



Meet our new Director Philip St John

Philip St John started at the City of Wanneroo in September 2014, after eight years as Director of Planning at the City of Fremantle.

Q: Please tell us more about your background?

Philip: After graduation in 1989 I have worked primarily in local government. I have had management roles at the Town of Cambridge, and the Cities of Swan and Stirling. Prior to my eight years as Director of Planning at the City of Fremantle, I also had short stints in the private sector and state government.



Q: What do you enjoy about working in local government?

Philip: I guess it is a bit of a cliché to say 'it's closest to the people' but it really is. Local Government is the most flexible and responsive arm of government, and forms an essential interface between the broader community and the development industry and government. In that capacity I feel it has the potential to really make a difference to community life.

Q: What is your greatest career achievement to date and why?

Philip: As a planner I have always been very supportive of housing diversity and affordability, and promoting appropriate residential infill to promote local community and economic vibrancy. Whilst at Fremantle I initiated and implemented a scheme whereby the Council can allow Small Secondary Dwellings on almost all residential lots, in many cases without the requirement to obtain planning approval. This pioneered the approach now being taken up by the State Government in the recent R Code review, and was recognised and awarded by industry.

Q: What are your first impressions working at the City of Wanneroo?

Philip: The main reason I came to work at Wanneroo is the opportunity to work in a growth Council again. I guess that my first impression is that the growth feels a bit overwhelming at first, but also presents enormous opportunities to shape the community of the future. I hope that the Council's planning can make it just that bit more vibrant, sustainable and liveable.

Q: What are your top economic development priorities for the long term?

Philip: Firstly, the key issue facing growth areas is the imbalance between homes and local employment – typically referred to as dormitory suburbs. One of our great challenges is to grow employment opportunities within our region and local neighbourhoods, to try and get greater local vibrancy and community sustainability. An ideal community should be one where its residents can live, work, learn and play, and through our community planning initiative we attempt to promote that. Ideally, of course, we would like to see part of our City become a destination for workers from outside our region, and use up some of the back flow capacity in our road and rail infrastructure. The second major priority is the bringing to fruition of key strategic development projects, like the Neerabup Industrial area. We see these projects as more than just land development. We hope, through targeting key catalytic industries and businesses, that projects like this can become significant employment nodes within the region.

Q: What message would you send to the City of Wanneroo's business community about Council and its economic development focus?

Philip: I would like to see the administration of Council's statutory regime become more business friendly. Planning and development process can involve a lot of regulation, and part of my job is to streamline customer processes to enable quicker decisions and responses, and less complex processes. This is not always easy, as although no one ever argues with red tape reduction, we need to remember that there is usually a reason for every bit of process or regulation, there is a reason why it existed in the first place and sometimes this was and still is a good reason. My job, then, will be to ensure that the regulatory arm of planning does this in a manner that is effective, customer focussed and transparent.

Q: What is your favourite quote?

Philip: "He not busy being born is busy dying" from Bob Dylan.

Q: What are the five words that best describe you?

Philip: Pragmatic, Impatient, Honest, Passionate, Uncomplicated.