

UNBUILT AUSTRALIA

DREAM CITY OF MACKAY

Karl Langer's Modernist ideals for living in the subtropics, outlined by Josephine Noonan.

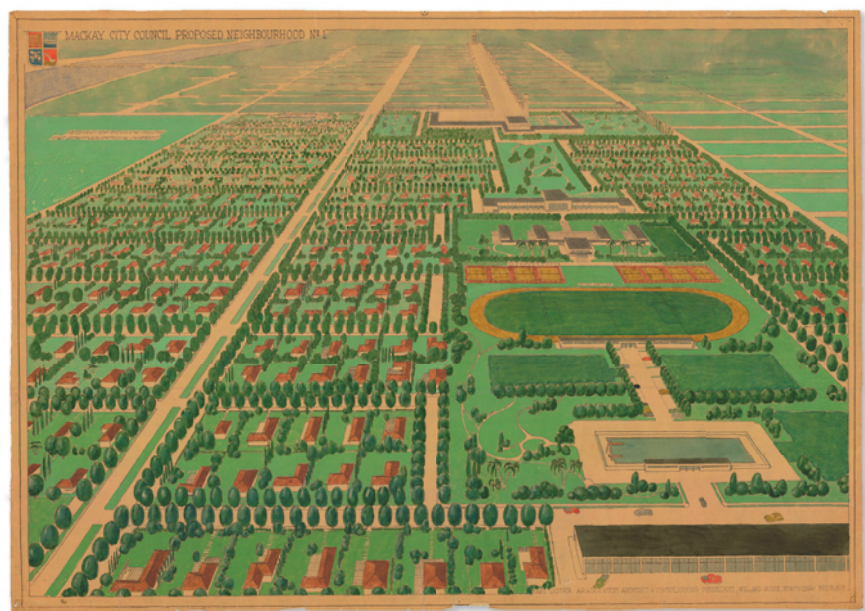
Following the publication of his 1944 booklet "Sub-Tropical Housing", Dr Karl Langer was commissioned by Mackay City Council in 1945 to design a town plan that would provide for the town's increasing population. Langer's town plan incorporated his design philosophies of "avoidance of fatigue", the use of light and minimization of glare, and designing according to each client's economical means. The plan also referred to previous prototypes, such as Ebenezer Howard's Garden City and the early 1940s planning concept of the neighbourhood unit.

The plan proposed six neighbourhood clusters, each containing a central green public space intended as a community hub. Facilities such as child minding centres and shops were all within walking distance for housewives living in the surrounding residences. The clusters were linked together by strips of parkland and green recreational areas, and were grouped around a civic centre in the heart of the city. This was to feature a library, a museum, administrative offices and an open-air theatre spilling onto a public square.

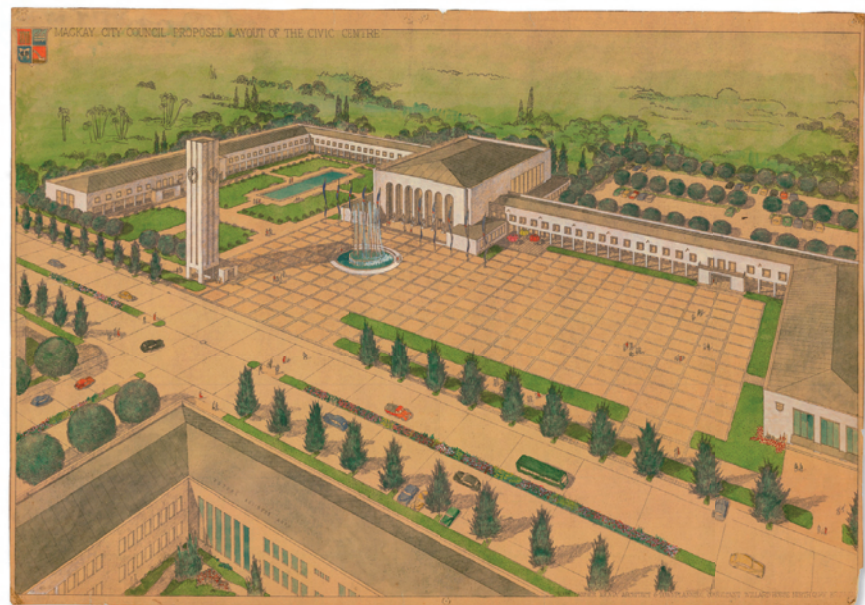
Planned additional improvements included relocating existing industry away from the city centre and surrounding residential areas to the outskirts of Mackay. Traffic patterns were also to be revised to cater for increased pedestrian movement around the city, with high-velocity traffic diverted out of the city altogether onto a circular drive around the perimeter. A water tower, complete with dolphin fountains at its base, was recommended to inject a touch of monumentality into what was otherwise a flat city skyline.

The plan was not realized at the time because it could not be financed. It was subsequently revised and gazetted for use in 1952. However, this was short-lived. The Labor Party, which was elected to Mackay's City Council shortly thereafter, rejected Langer's scheme, with its Modernist ideals of living, in favour of a plan based on existing zoning and traffic conditions.

Josephine Noonan is a final year student of architecture at the University of Queensland, and is currently writing her thesis on Karl Langer's Mackay Town Plan.



1



2

Nº1 Perspective of Karl Langer's proposed town plan in its completed state, looking east.

Nº2 Perspective of the civic centre to be located in the Mackay CBD.

The AA Prize for Unbuilt Work – unbuilt gems of today. Winners published in the January issue.