

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## GOLD COAST IN DANGER OF LOSING ITS LIVEABILITY

The Gold Coast is nearing a car dependant urban sprawl and is in danger of becoming "an also ran" in the league of great cities according to one of the world's leading urban planners and designers.

Demetri Baches, of DPZ Pacific, who is on the Gold Coast this week to speak on the topic of sustainable urban design, says poor planning decisions made 20 years ago are still being used, however the opportunity to lead the State, and the world in urban design is still within our reach.

Mr Baches is internationally known for his work with the concept of new urbanism and established DPZ Pacific, which is currently promoting sustainable regional and city planning in China, Malaysia, Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand, The Philippines and The UAE.

"There is a tendency for the Gold Coast to rely on many of the discredited and outdated planning and development practices that are at the core of unsustainable growth in cities throughout the world," Mr Baches says.

"However I note a real desire to understand how to be sustainable and you are much more pronounced in your general discourse of the issues at the public and private level than most places in the world.

"Its not too late to get it right, and if the Gold Coast's urban planning is done properly then you could really lead the world as one of its most liveable cities".

"Unfortunately under current practices, planning and development by zoning instead of design, that will never become a reality."

Mr Baches is no stranger to Southeast Queensland and the Gold Coast, having designed the masterplans for Ripley Valley and the Ripley CBD as well as the urban plan for Little Beach (now known as Salacia Waters) in Paradise Point, and conducted a similar talk here in 2006 with over 400 people in attendance.

"I enjoy working in places like the Gold Coast. It's exhilarating to watch a community simultaneously chase after both the wrong and right solutions to planning with such gusto," Mr Baches says.

"However, you get the community you deserve and I feel the Gold Coast deserves the best, so now is the time to make your actions worthy of the best."

Mr Baches cites two examples of the Coast getting its planning right - Varsity Lakes as a planned community and Soul as a high-rise in Surfers Paradise.

"Varsity Lakes is a good example of a masterplanned community that will provide liveable spaces for many years to come," Mr Baches says.

"It has a central business community that residents can walk to, adjacent to a university and school that feed activity to it, and the rear laneways help to make the fronting roads more pedestrian friendly.

"Unlike standard suburbia which is simple and, therefore, unsustainable, Varsity Lakes embraces complexity and has a long-term future.

"Soul is another example of good infill development as the retail and pedestrian elements are designed to be part of an "urban street life" experience, instead of behaving like a suburban shopping mall.

"The whole development acts as Surfer's front door to the beach, unlike many of the other beachfront developments that have been built, and as a result, it too has a long-term future."

Mr Baches' presentation, Crises and Beyond – The Path to a Post Carbon Human Habitat, is an open invitation event at the Gold Coast City Council's chambers at Evandale and will focus on the need for a single and sustained planning vision.

"There's been a lot of debate about population growth and its effect on the Coast, but this debate is an aside to the more critical question of how it's actually growing, which is much more important than the rate of growth," Mr Baches says.

"After all, if you are not growing you are dying. I don't really like using the word sustainable because it means you are neither declining nor advancing, in other words, you've lost, and I don't know of many places that want to lose.

"We're in the midst of a maelstrom of crises, the recent financial crisis, the ongoing climate change crisis, and the peak oil crisis - our planning and design decisions simply have to change."

Mr. Baches says the Gold Coast needs more New Urbanist examples such as Varsity Lakes and Soul and a greater variety of developments to balance out a very unbalanced housing stock.

"The easy development sites are gone. You now have to get serious and begin to look at new broadhectare sites as well as infill," Mr Baches says.

"The Human Habitat is as important and as fragile as the Natural Habitat. It's time to start caring for both equally.

"The solution is sustainable community design – sustainable urbanism - where both social and natural diversity are accommodated."

Mr Baches says all is not lost as the Gold Coast's American looking suburbs can be retrofitted to compensate for their larger carbon footprints, transportation and environmental impacts, by requiring energy generation, water reuse, recycling and food growing.

"It's ironic that many aspects of sustainable urbanism hark back to practices we've either forgotten, or lost over time through an obsession with poor planning principles and modern methods," Mr Baches says.

"Most of these concepts aren't new, we've already seen the reintroduction of the rain water tank as a requirement for all new development, however it took a drought to put it back on the agenda.

"I'm also aware the Council is debating the reintroduction of allowing households to keep chickens, a simple but effective component for recycling and food growing.

"The Coast needs two things to maintain its mantle as a vibrant and liveable city; real vision to make order out of practice and engagement with the community in building and design.

“Without either you’re doomed to become another unsustainable urban sprawl with all its associated headaches such as pollution, unaffordability, crime and poor quality of life.”

Demetri Baches will present his open invitation lecture at the Nerang Bicentennial Hall, Wednesday the 24<sup>th</sup>, from 12:30 to 1:30pm.

**ENDS**

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