

YIMBY (YES IN MY BACK YARD): IT'S A MOVEMENT & IT'S COMING TO YOU!

YIMBY QLD & THE GLOBAL YIMBY MOVEMENT, IN RESPONSE TO THE GREAT URBAN SHIFT

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YIMBY Qld: Who we are?

In early 2016, I co-founded YIMBY Qld. Now a not-for-profit organisation and part of a growing global YIMBY network, YIMBY Qld says yes in my back yard to good development that makes for better living. As **the voice of good development**, we aim to **bring back the balance** to the urban policy debate, so often dominated by the negative NIMBY (not in my back yard) narrative.

Why YIMBY?

In the century of the city and the decade of densification, we are experiencing first-hand the **great urban shift** and the pressures this places on our global cities. **Pressures** on infrastructure, the environment, housing supply, lifestyle and the cost of living. We have a **growing affordability gap** in our major cities and for the first time in our history, **the next generation is expected to be less well off than their parents**.

We expect another **662,000 people** to be living in greater Brisbane **by 2031**, which is like adding the current population of the Gold and Sunshine Coasts to Brisbane's population. To accommodate this demand, we need 280,100 new homes and 42 new shopping centresⁱ. This growth is no longer welcome at the edges of our cities, but right in our back yards as **infill development**ⁱⁱ. Our communities are taking notice. The media overwhelmingly sympathises with the not in my back yard sentiment, creating a sense of danger around the topic of densityⁱⁱⁱ. Despite the need to accommodate the growing population, many community groups are actively **rallying against urban density** and West End's new Councillor has been teaching his community how to protest. NIMBY campaigning comes at a **cost to the community**, be it the holding costs and potential loss of yield, the cost of an appeal not only on the developer but on Councils and the State government (i.e. the public purse) in defending their development decisions, or the cost impact of increasingly restrictive or nanny rules and regulations written in response, all having an impact on housing affordability.

It is in **direct response to the housing crisis** occurring in many large cities across the world, including the USA, Canada and Europe, that the **YIMBY movement** has arisen, rallying to support good development outcomes, most commonly more housing. YIMBYs support the younger generation fed up at not being able to afford a home in their cities, through to the older generations looking to age in place.

Sonja Trouss, who is spearheading the YIMBY movement in San Francisco and the Bay Area, frequently turns up at Council Chambers, **protesting the protestors** who are trying to block housing in her ever unaffordable city at breaking point from the pressures of Silicon Valley's growth. The New York Times said of Sonja, "*the anger she has tapped into is real, reflecting a generational break that pits cranky homeowners and the political establishment against a cast of newcomers who are demanding the region make room for them too*"^{iv}. The **battlefield is all too often the Council chambers**, pitting wealthy home owners against the developer over an individual project that comes too close to home.

What we are doing?

The YIMBY movement is about having a **community conversation** about planning, density and the growth of our cities, and we need it now.

At YIMBY Qld, our mission is to **engage the community and decision makers in meaningful dialogue about making cities of the future where everyone is welcome**. We believe in having the freedom to create the type of city we want for the future. One that is a shared city where those who live here are able to stay and those who want to live here are welcome. To do this, we have focused our attention on three areas: to Inform, Advocate and Inspire.

Inform

Through our blog posts, media opportunities, Instagram posts, seminars and events, we are **establishing a dialogue around what makes good development**, the benefits of good development outcomes and the way in which they contribute to the creation of great communities.

We aim to provide a **channel for planners to reconnect with a community** that, to some degree, has lost faith in the development industry as a whole. We hope to demystify the development assessment process, showcasing developments that are 'out of the box' in design (i.e. developments we believe challenge the 'accepted' envelope in an innovative and sustainable way), that many in the community are convinced have only been approved through back door deals. We want to dispel the many urban myths around how development occurs.

On our website we provide **an accessible resource**, which is continually being added to, with the aim of achieving a common understanding of the planning and development process in Queensland, including information on the **benefits of performance based planning, reasonable expectations and grounds for approval**. We want to enable an informed community to participate in the urban development debate and therefore believe it is important to share information so that people can make sense of what can be, at times, very complicated urban planning laws.

Advocate

We'd like to change the way people look at development and **balance the conversation about development, by putting forward the yes case**, saying yes to housing, yes to new shopping centres and lifestyle precincts, yes to services, yes to people, yes to good development. We advocate for sharing our cities.

YIMBY Qld advocate for best practice planning and design through plan making and development applications, supporting good development projects. We support urban policy that facilitates and encourages **innovation, excellence, resilience and regeneration, not one with a culture of defensiveness**.

