preliminary consultation have been provided to Councillors, the project team and LA3 Pty Ltd, a Cairns based Landscape Architecture and Urban Design Consultant who has been awarded the master planning contract expected to be completed over the next six months.

This executive summary is published on Council's website. <https://douglas.qld.gov.au/rex-smeal-park-and-market-park-masterplan/>

If you believe we have missed anything, please send feedback to gaye.scott@douglas.qld.gov.au. You can also register with Gaye to receive an email alert for the next round of public consultation planned.