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Letter of Transmittal

Dear Prime Minister,

You have asked us what could be done to improve the quality of urban design in Australia. We are now pleased to present our report.

Although we are deeply concerned about the State of urban design in Australia, we have taken a positive approach. We thus illustrate our report with examples of good work being done around Australia. The report, however, concentrates not on particular places but on the more fundamental changes that need to take place to provide the basis for higher quality urban design in the future.

We have been given a most challenging task. This is the first time that an Australia-wide review has been attempted to examine ways of improving the quality of our urban areas, and of strengthening the role that can be played by urban design. However, we wish to stress the limitations of this report: it is meant to point to directions for change, and is not to be seen as an exhaustive analysis or guide to better urban design in Australia.

Hence, we have adopted a broad approach to the task. We also confirm the need to link the urban design issues that we have identified to other concurrent efforts such as the Australian Urban and Regional Development Review being carried out for the Hon. Brian Howe, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Housing and Regional Development. These two urban initiatives are closely related and mutually supporting.

Prime Minister, we thank you for the invitation to conduct this investigation and hope that our responses will assist your Government and others to strengthen this area which we regard as a key to the nation’s quality of life.

John Mant (Convenor); Catherin Bull, Geoff Campbell, Espie Dods, Peter Droeges, Neville Gruzman, Michael Llewellyn-Smith, Wendy Morris, Alex Tzannes, Evan Walker, David Yencken.

16 November 1994
1 Our Charter

The Prime Minister has requested us to respond to the following brief.

'The Task Force should review the quality of urban design in Australia and make recommendations for improvement. It should particularly focus on ways in which the day-to-day working, residential and recreational environment of most Australians might be enhanced by more thoughtful attention to urban design.

'Urban (or 'community') design should be understood to apply to all scales of and types of urban activity and to be concerned about the physical arrangement and functioning of urban activities, the physical appearance of the built environment and its relationship to the natural environment, the way in which people experience it and the social and economic factors which influence its quality. The Task Force should examine all influences on the way in which urban growth and change takes place, including informal but conventional practices and formal planning controls. It should consider the impact of current trends in urban development and whether current practices are adequate to create pleasing results.

'The Task Force should determine how improved design may enhance the quality of the built environment and provide examples of the way in which this might occur. In making recommendations for improvements, the report may wish to instance examples in Australia or in other countries of more successful urban design than is commonly encountered in Australia.

'In making recommendations the Task Force should bear in mind their feasibility, equity, practicality and cost. It should also take into account current complementary work on urban planning issues, including within the portfolio of the Deputy Prime Minister Brian Howe.'

In pursuing this charter, we have focused on three aims:

* to generate debate about the role of good urban design in providing livable, equitable and sustainable places to live and work;

* to identify practical and cost-effective changes in industry, government and education across Australia;
• to suggest specific ways in which the Commonwealth can act to encourage good urban design.

Because there could be a range of expectations about this report we think it important to state the limitations of our mandate. The Task Force was comprised of professionals and academics, it did not have a secretariat to assist its work and all of its members worked on a voluntary basis. The report has been written in entirety by members of the Task Force. In preparing the Report we have considered a range of positive examples from around the country and overseas. The limited scope of this document has not enabled these examples to be fully documented. We strongly consider there is a need for well illustrated documents and other means of communication to inform the Australian community on urban design issues.

We would like to record with sadness the death of Michael Dickinson, a member of the Task Force, during the course of our work. Michael Dickinson was an architect and critic who had been appointed to be the writer of the report. He attended many of the meetings although he was unwell. He will be remembered for his fine contributions to the debate about urban design and the quality of our cities.

We appreciate the submissions received from Ms Jennie Beahan (Department for the Arts, W.A.), Professor Nick Beattie (Deakin University), Max Bourke (Australian Council for the Arts), Professor Laurie Hegvold (Curtin University of Technology), Mr Paul Pholeros (Architect, co-author “Housing for Health”), Professor Paul Reid (University of New South Wales), Mr John Roseth (A.V. Jennings), Mr Roderick Simpson (Architect, affiliated with Greenpeace).

We have received advice and assistance from a number of people and we thank them. We feel that this report should be used to invite further comment.

We are also grateful to Carolyn Stone for her work on key intermediate drafts; to Davina Jackson, editor of Architecture Australia, for her assistance with editorial and illustration advice, and to Samantha Biggs for her thoughtful help in the final production.

We have been surprised and delighted by the interest shown in our work by many others who have sought contact with us as individuals or as a group. We see this as evidence of a high level of concern about the quality of Australia’s urban areas. It is also testimony to the timeliness of the Prime Minister’s interest in this matter.

2 Urban Design

What is it?

Cities express our values, aspirations and relations of power with eloquence and clarity: they are our most significant artefacts. Yet there is much about cities that seems uncontrolled, even chaotic, as they evolve in the maelstrom of technological and cultural change, shifting social needs and preferences, economic realities and ideas about how to govern society. At the same time, global homogenisation of places and design styles in the very face of urban fragmentation is a rising symptom of contemporary cultural and economic trends.

Good urban design is concerned with visual meaning, functional efficiency and broad access to change in cities and towns. It does not depend on universal principles or national codes but is grounded in local characteristics and needs, so much so that it is often hard to notice, being distinguished by a natural fit with site and context. Urban design manifests itself in many ways, but is always centred on the quality of the public realm. Here is a range of examples.

Environmental design

In urban development, the physical environment as a whole is at stake. A large range of choices affects the design of the shared environment, and good urban design policy and practice will seek to optimise options that take into account aims of public participation and access, ecological health, social impact, economic growth, technological innovation, and meanings of place.

City design

Urban design as broad public policy commitment aims at the design of entire cities and towns. Urban development is a complex and collective process, occurring largely in ways that are not easily influenced by a particular conscious choice. Yet governments, the development industry and individuals can be encouraged to think in ways that take into account the city as a whole, the needs of all its people, the relation of its parts, its past and possible futures, its infrastructure and economic opportunities. Civic-minded leadership can act boldly, compellingly and in accordance with a comprehensive vision. When policy and design choices are
optimised in accordance with a view of the common good, comprehensive ‘city design’ becomes a reality.

Urban development design

Design debates ripple across the country, in the wake of large-scale changes in our cities. The Commonwealth Better Cities program, Olympic preparations, inner-urban redevelopment investment schemes, new infrastructure projects such as bridges, highways and airports, new-town scale residential expansions—all generate heated public exchange, media exposure, and fears of large-scale blunders. Quality-conscious urban designers and civic advocates point to the rich experience from the past and look for opportunities to conceive of large projects not as simple master plans but rather as sensitive and flexible development programs, prudently pacing development, while consulting a broad range of skills and community views. While real opportunities for wisely managing large urban development projects seem ever elusive, the ideal in good development is to place the creation of development of genuine and lasting value over quick political or financial returns.