To achieve this, we have been making submissions about planning policy and scheme amendments, supporting policy that facilitates good development, advocating for more policy that incentivises good development outcomes and less red tape. We have also created a **positive submission tool kit**, which is available to download from our website, to encourage positive submissions about development applications. This is an effort to encourage people to make positive comments about a development, not just to write a submission when they object. While this is an interim gesture, ultimately we are advocating for reform to our public notification practices, aiming to bring them into the 21st century, and in doing so, hopefully capturing the options of a broader demographic.

Inspire

Our end game is to **inspire good development outcomes**, that is to inspire developers to create good development outcomes, to inspire planners and other city builders in their role in delivering good development

outcomes and to inspire the community to see the good in these development outcomes. We believe good development outcomes feature one or more of the 4 YIMBY qualities - design excellence, sustainability, innovation and community dividend.

With the commencement of the Queensland *Planning Act 2016* has come an opportunity to step up this community conversation about good development outcomes. As we know, the new planning legislation requires decision makers to **publish the reasons why they decide to approve** individual development applications. In the past, decision reasons were only required when a development application was refused. This initiative is an **opportunity to balance the conversation**, to talk about the positives.

This is an opportunity at the core of the YIMBY Qld values, an opportunity we have embraced by creating a **YIMBY Reasons for Approval brochure**. It is a list of features, attributes and benefits under each of the 4 YIMBY qualities of good development. While we appreciate it will not simplify the task of development assessment or meet the statutory obligations for decision notices, we hope the list provides **inspiration** for writing reasons for approval. Inspiration for our role as DA planners or decision makers in delivering good development outcomes.

In our blog, twitter and Instagram feed, we **showcase many of the good development outcomes** we see in Queensland, across the country and around the world, and are constantly seeking out new material to continue to inspire this conversation. Part of this role is showcasing our favourite elements of the urban environment that they have been **delivered by developers**.

For example, we **showcase the public art around the inner city of Brisbane**, acknowledging it is delivered by developers. Brisbane City Council requires the delivery of public art for large development projects in and around the central city. As a result, the community has received some incredible public art recently because of development, including Danie Mellor's "*SuperNatural Landscape*", a 350m² rainforest mural spanning two levels of the atrium of 480 Queen Street by Grocon, Australia's largest public art project in a commercial building. Construction of a new office tower, residential tower and retail building is happening at 300 George St in Brisbane's CBD for the "*Brisbane Quarter*" Development. The cost of the project is reportedly over \$1 billion, which is great news for the city's art scene, given the DA requirement is for a percentage of the total project value to be contributed as public art. This is a significant investment in our city's art and culture considering that the estimated public art spend on the "*Brisbane Quarter*" development together with the four other major development projects underway in our CBD will exceed the \$1.5 million QAGOMA spend on art acquisition this year. These artworks contribute to our understanding of the city and its unique places and spaces in-between.

YIMBY around the World

New York YIMBY

The global movement takes its name from **New York YIMBY, a pro-development blog turned website created by Nikolai Fedak**. Fedak has made a career out of showcasing new urban development, featuring the glamour, design and innovation of New York City's new skyscrapers. Despite its density and iconic high rises, **new development in New York City is still a battlefield** with the preservationists. At only 23, Fedak says "**a lot of people my age support development**"^v.

Sure, Build It in My Backyard

Debriefing

By CONSTANCE ROSENBLUM APRIL 4, 2014



Nikolai Fedak, 23, at work in his TriBeCa office on the website New York Yimby, which stands for Yes in My Back Yard. His satellite office is the street. Ozier Muhammad/The New York Times

Worlds First YIMBY Conference

Last year I attended the **world's first YIMBY conference in Boulder**, Colorado. It was fascinating to hear first-hand how ordinary Americans have embraced the YIMBY movement. It has become a voice for young people asking "**What is my future in this City?**" and in doing so has gained world-wide attention and activated a new generation of pro-housing campaigners. Out of this conference has evolved a **world-wide YIMBY network** who together advocate for the Yes campaign. It can seem an **unlikely group**, of all ages and diverse backgrounds from across the globe, non-political and made up of grass-roots activists, developers, social housing providers, planners, journalists, policy advisors, politicians, transport planners, health professionals and environmental warriors, **all working together towards a common cause.**

What I took away from the conference was that the best way to advocate for and explain the benefits of good development is to **put a human face to the narrative**, to talk about the stories, not the storeys. The face of growth might be the newcomer to the neighbourhood who has arrived because of a new job in the city, it might be a household split by divorce, or 2 or 3 new households as your children grow up and look for a home of their own. Are our children the growth the NIMBYs are fighting to keep out? Blocking urban density doesn't make the families that would have lived there disappear; they just settle in a less urban location, where they will have a higher per-capita impact on the world and potentially have lesser access to schools and more travel time to work.

Environmentalist Alex Steffen highlighted the **alliance between density and the environment movement**, quoting that access by proximity is one of the great climate action tools we have, in response to the American cities heavily reliant on the private motor vehicle.

