



face2face Chris Carman

Mission possible

Despite all but universal opposition to the controversial North Port Quay development, its proponent and driving force remains confident of success. **Belle Taylor** speaks to Chris Carman.

Picture: Astrid Volzke

Next time you go to East Perth take a good look at the giant silver sculpture in the middle of Claisebrook Square. It sticks out at odd angles and if viewed from two particular angles, forms a triangle.

In case you were wondering, it's called the Impossible Triangle, a shape first devised by Swedish artist Oscar Reutersvard in the 1930s and then by English mathematician Roger Penrose in the 1950s, who called it "impossibility in its purest form".

Perhaps it was for this reason Chris Carman, managing director of project management and development consultancy company Benchmark Projects, chose the sculpture as his business logo. Carman deals a lot with impossibility in its purest form.

Carman is the man behind some of the biggest development projects in Perth during the past 20 years, starting his career working on the development of Joondalup and overseeing the much-lauded Mandurah Ocean Marina. Recently he has been making headlines as one of the proponents of what could be the most audacious and controversial plan for Perth yet, the North Port Quay development, the plan to build a mini-suburb off the coast of Fremantle, reclaiming 345ha of seabed to build



town houses, apartments, office space, a performance centre, a hotel and schools. Think Waterworld meets Neighbours.

It's a wild idea. The previous government dismissed it outright and the current government is also reluctant, with Premier Colin Barnett saying he is "fundamentally opposed" to the project.

But Carman is optimistic.

"We launched this in May and it's now October. We survived and, for a proposal like this, if you are still alive after four weeks you've got legs," Carman says in the slick boardroom of his East Perth offices in a mixed-use building — retail, offices, apartments — just the type of thing he envisages for North Port Quay.

While the plan is only a "what if", he says public support for the development to be considered, not built but considered, hovers about 70 per cent.

"Even in Fremantle we have 53 per cent support for it; not for it to be built but for it to be allowed to go through the process," he says.

North Port Quay is being touted as the world's first carbon-free development. Carman explains that once it is built, the North Port Quay would be completely self-sustainable, wind, wave and solar power turning on the lights, with a grey-water recycling system and free public transport on electric buses.

But sustainability, he explains, is more than just about the environment.

"Our vision is to construct this in a sustainable manner and that includes community, a sustainable community. Lots of people say sustainability is just the environment, it's not. Environment is one of the three bottom lines of sustainability. Sustainability is much more than that, it's about creating a community that is sustainable socially, economically and environmentally."

Sure, but even bandying green credentials around isn't going to distract people from the fact that you are building Waterworld off Fremantle. Carman points to his success at the Mandurah Ocean

Marina, which faced fierce opposition at first, to show that sometimes the impossible triangle can happen.

"(The) \$60 million of government investment (in Mandurah) has attracted half a billion dollars of private investment, which is three times the university estimates in the first place, so from an economic point of view, jobs were created," he says. "It's created a community, land values in Mandurah have gone up 250 per cent, so it's met all those targets. It's won best marina in Australia and best marina in WA project of the year from the Australian Institute of Project Management."

Awards aside, what of the criticisms of Mandurah that it can feel a little sterile?

"I don't know if I agree with that," Carman says. "It's still a work in progress as far as building is concerned, so it hasn't met its full potential in terms of people. There's still development going on but it's all mixed use. In respect to residences it's all mixed residences, which are outnumbered by apartments, but a lot of them are still under construction in the southern area."

Carman is not an urban planner, he is a project manager, but his interest in urban planning has manifested itself throughout his career. Now he is a proponent of the "new urbanism", which as he points out, is a lot like the old urbanism.

"New urbanism isn't new, go look at the old part of Subiaco, it's walkable; you can walk to places, you don't have to rely on a car, so that's called new urbanism."

Carman is also a cheerleader for that other buzz phrase we keep hearing in Perth — high-density housing.

"Perth is already geographically bigger than LA and that brings with it all the infrastructure problems, all the carbon problems, all the congestion problems. All those problems that (as) you look around the world no one has been able to solve, so you have to develop closer in."

Whether North Port Quay gets the go-ahead is yet to be seen but Carman doesn't seem to be daunted. After all, it's only impossibility in its purest form.



West Australian
01/11/2008
Page: 8
Section: West Weekend Magazine
Region: Perth Circulation: 195033
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 274.00 sq.cms
Frequency: MTWTFS-