Public space design

Good urban design spells stewardship of the public domain: the shared urban areas and spaces, the structures that relate to those spaces and the infrastructure that supports and serves them. It is concerned with the quality of public space: the streets, roads, squares, sidewalks and parks and the fountains, furniture and art works found within them. It is concerned with the quality of new building projects and associated atria, plazas and parks. It seeks ways of retaining and reusing historical structures of civic significance. It is concerned with means to guide design of all these structures for the benefit of the public realm, while seeking opportunities of mutual support with the private domain: good public realms enhance the quality of private territories, while private space and buildings can contribute to a better functioning of the whole.

Community design

Urban design is a process of defining and engaging the interests of communities, and to help support their health. Good urban design often involves community design, design with or by local communities. It is frequently argued that the best

and most beautiful places have evolved slowly over the ages. By working with communities and developing local areas thoughtfully and with care, we can replicate longer-range, adaptive processes, giving people opportunities to shape their own environments.

Why is urban design important?

The quality of urban design matters. It does so in terms of experience and meaning because of the messages and feelings different places provide us with; functionally, for the efficient and effective working of the city; environmentally, for the way it can minimise waste, energy and pollution; socially, as a means of building equitably supportive towns and cities; and for the way it can strengthen economic life and competitiveness. Urban design gives us the tools with which we can consciously improve the quality of our cities and regions.

The value to individuals and communities

Urban design is important to individuals because it is directly concerned with creating and caring for places that people experience in their daily lives. Places become memorable and valuable because they manifest qualities or are associated with events that have meaning to us. We see such places as important because they represent us as communities and as a nation. They physically spell out to Australians what they hold as valuable about their way of life.

Good urban form can be the glue for a community: well-designed and cared-for public space supports interaction and involvement. Shared activities thrive in good places: play, recreation, ceremony, as well as day-to-day business, and good design has an important role to play in making streets and public places safe and secure.

Urban design and environmental health

Ecologically sustainable design is about amplifying and sustaining the quality of life for people. To do so, good urban design seeks to cushion the environmental effects of urban development. It can help to reduce heat islands, improve micro climates, prevent contamination of land, protect water supplies, manage urban run-off and storm water, encourage planting, nurture urban environments as diversely life-sustaining settings, and safeguard wildlife habitats. It can support
walking, bicycling and public transport, reducing car dependency, and related energy use and airborne pollution.

The recent Green League of Nations Report, a survey of environmental performance in 21 developed countries, shows that Australia’s urban environmental performance is poor by international standards. Urban design can help reverse these trends, through resource efficiency and care for the quality of the environment, including our coasts.

Urban design and social equity

Through good urban design, urban change can be made to respond to the needs of less advantaged groups, by distributing benefits through places and neighbourhoods that are more accessible, satisfying and empowering to its users, are well-connected to the rest of the city, and provide safe and educative environment for all children and adolescents.

Urban design, the economy and the future of Australia

The OECD report Revitalising Urban Economies suggests that the two most important initiatives a city should take to stimulate economic activity were strong infrastructure investment and a focus on environmental quality.

The quality of a region’s urban environment can be a decisive factor in attracting and accommodating investment and economic activity. Global and national competition among cities is on the rise, with mounting ease of international travel, shifts in industrial structures, greater information exchange and reduced trade barriers. In the drive for greater comparative advantage more and more cities embrace bold urban design programs, recognising that the design expression of their ambition and prestige, their beauty and vitality can be critical to the location choices made by quality businesses and industries.

As an important model, the city of Lyon under its mayor Michel Noir has adopted a visionary commitment to urban design—and is fast on the rise in the European community of cities. The close link between the attractiveness of a city to visit and enjoy and the stimulation of other economic activities is also illustrated by the city of Munich in southern Germany. It has consciously brought about major urban transformations in its central city, not only to attract people for shopping, entertainment and business, but also to demonstrate its unequivocal commitment to quality in everything it does, from advanced manufacturing to the methodical change to new growth industries.

Tourists, too, feel the pull of important city centres because of their unique environmental qualities, and because they symbolically represent their regions and nations. But urban quality and tourism are also closely related elsewhere in Australia: most leisure travellers seek attractive non-urban locations for their visits and vacations. As these places develop, good urban design can be used to manage this growth so that the emerging centres remain unique places to visit, and the surroundings to be protected, even in times of rapid growth.

Good urban design can help generate a sense of place that is distinctly Australian by reflecting our natural and cultural heritage. At the same time, a general high quality of urban design inside Australia generates skills that can be applied internationally. The demand for Australian exports in design and planning education, consultancies and other services is on the rise, but Australia’s contribution to international development will be more meaningful if innovation and best-practice standards become its hallmark, and our own urban environments provide more tangible examples of good design.

What are the challenges?

Much of this Task Force Report concentrates on problems related to the quality of urban areas in Australia and on new initiatives that might be taken by government. The report also canvasses the tools and approaches used in other countries to suggest what might be international best practice for possible adoption in Australia. We do not, however, wish to suggest that there have been no important developments in recent years nor that we are without good examples to draw upon in Australia.

Over the last twenty years or so there has been a growing awareness of the importance of urban design in Australia and many significant actions from citizens, government, and the private sector. The Prime Minister’s initiative in establishing this Task Force is an example of this change in overall awareness.

The heritage, national estate and conservation movements could be considered as the forerunner to the growing concern with urban design today. Similarly, the
environmental movement has greatly contributed to a heightened sense of importance to urban quality issues. And most recently, in the face of dramatic demographic shifts, a rising sensitivity to ethnic and cultural issues in the built environment has added yet another important dimension to public awareness and policy response. The conservation and environmental movements have additionally informed approaches to urban design through innovations in planning legislation, grants and incentives, grassroots and local community action, and government intervention.

There are many high quality urban areas in Australia today, some recently created and some the product of remarkable efforts to conserve, restore and enhance. These are the building blocks on which we need to build in the future.

Australians devote great care to their private places. Yet many Australian cities struggle with a neglected stock of public spaces because of the premium placed on individual choice, and because of inappropriate government and industry structures.

The State of Australian streets tells the story starkly. Throughout the ages, urban street networks have provided cities’ essential civic communication and movement channels: in the modern city, because of the primacy of the motor car—of the excessive departmentalisation of government activities, streets have become almost exclusively conduits for cars. Yet we all know that streets have other roles, ranging from eight-lane freeways to pedestrian malls. In our cities, streets must retain their function as the backbone of our society’s public domain, and be made attractive for pedestrians, for children’s play, for meeting other people, for resting and eating. Like other parts of cities, streets must be designed to serve these purposes well.

