



Troops reporting for vital duty

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THERE was an air of guarded anticipation among Rescue Patrol delegates as they filed into the Griffith University chancellery building yesterday.

Without doubt, there was no certainty that the meeting – which brought together some of the brightest minds on the Gold Coast - could achieve its stated aim of delivering compelling responses to the economic woe that has befallen us and how we can reinvigorate our city through an entrepreneurial spirit of old.

But all had the same attitude. It was only an afternoon of their time, and it was worth a shot.

After assembling as one, and enduring some routine speeches from politicians on both sides of the fence, it was down to business as the delegates split into nine defined groups.

The level of animation from room to room varied according to the depth of passion for the subject.

Needless to say, those on the environment and lifestyle committee were most lively.

Trees and recycling were uppermost on the agenda and a mad scattering of marker ink across the whiteboard was evidence of an active debate.

Zarraffa's boss Kenton Campbell, who handled the marker, said it was a whiteboard map that steered his company to success.

Environment delegates left their meeting full of hope.

The tourism committee brought together some wise old heads and also one of the Rescue Squad's youngest delegates, Brock Schaefer, a concierge at the Hyatt Regency Sanctuary Cove.

Marketing incentives and customer-winning service were top of the list of ideas, but it was clear that many thought Gold Coast tourism operators had to band together if they were to flourish.

The tourism committee's response was an immediate incentive from operators for special offers for short-stay visitors from our immediate neighborhood.

Incentives, they said, would get more people to drive down the M1 from Brisbane and Toowoomba and fill our hotel beds, restaurants and theme parks.

But their long-term vision for a cruise ship terminal made some in the environment camp cringe.



As for the development and construction committee, it was on a mission to pull back the Gold Coast's waning image on housing affordability.

Gold Coast house prices are the highest in the state, yet our wages are among the lowest.

Delegates were strongly behind their proposal to provide a \$20,000 rebate for all new homes built over the next 12 months.

The funds could come from the council's coffers.

They argued that the city council already was facing a \$60 million-plus hole in its infrastructure budget due to the downturn in building activity.

They said this proposal would help kickstart activity and position the Coast for a marketing coup.

The rebate is expected to have a 20 times multiplier effect on the economy and trigger a new wave of enthusiasm for newcomers to settle in the city.

But there was no comfort from Mayor Ron Clarke, who hosed down the initiative with hard facts.

"With every \$5 million cost idea, rates go up 1 per cent," he said.

He also argued that, at an average of about \$35,000 per home, the Gold Coast did not have the highest infrastructure charges in Queensland.

Development committee member Kerry Young was not backing down, saying the costings for the scheme were sound.

The tone of infrastructure committee head Peter Trathen was sobering.

"We have a fundamental problem in this city. Infrastructure follows Development - it doesn't precede it. One of the reasons for that is there is a fundamental flaw in the way infrastructure is funded."

It was clear there was a division of opinions between the private and public sector.

There is much work still to be done to give many of yesterday's recommendations real traction.

More meetings are planned to prevent Rescue Patrol '09 from being remembered as just a talkfest.

Gold Coast Bulletin managing director, Steve Howard, was succinct.

"The aim is not to produce a dust-gathering document," he said.

Unlike Prime Minister Rudd's 2020 summit, the Gold Coast Rescue Patrol is not designed to be a one-hit wonder.

The suggestion by some was that it should become an annual event, even in better economic times.

As Mr Trathen said, his committee had no shortage of ideas.

"For us, the dilemma was how do we pick something and leave something out," he said.