Can I Be Your Neighbour?

April was **Fair Housing month in Houston** and Houston YIMBY launched a campaign to advocate affordable housing of all types in all areas. The campaign titled "**Can I Be Your Neighbor**" aims to educate the community about how working individuals and families are being prevented from earning their opportunity to reside in areas of high opportunity. Although there is no formal zoning in Houston, affluent neighbourhoods continuously oppose affordable housing developments. **The campaign puts a human face to the narrative, as the face of growth, making it a personal story, and a powerful one.**

SCANP's Upcoming YIMBY Themed Conference

There is an annual conference of the Southern California Association for Non-Profit Housing (SCANPH) next week with **YIMBY as the theme, "the movement of the moment"**. Southern California Association of Non-Profit Housing (SCANPH's) mission is to "*facilitate affordable housing development across Southern California*". They envisage a "*strong Southern California communities where an affordable home is available to everyone*"^{vi}. It's a great example of the unlikely allies in the YIMBY movement, developer and not for profit housing sector alike.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE



SCANPH is proud to announce our theme this year: YIMBY (Yes In My Backyard). Join us for the movement of the moment! Please note you must register separately for Day 1 and Day 2 if you wish to attend both days of programming.

YIMBY: A Call to Action

The Important Role of DA Planners

The **developer** is played out in the media as the **villain in the story of the growth** of our cities and all too often the planner and urban development professionals are considered **shills for developers**. It seems to me that many planners, particularly those in DA and facilitation, shy away from the spotlight, preferring to stay away from the all too often negative attitude towards development played out in the media. But as an industry we deserve better. Rather than being defensive about what we do, **I want the YIMBY message to remind planners to be proud of their work**, whether they are private planning practitioners facilitating good development projects, government assessment officers or decision makers assessing and deciding DAs, or Strategic planners writing the planning framework, policies and codes. Be proud of our achievements and the outstanding work we do in shaping our modern cities and regions. Be a positive part of the back-yard BBQ discussion about the design of our cities and design for the future.

DA Planners as Story Tellers

As DA planners, I believe it is **our role to be story tellers**, bringing to life each development proposal, telling the story of why it belongs. J K Rowling is described as a **master storyteller**. When analysing her technique, two important story telling elements are embodied in her novels: (1) **characterisation** – her characters not only come to life straight from the page, but are relatable and (2) **world building** – every aspect of her world is described in detail. These are **equally relevant in telling the development story**. The development proposal is the character in our story, and our task is in characterising it and helping the community to understand why it is a good development outcome. The world we are building is the surrounding context of the proposal. Why is it a good development outcome in this particular location?

And we need to **watch our language**. I think it's important we be careful or more precise with our language, remembering there are no limits or maximums when referring to acceptable outcomes, in our performance based planning regime. Using terms like limits and maximums simply spreads confusion, followed quickly by disbelief when a taller or denser development is approved.

My Closing Story

I'll **close with a story** I was told at the world's first YIMBY conference in Colorado last year. Sara Maxana goes by the name **YIMBY mom**. She lives in **Seattle, a city suffering from an extreme housing affordability crisis**. Even in this environment, a local anti-development **NIMBY lobbyist calls development a cancer**. Sara asks, then **are my children the cancer?** We were one household when we moved to Seattle, after my divorce we became two households and in less than 10 years when my children leave home, we'll become four households. This is the human story of growth in our city. It's also the tech workers taking new job opportunities in our city. The key workers who make sure our city functions. She says if she lets her privilege buy good opportunities for her kids, she'd be the villain in the story if she then tried to stop new homes from being built in her neighbourhood.

So, **who's the real villain in this story, and who is the hero?** I hope you'll agree with me that YIMBYism is the hero in the urban development story. Don't let the car parking space in front of your house become more important than the opportunity to make a new friend.

Join the Movement

YIMBY Qld is a **call to action to planners**, calling for YIMBYs to join the movement to celebrate, encourage and support good development outcomes. So, get on board Team YIMBY, be the positive force in this conversation. The #YIMBYQld campaign has been created to help us engage industry professionals, city leaders and the community in this discussion. Sign up to our blog, become a guest blogger, follow us on twitter and Instagram, come to our events, join a committee, become a member. But most importantly, spread the YIMBY word. Find your Yes!

ⁱ Salt B (29 August 2017), Future Brisbane, Courier Mail

ⁱⁱ Qld Government (August 2017) SEQ Regional Plan

ⁱⁱⁱ Raynor K (2017) Defining the Density Debate: Social Representations of Urban Consolidation in Brisbane, extract published in the Conversation

^{iv} Dougherty C (4 July 2016). How Anti-Growth Sentiment, Reflected in Zoning Laws, Thwarts Equality, New York Times

^v New York Times

^{vi} SCANPH, www.scanph.org/, 2017