Road engineers are not alone in shouldering the blame for many of the failures in the design of cities. Other professional groups share responsibility. Architects and building designers are largely taught to see individual buildings as isolated objects. They do not generally begin by asking: what will this structure do to the urban fabric as a whole? Will it help the public areas? Will it support and encourage street life and activity? Is it ecologically responsible?

A related challenge rests in the freedom given to individuals in the treatment of their private sites. While that freedom of choice must be safeguarded, it must also be exercised with responsibility. A firm balance should be struck between the rights to individual choice and expression and the need for that individuality to improve rather than detract from the whole. Indeed, ours is an age of unprecedented choice—we have at our disposal an array of technologies, materials and forms not available to previous generations. In response, we need to develop the skills that are requisite to good decision-making, based on a knowledge of urban design.

Like individuals, companies and enterprises can be guided and rewarded in their efforts to act responsibly. History shows that private businesses can powerfully articulate their own civic visions and prompt urban rejuvenation on an unprecedented scale—such as in the extraordinary city design efforts that transformed Chicago early in this century.

Yet another major challenge presents itself in the legal, financial and administrative arrangements in government and industry that have developed over the years. Many were generated under circumstances which have little relevance today, and need to be updated urgently.

A fifth challenge is posed by low levels of awareness in the general public, among public administrators, technical staff and professionals. The means to address this challenge ranges from media campaigns to professional training.

A final challenge lies in the general misconceptions held about people and their attitudes to urban design. There is often little correlation between decision-makers’ assumptions about popular preferences and people’s actual feelings and thoughts. For instance, surveys show a much stronger desire for safe and walkable neighbourhood streets than is generally reported or taken into account in policy decisions.

What is good urban design?

Drawing upon the work of the US urbanist William Lyman Porter, we have identified a set of criteria for good urban design.

Good urban design:
- demonstrates design excellence in urban development and architecture;
- distributes benefits widely in the population;
3 Improving Australian Settlements

This chapter highlights key opportunities for improving Australia’s urban places. It is not a comprehensive overview, nor is it a watertight scholarly critique. Rather, it is an overview to help illustrate our analysis and our recommendations.

The directions given in our report go beyond a concern with providing our urban areas with greater visual qualities. Rather, they can help build our cities as domains of social equity, environmental health and efficient infrastructure.

This overview contains sketches of our central areas, regional metropolitan centres, regional cities, rural towns, residential suburbs, coastal towns and areas, Aboriginal settlements and infrastructure networks.

Central areas

Australia’s central city areas grew from early beginnings as colonial outposts into the metropolitan cores of Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. Since the Second World War, fundamental changes in the national and global economy, in urban land markets and building and fire-fighting technology have contributed to the rapid transformation of these Georgian- and Victorian-styled centres of brick, stone, wood and iron. Uniform yet articulate building patterns have largely given way to the towering, steel-and-glass Central Business Districts. Rising ‘Manhattanisation’ marks an early wave of economic structural changes that swept across many large cities of the late industrial world. It continues to engulf cities of the newly industrialising countries of East Asia.

Much of today’s inner-city design opportunities are linked to these deep structural changes that have rendered obsolete industrial wharves, rail goods yards and heavy-industry zones. They continue to increase the pressure on the older building stock that is part of Australia’s fine built heritage—that is, where it has survived. Melbourne’s Docklands, East Perth, Sydney’s City West, Newcastle’s Honeysuckle area—all are examples of the inner-urban frontier that continues to present golden opportunities to dramatically improve the design of Australia’s cities.

Today, the most urgent urban design needs continue to be:

• public fora and events to foster informed and open civic discourse and a sense of communal purpose;
reinforced by unrestrained lending practices, public development policies and external factors such as favourable international exchange rates can lead to fatal runs onto the real estate markets—resulting in overbuilding and pressures to forego common sense and concern for development quality. By contrast, the efforts to save and improve the Melbourne and Adelaide cores under similar conditions show the fruits of concerted metropolitan growth guidance efforts.

What are the essential tools for managing the pressures on Australia’s central city areas? CBD strategy plans, bold policy instruments, creative and powerfully urban-design minded civic leadership and capable institutional settings—all these are tools for achieving better central cities for Australia.

**Metropolitan regional centres**

Many Australian suburban areas are changing; they evolve into multi-centric metropolitan networks. This change responds to both spontaneous and managed regional development processes, and generally follows the network of road and rail corridors. Here, in Australia’s regional centres, the greatest share of any urban economic growth can be expected, and therefore it is here that intelligent urban design measures may well have their greatest impact.

In many ways the metropolitan regional centres act as secondary CBDs, but they serve very different purposes as well. In supporting their own constituents and in attracting world-class enterprises, many of them have begun to compete successfully with the older centres. To achieve a higher level of environmental performance, they must come to terms with the paralysing form and nature of older infrastructures, such as their car-dominated public realms, and the overpowering regional road thoroughfares and rail corridors that divide many of these growing centres, and hence stifle their integration and expansion into vibrant, multifunctional hubs of commerce and pedestrian life. Doing so will also make regional centres more capable of doing battle with their new and formidable rivals: the ex-urban shopping malls. Malls thrive on homogeneously-zoned, car-dependant suburbia, supply monopolies, consequent huge development profits, and the mass consumption industry. Good urban design policy will seek to rebuild the less costly, fine-grained range of business and retail opportunities only town centres seem to be able to provide.
Urban Design in Australia

Australia's metropolitan regional centres—and especially the main transport hubs—are slowly beginning to embrace the opportunities for better urban design and development. Local Government reform is essential, and so are better skills in development strategies and urban design. Ultimately, the creative empowerment of Local Government will depend on the successful nurturing of regional and sub-regional, outcome-oriented planning powers supplied within sophisticated regional design strategies.

The city of Ryde in New South Wales is one of a growing number of council areas in Australia that seek to combine new economic development paradigms with more traditional—and hence well-tested—forms of urban development. It is drawing from the experience of other communities in Australia, such as the Perth Urban Villages Project, to give more responsive urban and environmental forms to an emerging demand for quality housing, and to new economic forces marked by jobs in high technology, health and education.

Regional cities

Australia's many, often fast-growing regional centres, Cairns for example, pose especially urgent urban design challenges. In some sense, their challenges are not dissimilar to those faced by metropolitan regional centres: integrated design strategy plans and skills are needed to develop solutions that are both encompassing and specific and linked to their regional functions. But because of their more independent, often strategic role in the emerging national economic and demographic picture, visions need to be forged that are bold, uniquely recognisable from abroad, integrated with emerging economic aspirations and especially innovative in terms of ecological sustainability, because of the inevitable pressure on an often fragile hinterland or coastal area. Recent assessment of the changes in the regional centres is documented in Beyond the Capitals—Urban Growth in Regional Australia, by Beer, Bolam and Maude.

