

Observations: High Line “Greens” New York

Would it Work in Melbourne or Sydney?

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“Globally we are experiencing a huge shift towards urbanisation, as economic status and diversification of housing stock allows non-urban dwellers to move into these areas.”

Not just from country areas, but within the metropolis of many cities, those at the outer metropolitan edge, seek to move closer to the inner urban and city centres, where a greater diversity of facilities can be found, including retail, entertainment, educational and employment opportunities. The surge to preferred inner urban areas is challenged by affordability and consequently, higher densities are the only solution. With this inevitability, community concern rises as to how these vertically increasing populations can be given access to recreational and green spaces which consequently are at a premium, in terms of location, size and usage. In New York the HIGH LINE has now been established as an outstanding success. Created on a former central railroad, on the west side of Manhattan, the 2.3 kilometre park elevated 9 metres above ground level was established in 2006 and has proven to be enormously popular in providing



Scott Keck
Chairperson
scott.keck@charterkc.com.au
T +61 (0) 3 8102 8861
[LinkedIn](#)

recreational and green space, central to a high density residential precinct. With strong visitation and complemented by the establishment of commercial and entertainment facilities, it is also evident that it has benefited the value of real estate which associates directly and has attracted developers wishing to create new development to take advantage of the amenity which it provides. This innovative, transitional use of an earlier resource to a more relevant role can be duplicated in urban precincts globally.

It is interesting to contemplate whether such an exercise could be as successful in Melbourne and Sydney. Certainly by direct comparison, New York has a much greater population and higher densities and a relative undersupply of green spaces and parks other than for Central Park, being a notable exception. By comparison, Melbourne does not have the same population, has lower density and more by planning than happenstance, is considered “A Green City”, having a history of parks, most of which have been preserved and flourish in inner urban areas. Notwithstanding that the balance may presently be acceptable, proactive thinking about the future is necessary as with Melbourne’s population destined to double in the next 35 years, the provision of open space will, in relative terms, dwindle.

Other than for recent infrastructure works in Melbourne there is very little in the way of elevated railways, most are at ground level and most are still used, not therefore able to be applied for other purposes. This may change however and as it does, the transition to recreational uses and greening must be viewed as a desirable community benefit. Other Government land, no longer servicing original needs, some elements of the road system including service roads and medians and other decommissioned infrastructure are all candidates. The proposal for Melbourne’s South Bank Boulevard is one example, as is the Goods Line in Sydney, a walkway linear park, previously a disused rail line. The important point is that well considered infrastructure usually has a positive impact on real estate values.



Apart from the obvious benefits that providing more green and recreational space has in inner urban locations, there is the other positive of value enhancement to real estate, that may enjoy direct association. The environmental and social benefits of parks and gardens are well known and in Melbourne, there is a strong correlation between real estate values and direct proximity to such community / public resources. A similar relationship can be found between residential properties and nearby beaches and water views. In the instance of the HIGH LINE in New York, not only has the transformation proven itself as a recreational facility, it still provides a connection link for pedestrians and cyclists, and has become a tourist attraction, as well as being the catalyst for commercial enterprise in the form of cafes

and other complimentary commercial operations, which interconnect from ground level. Of further advantage, the project has a high level of security, is easily monitored with CCTV, and is generally viewed as a “safety zone”, increasingly, a social benefit which is hard to maintain as urban densities increase.

For my opinion, both as a resident of Melbourne, but also as a real estate analyst of 50 years practice, I applaud the concept of inner urban greening and the greater provision of safe recreational space that can be monitored and therefore available for the enjoyment and use of all age groups without risk or anxiety. The HIGH LINE in New York has been innovative and very successful and has I think established itself to be a long term and essential component of that city’s inner urban fabric. The “squeeze” in Melbourne may not yet be as great as in New York, but perhaps it is important to proactively consider this need, and not let potential sites be converted for other uses and thus no longer eligible for such community benefit. The concept is simple to understand, not expensive to develop and will be appreciated by future generations. Now is the time for non-controversial forward planning to recognise and preserve such assets and for the lucky few with the capital to live in inner urban locations to take advantage of selective buying where such community assets are created.



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