



Empowering PEOPLE

North Sydney Council is proving that local government can be a varied and interesting place to build a career. The organisation offers great diversity and is proactive in the sector, with a pipeline of projects planned to meet the needs of the community both now and in the future.

Images by Scott Ehler

“I found in the public sector that if you are willing to work hard on yourself and to continuously improve, then opportunities come up and you are given a bit of a free rein to explore new ideas.”

- Warwick Winn

Warwick Winn is a passionate general manager dedicated to making a difference. Originally from New Zealand, he studied an undergraduate degree in industrial psychology before moving to the UK where, after doing some contract-type work, he landed a job as an environmental strategy officer at one of London's local councils. He quickly realised that the public sector was a great fit for him and decided this was where he would build his career. For a number of years, he worked in the fields of urban planning and sustainability, progressively moving up the ranks into management positions. He then moved back home to New Zealand and took up the role of city

planning manager for Dunedin City Council.

“That was a great place to work,” Warwick says. “It had a few issues when I first arrived, and it really was a ‘change’ job where I had to make some significant cultural shifts in the team to meet some of the important targets. It was also very much about regional economic development work, and that was a great experience for me.”

As a reflection of Warwick's hard work there, he was nominated in 2000 for the New Zealand Young Executive of the Year Award by fellow staff and the elected council. While he didn't win the title, he says the experience was one he will always remember fondly. Following that, he came to Australia and worked as a director

in charge of the planning and environmental side of things. “I spent nearly 10 years as the planning director here in North Sydney Council, and then took on the general manager role about 18 months ago. It's been quite a journey but really enjoyable.”

Warwick believes local government jobs provide huge opportunities for skill development and career progression. “What I found in the public sector is that if you are willing to work hard on yourself and to continuously improve, then opportunities come up and you are given a bit of a free rein to explore new ideas. For anyone looking at a career with a lot of different challenges and tasks and something that is really hands on where you can actually make a >



As featured in
The CEO Magazine
For more info visit
theceomagazine.com





difference, then the public sector is a good place to work. Our training and support is second to none, and that's really important for people as they go through their professional lives.

"There is a chance to make a real difference that you can see and touch. The interaction with the community can be very fulfilling and it can also be very challenging. You have people who are down on the ground, and whether they are making a park really great for the residents, running events, or looking after food shops in a particular area, they are interacting with the community and can see the purpose for their job. That for me is one of the key things that the public sector can provide to you in terms of your career.

"It's a very broad scope and, again, the support you will get from the organisation, in terms of your training and the opportunities, is vast. That's what we try to do here at North Sydney with our people. We give them the flexibility to take control of their own career. If they are looking for other opportunities across the organisation, we work to enable that, and similarly for people returning from parental leave. We are very flexible in terms of how we set up the way that they work and the nature of their work. As an organisation, we want to capture and retain those key skills, and we are looking to support them so that they can come back to work if that's what they want to do."

According to Warwick, North Sydney Council is an especially great place to be. With its own CBD, dense urban areas, low-scale residential places, harbour views, and its close proximity to the Sydney city centre, the local government region is diverse and rich in culture. "In terms of location for business and for living, I think North Sydney is second to none," Warwick states. "Our point of difference is that we aren't the big city across the water but we still are a large CBD, and I guess that leads on to some of the branding and marketing that we

"The key thing that council has done over the past 12 to 18 months is really grasp the nettle in terms of what we are going to do for the future, and what projects we actually need to stop talking about and start doing."

- Warwick Winn



have been doing as well. We are not the suburbs, and we are close to transportation linkages and other services that come with a CBD this size."

Over time, North Sydney has experienced significant growth and change. Traditionally seen as a hub for technology and advertising businesses, today the area has a mix of service functions and a significant residential population. Its demographic is also less skewed towards the older age groups as it was before, with more young families moving in. Warwick believes the council has navigated these changes over the past decade incredibly well, coming up with solutions and ways to tackle any challenges.

"I have been really proud of the way that our CBD has managed to grow and develop over the past 10 years and throughout the GFC period. There were a number of changes that we made to the code and the planning controls to enable some of that to happen. It's always going to be a work in progress, but I am really pleased with the way that some of the very large developments are now starting to come up and out of the ground. There's always a time delay between getting the policy done and the practical outcomes, but now those practical outcomes are coming to fruition.

"I am particularly proud of the work that we have done in St Leonards and Crows Nest. These areas have experienced significant levels of growth, with thousands of

extra people moving in. We have worked very hard to try to keep ahead of that curve and to keep the amenities and our thinking going so that in the future people will be able to have parks, open space, and retain that sense of community. The key thing that council has done over the past 12 to 18 months is really grasp the nettle in terms of what we are going to do for the future, and what projects we actually need to stop talking about and start doing. I have been very proud to be part of that discussion that the elected council has had in order to be able to move forward."

North Sydney Council is a progressive organisation and has doubled its capital expenditure over the past couple of years. Its current focus is on the iconic North Sydney Olympic Pool; it will soon bring six options to the community across various cost categories to determine what work needs to be done there. Warwick says there is an opportunity for generational change with the pool. "In 50 years time, people will be able to look back and go, 'Wasn't it great that the council did that?'"

Warwick and his team are also concentrating their efforts on upgrading and enhancing the North Sydney Oval. "It's an iconic place, but it hasn't been a thing that council has invested a lot of money in over the years," Warwick notes. Another key project is the revitalisation of the CBD.

"There are lots of smaller-scale projects that we are doing as



well," he adds. "We are trying to create a new park in St Leonards because of all the growth that's taking place down there, and we are also working with the New South Wales Government on the new train stations that are going to be in North Sydney—one probably in the CBD and one up towards Crows Nest and St Leonards. We are working very hard to try to get their early thinking tied into our thinking so we can get a real win-win for

the community with the new rail infrastructure which the government is currently working on."

To embark on these types of developments, North Sydney Council must work closely with its suppliers and contractors. "Invariably, we are embarking on large projects and quite complicated projects," Warwick says. "Sometimes our contractors and suppliers don't necessarily

have a lot of experience in terms of the political world, so we work very closely to educate and help the contractors and the specialist suppliers to provide us with what we have asked them to do.

"There is a level of scrutiny that gets applied to things council does, and that accountability is probably at a very high level compared to what a lot of our suppliers and contractors are used to. We work very closely and carefully to define the outcomes we are looking to achieve."

Over the past 18 or so months, Warwick has been trying to instil a more innovative and entrepreneurial feel to the organisation. He wants staff to feel empowered and to have responsibility for the tasks they do. "We have a new business planning framework within the council that enables me to have the specific practical projects clearly identified in each directorate. Then those objectives get filtered into individual work programs, and there are assessment criteria we use on a six-monthly basis with staff. This is so that people can actually see what the expectations are at the top, the middle, and at their level as well. We have a sense of ownership, and our core values are out there. We are an employer of choice, we care about our people, we care about each other, and we care about our community.

"My vision for North Sydney Council is that we really focus on the amenity aspects for our increasing residential population and concentrate on making sure our CBD is as exciting and innovative as possible. We want to be working with our stakeholder partners in our CBD and our other town centres to make sure that these projects can come about—it really is a partnership approach. Council can't do everything, but what we can do is work with others to get a bit of bang for our buck and give them better bang for their buck. My vision is for North Sydney to be a progressive, modern, innovative, inner urban area." •