Rural towns

Australia's rural towns are also under threat. From an urban design point of view, many older towns are structured in ideal ways, with their intact main streets, post offices, banks, churches and other public buildings. And yet, these qualities are unlikely to survive, unless a concerted effort is made to protect them, while identifying paths for their economic survival and welcoming positive forms of urban change.

The Creative Villages program, organised at the University of New South Wales and funded by the NSW Ministry for the Arts, has sought to illustrate the scope for design innovation in small and remote settlements. While no formal reviews of the results of this and other efforts, such as Main Street programs, have yet been undertaken, the attention these programs have placed on the quality of rural life has gone a long way towards a more broadly shared understanding of how to use the power of design across the entirety of the Australian urban system.

Residential suburbs

Most older inner-urban residential areas across Australia are seen as attractive, pleasant, even beautiful and fashionable places to be. However, a central question that occupies the country is: how should we be designing our newer suburbs?

Much of recent residential design in Australia is seen as poor. This is despite the fact that our suburbs have come to signify much that is desirable about Australia—even abroad in countries like Japan, where Australian residential exports may find a new market. Our suburban environments are cherished as pastoral settings for a majority of families to rear their children, but the vast, repetitive and proliferating aggregation of these areas and a large number of structural design deficiencies have sobered the nation. Too many recent housing areas fail to meet basic performance standards, in terms of accessibility, orientation to the sun, minimum disturbance of the existing environment or efficiency in the use of energy, building materials and land—let alone in the degree to which healthy and accessible communities are being nurtured, daily needs of women, youth and elderly are met, new demographic realities such as the rise of non-traditional households are served, new immigrants' needs are integrated, or local employment opportunities are provided.

There are many ways in which the average detached dwelling development or subdivision in Australia could be improved. Many are listed in our report. All would result in a decrease of subdivisions that are narrowly focused on maximum lot
yield and minimum up-front infrastructure cost, regardless of the environmental qualities and opportunities of the land. Such improvement opportunities are:

- greater housing choice from alternative forms of residential development (eg those based on integrated community design and planned around public transport and service nodes);
- less wasteful use of land (eg the avoidance of rigid setbacks that reduce the useable areas of allotments and fail to contribute to the development's public domain);
- better environmental performance through good orientation, avoiding rigid adherence to winding street alignments;
- increased privacy between houses, reduced overshadowing and more site responsive design;
- enriched street life providing safe community space by avoiding, wherever possible, streets that are devoted to cars, garages and blank walls;
- better and more accessible recreational open space;
- new housing forms that offer greater choice by responding to demographic changes and a need for greater affordability.

Subdivision and road layouts should be based on the characteristics of their particular environments on good orientation and environmentally respectful site planning, the overall design and functionality of the settlement and the optimal relation of individual houses to each other. Development, design and building controls must support the optimisation of these choices.

Simplified title systems are required. Where corporate bodies are unavoidable, a system of minimum contributions and streamlined contractual documents must be developed, as well as ways of limiting unnecessary cash commitments by developers and expense by purchasers. Flexibility and openness to change over time must be among the objectives of innovative design approaches.

Coastal development

Continuing urban development along Australia’s coastline is creating serious environmental problems. A major effort must be made to preserve this vital and irreplaceable asset. Australians must understand that the luxury of living close to the coast brings significant costs—costs that must be accounted for and mitigated against, in better design of those additional coastal settlements that cannot be avoided.

Firmer controls and better design solutions are essential, but Australia must also tackle the paralysing number of government agencies with overlapping responsibilities for the coastal environment. State and Local Government agencies in particular are structured in such a way that many are involved but nobody is responsible for coastal areas as a whole. New agencies set up for this purpose have been given only limited powers, and are proving largely ineffectual. In section 4, we suggest ways of restructuring State and Local Governments and reform of the regulatory systems. Both can significantly improve ecological management of coastal areas and the urban design of coastal settlements.

From the point of view of this inquiry, there are two main concerns about the coast—first the location and second the design of settlements.

Location

Coastal land values are generally high. This results in extraordinary pressures on government to grant development approvals. Local Government is responsible to its electorate and cannot be expected to represent the regional or national perspective consistently. Urban and resort development generates employment and, provided reasonable infrastructure contributions are received from the developers, can add significantly to council revenues.

Coastal urbanisation epitomises the shortcomings of the development control system operating in Australia today. Permission to develop can result in massive increases in value for what is often marginal farm land. The principle of equity makes it hard to justify that one property owner should gain substantially while immediate neighbours are denied a similar windfall.

If current trends were to be projected into the future, all privately owned habitable coastal land will be developed in time, regardless of its present zoning. Ironically, land which could be developed but for a zoning prohibition may be more likely to be developed since down-zoned areas are artificially under-valued—greatly increasing the profits to be made from a successful rezoning exercise.
Only public ownership of development rights and concomitant powerful legislative constraints on the disposal of those rights can protect the coast of Australia from the tragic fate of mutating into a continuous urban strip. In the last century visionary Surveyors General in several States reserved coastal stretches, preventing them from being sold to private owners. The consequences of this far-sightedness is evident today in Victoria, with its strip of coastal reserves. In this century there have been equally far-sighted Ministers, such as New South Wales’ Tom Lewis in the 1960s, who recaptured key parcels of coastal land for the public. Park and forest reserves also came to provide important breaks in the sea of development—the old, now forgotten ‘green lung’ concept. In the face of new and unprecedented development challenges, what is needed today is an equally visionary national program to buy back the development rights to key coastal lands.

In many cases it would not be necessary for the whole of the freehold to be acquired. Most States now have legislation to enable the government to acquire development rights and record the restriction on future development on the titles of the individual parcels. As with an alteration to a Conservation Reservation of Crown Land, any lifting of the restriction would need Parliamentary consent. The purpose is not to turn all non-urban land along the coast into park reserve but to fairly compensate land owners for not being able to ‘win the jackpot’ of a favourable rezoning and thereby take the pressure to rezone off government, and especially Local Government.

Design

Little in the recent development of coastal towns and villages has been of great quality. Unless a town is a heritage area and has had the benefit of some special conservation controls, such as Robe, or had a particularly concerned Local Government authority, such as Port Douglas, Noosa or Byron Bay, standard planning and other development control policies apply, with often fatal consequences to the quality and vitality of the coastal environment.

Early and recent subdividers encouraged building on the foredunes—such as the South Australian Lands Department with its coastal shack blocks in the 1950s—to the detriment of public access, the dune system and the visual quality of the coast. Much of the speculative or holiday development along the coast now houses permanent populations. By contrast with some other States, the coast of Victoria is comparatively unscorched in this regard, thanks to its coastal reserve.

It is high time for Australian environmental legislators to produce design policies that are specific to coastal development. Standard zoning, design, siting and traffic management controls are insufficient to keep unspoilt fragile coastal areas from being developed in destructive ways, and small-scale, traditional coastal settlements from mutating into homogenous suburbia.

The power of administrative styles is evident: different processes for administering rezoning in the several States have led to different patterns of development. The Queensland system, which allows for an application for rezoning to be made with a right of appeal to the Court in the event of refusal, puts the initiative for rezoning with the landowner. In the other States government carries the initiative.

The consequence is that in Queensland there is a greater scattering of developments, whereas in the other States the pattern is more one of building onto the existing settlements, transforming old villages into towns and suburbs. Queensland is host to more stand-alone resort-style developments and some are walled, privatised enclaves. They are anathema to the development of a broadly shared sense of community and a feeling of public access, and they also are often environmentally hostile. On the other hand the Queensland process provides a potential for considerable capture of the increased land value to fund infrastructure, and scope for overall design quality. A public policy gap is waiting to be filled, to allow these important links to be made.

In summary, a sensible response to the rising demand for living along the coast requires better design practice, greater restrictions and a mix of supportive policies—but also the provision of more desirable living environments elsewhere. Needed is a national program to purchase development rights of strategic parcels of land, constraints on the expansion of existing coastal settlements and incentives to develop well-designed and demarcated urban areas that are not walled and exclusive, and carefully sited inland, back from the immediate coastal strip.

If the latter is to succeed there will need to be a reasonable opportunity for private initiative. Were government to identify too precisely such opportunities, the existing land owners of the sites identified would be likely to push the price of land too high
to make a success of the ventures. The result would be an avalanche of zoning approvals or appeals and a massive expansion of existing settlements. A variation of the Queensland system may be the best solution, to provide effective control over the areas not to be built on through the public purchase of development rights, with a wide range of opportunities for the development of environmentally responsible, higher-density and networked new settlements within the remaining areas. Social equity issues would have to be resolved through pro-rated affordable housing requirements in every new settlement.

Aboriginal settlements

Environmental health and cultural fit through community design for both urban and remotely settled Aboriginal people is a special Australian urban design challenge.

Settled Aboriginal people have the shortest life expectancy, worst living conditions, and lowest employment and education levels of all communities in Australia. As a group, their lives are marked by dispossession, and poor social and economic outcomes. The provision of housing by public agencies has done little to mitigate these conditions. To the contrary, they have often been exacerbated due to the financial and psychological stress caused by cumbersome, inferior and ill-fitting accommodations.

Recent field work and research in the Northern Territories has shown that there are clear benefits in responding sensitively to the life-style patterns and needs of Aborigines. To Westerners with their focus on individualism and material possessions, a house is a medium of personal identity and status. By contrast, Aborigines place greater emphasis on structures of kinship; group knowledge and beliefs are more important than individual possessions. In its undisturbed form, indigenous life takes place in places, and is not structured around buildings as objects and assets on the land. Traditional habitation exerts a custodial relationship over the land and does not define itself in relations of contracted and traded ownership.

In Aboriginal urban settlements, such as those surrounding Alice Springs, the overall shape of the community has been shown to be of greater significance than particular house design. Small clusters of houses each represent an extended family group: Aboriginal kinship obligations would be difficult to fulfil in conventional suburban subdivisions. The occupancy of any individual house can fluctuate greatly, and houses are shared over time. In response to a death, a house remains abandoned for a certain time.

Outdoor space is living space; Western layouts of indoor and outdoor spaces carry little meaning. To be useful, houses need wide verandahs with low walls around them, acting as wind breaks, seats and shelves. Open spaces need furnishing with fences, and the possibility of separating playing children, water and domestic animals, to avoid the spread of diseases. To respond to Aboriginal needs, research and consultation are essential to avoid mistakes of the past. The recent study ‘Housing for Health’ on remote settlements in the Northern Territories documents the need for a range of ‘health hardware’, house and open space design, and community layout provisions—most of which are not now common practice.

Infrastructure development

Good urban infrastructure practice is synonymous with excellence in urban design. ‘Infrastructure’ usually connotes technical networks of transport, energy, water and communications—but, equally importantly there are human, amenity, environmental, narrative (myth, history, symbolism, maintenance of meaning, inspiration) and organisational infrastructures that are critical in maintaining the fabric of a society. Good urban design will at minimum do nothing to harm any of these networks, and at best strengthen each one of them.

The form of Australia’s street and transport systems is critical to building better designed cities. Good street layouts and design mean efficiency and quality of traffic flows when they are applied in a richly differentiated and networked way. Good road networks range from a bare minimum of carefully routed highway-grade thoroughfares to a highly connected system of multi-purpose streets, amply providing for alternative routes, making it easy for residents to reach shops or transport stops on foot, and ensuring comfort and safety for children’s play, and for communal, commercial and recreational activity.

Good urban designers are always on the lookout for opportunities to improve the status and performance of public transport. In fact, good urban design is predicated on the availability of well-differentiated public transport systems, providing a range
of travel opportunities for all urban residents, and ample means of movement and accessibility for those without the use of a car—the young, the old, the infirm and the poor. High public transport patronage reduces energy consumption and noxious exhaust emissions. Good on-street and recreational bicycle networks further widen travel choice and reduce car dependency.

Mounting urban and environmental crises pose great challenges and invite innovation in the design, development and management of technical infrastructure, such as water, drainage, sewerage, gas supply and telecommunications. In water and liquid waste management, for instance, promising developments point towards the evolution of more self-sufficient sub-regional supply and treatment systems. These changes, like new work patterns, appear to be sympathetic to emerging ideas about the evolution of urban and regional ‘village’ networks within Australian metropolitan areas.

Pedestrian surveys in Australian cities point clearly to the importance of comfortable movement systems—especially public transport, walking and bicycling—for the making of satisfying places. Because of narrowly conceived technological, economic and administrative imperatives the main emphasis in transport planning in Australia since World War II has been on roads and motor vehicle traffic. We cannot bring about more pleasing and satisfying cities without a drastic change in transport priorities.

Designing new communities for public transport

The nexus of transport and urban quality is especially apparent in the outer suburbs where public transport services are poor and subdivision design and low densities prohibit purposeful walking and cycling. In response, design reform movements, initiated in the US, have been gathering strength. Three fundamental changes are advocated: first, a return to more traditional forms of street layout and design; second, a renewed emphasis in housing developments on planning which will support and encourage public transport; and third, a search for mixed-use forms of settlement that make possible greater access to goods, services and jobs. Two of these design approaches are known as Traditional Neighbourhood Development and Transit Oriented Design.

The principles that underlie these approaches are:

- community commercial and service centres—dubbed ‘villages’ in the post-suburban nomenclature—should be combined with high-frequency public transport access points within 400 metres of major residential clusters—400 metres being the maximum walking distance that is seen as acceptable to most people;

- subdivision and street design should be as flexible and permeable, or ‘connective’ as possible. Connectivity suggests ease of movement across the system, a variety of routes and maximum directness of access to any given point—ie a grid-like network of alternative choices, rather than feeder roads branching into culs-de-sac and lollipops, the hallmarks of recent Australian suburban subdivision patterns;

- residential planning should strive to make public transport feasible by achieving threshold population densities and networks configured to serve the largest number of people.

Planning for pedestrians

The designing of streets that can be shared by pedestrians and cars can take many forms. Occasionally, full closure to traffic may be the most appropriate answer. Well-designed urban malls can lead to increase in pedestrian activity: this has been demonstrated many times, here in Australia and all over the world. But frequently ‘traffic calming’, the designing of streets to be shared by pedestrians and cars, is more appropriate, particularly since pedestrian malls can be abandoned and feel unsafe at night. This will require careful street layout and paving, and clear signals to motorists that they are entering an area of pedestrian-vehicular share-ways.

Flexibility, variety and robustness

It is particularly important that new places are open and permeable, flexible in the way that they can be used today, and easily adaptable over time, that is robust in their ability to cope with future change. These ideas can be clearly illustrated by comparing street layouts based on cul-de-sac and road hierarchy principles—the way most new subdivisions have been designed for the last
thirty years—with older and more traditional grid forms of street layout. The English word for cul-de-sac is less euphemistic and more truthful: dead-end street. Ironically, the cul-de-sac is often marketed as a pedestrian-friendly, privacy-enhancing feature, while it actually can serve to cement car-dependency in the overall network, due to the inefficient traffic patterns it generates.

Today’s suburban streets are typically designed to collect vehicles from culs-de-sac and meandering loops on to collector roads, channel them onto distributor roads and on to distant urban centres and shopping malls on choking arterial roads. This system often offers very few alternative local routes to motorists, resulting in congested bottlenecks when the system is heavily used. The design also makes walking very difficult since to move from one cul-de-sac to another requires journeys many times as long as would be the direct line joining the two points. In such circumstances people will tend to use cars. This car-based development system has been expanding the sheer size of many cities at an alarming rate.

The low density that is typically associated with this layout also makes it difficult for local shops to have sufficient population within walking distance of houses, with the result that the shops cluster on road intersections or on major roads and then need to be reached by car. The lack of incentive to walk reduces street life, and the lack of street life and local shops providing surveillance of street activity make the areas more anonymous and dangerous. Most troubling is that these forms of subdivision are virtually impossible to change.

By contrast, the grid layout offers multiple local alternatives to drivers, provides many alternative short routes for pedestrians, encourages walking, is flexible in land use and adaptable to the kind of changes that all healthy cities continuously undergo over time.

The principle of open access can also be illustrated by comparing the semi-private spaces of shopping malls with the traditional shopping streets of small towns. Private shopping malls are closed at key times and carefully managed and controlled by their commercial managers while shopping streets are open to anyone at any time, and more accessible by foot or public transit. They also provide space for a much wider range of businesses, including ethnic or marginal enterprises. New urban design initiatives thus have two targets: (a) the revitalisation of older shopping areas through access improvements, spatial reorganisation and deliberate

area management; and (b) the re-integration of the ‘isle-in-a-see-of-parking’ style regional mall as a new town centre through backfilling with commercial offices, housing, community services and structured parking.

Safety and security

Designing streets for pedestrians also means more activity on the street which, in turn, improves safety and security. Personal safety, especially security against crimes of violence in public places, is a complex issue involving social, policing and environmental factors. Urban design can encourage safer environments by improving the location of activities and access to them by such means as the location of bus stops, by encouraging street activity and surveillance from modest car traffic shoppers, traders and residents, and by lighting. It also has an important role to play in reducing the perception of danger in public places since perceptions can significantly influence behaviour which, in its turn, tends to influence the level of safety, security and comfort offered. Privatised malls and plazas,introverted atria and walled-off residential areas are anathema to good urban design and healthy cities.

Planning for the needs of special groups

Many groups, women, the aged, children, low income communities, have their own special needs. Effective urban design for such groups needs an excellent understanding of these needs. Urban design can in addition make an important contribution to the solving of their particular problems. One submission, for example, received the by Task Force, related to the needs of children and children’s play. It noted that an urban charter for children had been proposed at a recent international conference.

Linking urban design to broader issues

Ecologically sustainable design

Cities are powerful assets in the life of nations, but in a sense, they are also their greatest liabilities: they are energy-guzzling waste machines. Because of the mounting pressures on the carrying capacity of the earth, cities around the world are seeking to re-structure their performance to reduce energy use, solid and liquid
waste discharges, environmental toxicity and the consumption of finite resources. Good urban design is essential to creating settlements that minimise environmental damage through good management of development densities, location decisions, mobility planning, area and site design, solar orientation and microclimatic aspects, surface water capture, filtration and recycling, and the protection and building of green networks: forests, grasslands, dunes, wetlands and rivers and lakes as supportive living places for flora and fauna. Some States, such as New South Wales, are considering the adoption of ‘ecologically sustainable design’ (ESD) principles for their policies and programs, and occasionally, suburban development is being touted as ‘greener’. However, on the whole, we are still far from managing urban design and development in environmentally sound ways. Despite overwhelming evidence of the beneficial effects on social equity and the national economy, Australia’s under-informed and fragmented decision-making apparatus impedes progress in this area.

Cultural development

Urban design world-wide is beginning to be seen as integral to a post-industrial mode of wealth-creation: cultural development. This idea of harnessing environmental and cultural assets on an urban and regional scale is being embraced by an increasing number of cities and lies squarely within the domain of urban design strategies. Here educational, environmental, event staging and urban design strategies coincide. In Australia, the cities of Adelaide, Fremantle, Hobart, Melbourne and Sydney have all in their own ways employed successful forms of cultural development, although not all have produced coherent and explicit strategies.

The Community, Environment, Arts and Design (CEAD) program of the Australia Council for the Arts is one Commonwealth initiative that aims at stimulating cultural development at a small, community scale. The lessons drawn from this worthwhile inter-disciplinary initiative can apply to all Australian communities. The Arts and Arts Programs can also make an important contribution to the quality of public spaces as the submission made by the WA Department for Arts to the Task Force has effectively demonstrated. A strong Arts and Urban Design partnership is one of the most powerful means of generating exciting urban places.

Regional development

Good urban design achieves a carefully optimised configuration of urban investment in the physical environment. As stressed before, the Australian Urban and Regional Development Review currently being conducted for the Hon Brian Howe, Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Housing and Regional Development, identifies both constraints and opportunities in the way Australian cities change and function in their economic performance. Good urban design will be closely associated with the objectives of sound urban and regional development — and much of the discussion about how to do that is centred on the question of infrastructure investment.

The best examples of sound regional development initiatives are by necessity also endeavours of high urban design ambition — the building of efficient and beautiful environments, innovations in multi-use development and cross government efforts to bring about regional environmental change. In New South Wales, the cities of Newcastle and Wollongong provide examples of how to move in the right direction. In Germany, the IBA Emscher Park effort provides a powerful example of a regional institutional innovation that is successfully geared towards design and environmental improvement on a regional scale. No new regional governance structures are involved in this project. A small networking, management and planning institution acts to coordinate and backstop efforts by a myriad of community groups, local and state agencies, as well as private enterprise, to transform one of Europe’s most polluted late-industrial area, in the heart of the Ruhr zone.
4 Improving Organisation and Processes for Urban Design

The role of government

All levels of government have a role to play in ensuring that Australia applies the necessary care in the design of her regions, cities, towns and rural communities. A range of tools is available to government to improve the design of urban areas. It can:

- provide targeted rules, regulations and legislative controls;
- lead through exemplary management of its own facilities and lands;
- provide incentives for good and disincentives for bad design;
- foster awareness through research, teaching, publications and other information.

These tools for the control of design quality can be used to produce good or mitigate against bad design and they can be applied at the onset, during and towards the end of the planning and design processes. The enlightened use of these tools and the quality of the work achieved varies greatly across Australia. Crucial to success is the availability of an appropriate range of skills and the effective deployment of those skills. This in its turn requires suitable government structures and arrangements.

These useful tools have been explored and tested by the MIT Professors John De Monchaux and Mark Schuster, in their work for the US Mayors’ Conference on city design. They are also well suited to the Australian environment. However, we find that in our context they need to be amended or made more explicit by two other sets of tools. Governments need to

- provide the strategic planning frameworks within which high quality environments can be developed;
- restructure their administrative apparatuses for quality-oriented decision-making, and both deepen and broaden their knowledge base.

The planning and management of a city and its public domain areas are the
responsibility of governments and public agencies, and, indeed, much can be done by governments to influence the quality of design. However, there are bewildering stumbling blocks to doing better before these tools can efficiently be applied. The sheer number of government agencies involved in managing an area, their variegated forms of organisation, procedures, policies and regulations, their greatly differing resources and skills, and the nature of their mutual relations all impact on the design of a city and the quality of its public domain.

The responsibilities which directly affect urban design include

**Strategic planning:** transport, land use, environment;

**Services:** electricity, water;

**Public works:** infrastructure, building, landscape;

**Regulation and control:** subdivision, development, traffic, heritage, environment, health, occupancy, activities.

Decisions relating to these responsibilities are the result of organisational consultations and actions. The degree to which such activities are uncoordinated or co-operative, or of poor or of high quality impacts significantly on the final urban design result.

The essential organisation structures of government have remained largely intact in their traditional form, despite the introduction of various reforms. The structures reflect individual programs rather than an integrated approach, performing functions which have been added over time as needs emerged. Areas of responsibility have become identified with particular skills, and these in turn with specialised professions.

Yet cities and their public spaces require attention to the linkages between functions, comprehensive design, integrated implementation and continuing management. Successful design strategies are not only predicated on the contribution of a number of disciplines but genuinely multi-disciplined work. A ‘task force’ approach to multi-disciplined work has at times been used effectively, particularly at the conceptual stage. Similarly it is possible to ensure co-ordination of approaches and activities of different groups of professional expertise by requiring their formal agreement to a proposal before a final decision is made by senior management, the Council or a Minister. More fundamental reforms may be needed if there is to be a more creative integration of efforts and skills sustained over time.

The form of governmental organisation by itself cannot guarantee good urban design, but certain organisational arrangements do make it easier to achieve. Organisational structures which achieve clear responsibility and accountability for the management of cities and towns and their public realm areas offer more opportunities for improved urban design.

In complex arenas of urban change, governments have a fundamental responsibility to find solutions which manifest the public good. The nature of the public good is a matter for debate: government's role is to structure that debate.

The creation of organisations which can accept greater responsibility and accountability for the management of cities and towns and for the quality of the public environment, also requires the prudent application of certain micro-economic reforms, not unlike those applied to many other Australian organisations.

**Organisational impediments to change**

The traditional structures of State and Local Governments have made it difficult to allocate clear responsibility and accountability for the management of places such as cities, towns and the public realm—that is, spatial management. State Government Departments divide along functional grounds, such as planning, transport, environment, health and Local Government. Similarly, Local Councils consist of separate divisions of engineers, health and building surveyors, town planners and clerks. The result of this fragmentation can be seen at both micro and macro levels.

Within State Governments no one agency can be given responsibility for the management of a city or a town. There may be co-ordination to varying extents but there is no clear responsibility and accountability for the outcomes. The same applies to responsibility for the different parts of the public environment, with the exception of those domains, such as National Parks, where single agencies have virtually been given all the powers of the State and Local Government.

The way in which Local Government is organised means that everyone, and therefore no one, is responsible for the overall quality of the public environment.
Roads and drains are the responsibility of the engineers; planners are responsible for urban structure and for some detailed design; building surveyors for yet other design aspects; recreation staff looks after parks; and various by-laws regulate urban activities.

There is rarely a comprehensive analysis of, or vision for the public domain. Overall environmental quality and the quality of public spaces are no one's responsibility and if any one player sought responsibility, others would object to their power being usurped. Clear responsibility and accountability for the management of cities and towns, and of their public realms, requires spatial accountability, management and outcome oriented organisational structures. Government responsibility and accountability for the management of cities, towns and the public realm should be reflected in their organisational structure, with explicit emphasis on spatial management for quality outcomes.

Organisational reform

The fundamental tension in organisations that deal with urban development is that between the necessary achievement of individual urban products—such as number and types of houses or lengths of road—and the achievement of integrated development which reflects concern for how these products are put together as good urban design. Most organisations are structured around individual urban products, not to achieve good urban design.

The search for quality products must be conducted in the context of current moves towards (a) the creation of outcome-focused government departments and the reform of several provider organisations into business enterprises, and (b) the multi-skilling of agencies.

Funder/provider split

The application of micro-economic reform to public works organisations would see one becoming responsible for funding and another for providing. This ‘funder/provider split’ would make organisations accountable for producing quality outcomes.

As example, for road authorities, a funder/provider split would mean the division of responsibility between the funding and the construction of roads. Ideally, the funding should be available for increased overall accessibility or greater proximity, rather than for increased road capacity or even increased public transport. Given that activities can be made accessible to each other when they are placed adjacent to one another, or linked by efficient means of transport, the funding body would be interested in proposals which most effectively increased proximity or accessibility. These might involve land use or transport solutions or a combination of both: indeed, such a funder organisation can become an effective land use and transport planning body.

Some States have made changes in the direction of a funder/provider split, especially in the areas of water services and public housing. These are fundamental changes which signal the move towards a new structure of government, but in turn are dependent on other supporting actions described later.

Multi-skilling

The second essential reform is the employment of staff with a range of relevant skills in combination with the introduction of flatter organisation structures. This requires the abolition of existing legal and cultural barriers to such changes. It is often overlooked that it is skilled individuals who make the key contribution to a design, not professions, and that not all individuals in a profession can make an equal contribution. Complex problems such as those of urban design require a contribution from a number of capable individuals and require careful team building, mutual respect and the development of shared values. The development of urban design as a discipline does not replace the need for this multi-disciplinary action: it demands it.

For Local Government most States have reformed legislation to remove these impediments to change and have amalgamated the specialist awards. Increasingly, it can be expected that the professionally based divisions will be replaced by funder or outcome based responsibilities, with business units within the council, competing to provide services to the former. It should follow that the range of skills and experience available to Local Government will be rapidly expanded. Under such structures it will be possible to allocate clear management responsibility for defined areas of the public environment and to provide managers with the skills, resources and controls to achieve a quality result.
While State Governments have taken this approach in reforming Local Government, they have not paid the same attention to multi-skilling in their own institutions. For example, the traditional organisational distinctions, and the associated skills divisions between planning, transport, heritage and environmental policy linger on. In the past, these distinctions have led to separate legislation and legislative processes where design becomes a question of satisfying a series of incremental approval steps, and the prospect of an integrated approach is further clouded. With the exception of South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, little has been done to amalgamate the separate parcels of legislation. While some of the legal and award barriers have been reduced, formidable cultural, organisational and industrial barriers remain. In looking for tangible staffing benchmarks, promising forms of institutional reform will recognise that high degrees of professional specialisations should be found primarily in provider, not funder organisations.

As a caveat, increased calls for flatter management structures and reduced core services without redefinition of corporate missions can lead to the counterproductive empowerment of individual sections within an organisation. Ironically, simple decentralisation and outsourcing measures can result in decreased effectiveness and efficiency in achieving whole outcomes, by sharpening demarcations within organisations and providing fewer incentives for integration across sectional boundaries, further reducing opportunities for pursuing good urban design.

Objectives and outcomes

All these reforms can do is to provide a better environment in which good urban design can take place: the success of organisations in achieving good urban design is not predicated merely on their structure, a funder/provider split or in multi-skilling in itself. Corporate agreement to improved urban design outcomes also depends on explicit urban design objectives, on the culture of the organisation and on leadership.

Corporate commitment to improved urban design outcomes must be carried through from the articulation of spatial objectives and the commitment of programs and resources, to consultation and design, to decision making and construction and subsequently to on-going management, to continually enhance the achieved outcome. Explicit and publicly available urban design objectives and outcomes, such as the quality of the public realm should be adopted by each Local Government.

Multiple level consent authorities

Agreement on local urban design objectives and outcomes is not only a matter internal to an organisation, it also involves the community, other spheres of government and the private sector. Urban design objectives and outcomes for an area in the inner suburbs of any of our major cities, can involve a number of consent authorities at the State and Local Government level and may include the Federal Government. The successful achievement of these objectives in part depends on an integration or a rationalisation of the consent powers of these authorities. The objectives should include integrated decision-making. From the start of each significant development initiative the relevant authorities should establish the means by which this will occur.

A number of different models are available and have been adopted by different communities. They vary from administrative agreements, such as those for the Inner North East Brisbane Urban Renewal Task Force, to the various State and Local Government partnerships in South Australia, to statutory authorities with representatives of the relevant local authorities, such as the East Perth Redevelopment Authority.

Enabling and regulating systems

Controls on development have evolved over time as communities became concerned that the development on one site unreasonably impacted on a neighbouring site, or the area, or the environment. As the scale of development grew the means of control proliferated. In some cases additional controls were layered onto existing categories, while in others new categories were introduced. The result is a wide range of controls under different legislation, and in many cases this has resulted in the requirement to submit separate applications, seeking separate approvals that are subject to separate appeal systems.

The control of development in most Australian cities consists of:

- the zoning and development approval system under planning legislation which designates land for different forms of development and use;
• the subdivision system under one or more subdivision acts;
• the sale of land under land title systems;
• the siting of buildings and associated structures under planning, building, environmental or other legislation;
• uniform building regulations under building control acts; and
• historic area and building controls under heritage and planning legislation.

While indispensable in the absence of more advanced means, this regulatory system can perform in inflexible ways, adding to the cost of development. It can also impose penalties and restrictions on certain types of development and on good urban design.

Conditions which are generated by one category of control have unexpected and unacceptable impacts on other aspects of a development. Conditions which were introduced when the development industry was less sophisticated, for example subdivision conditions, now can prevent beneficial forms of development.

There are two aspects to this challenge. Firstly, the initial conditions for one category of control were prepared by specialists of that category without an understanding of the possible impacts on other categories. Secondly, subsequent conditions have been added over time usually for administrative ease or to counter a single emerging problem.

There have recently been some important moves to create more flexible and adaptive controls. These include:
• consolidation of all subdivision legislation into a single flexible act which allows different combinations of development (conventional, strata, cluster) on the same site, under the same legislation and which allows flexible forms of staged development; a model of this is the Victorian Subdivision Act;
• opportunity for sale of land or units ahead of development to reduce penalties on combined land and building development through better cash-flow;
• flexible siting controls to permit building to boundaries, with minimal set backs;
• flexible zoning for mixed use development;
• use of 'guideline documents' with statutory force to encourage development in

accordance with principles of public transport planning, shopping provision, walking distances, appropriate densities, flexible and permeable street layout.

Innovative means of control are frequently explored and supported by the use of well-structured workshops, to bring together developers, representatives of Local and State Authorities, professional consultants and community representatives under the leadership of designers to produce a detailed design, and increased awareness of issues across interest groups.

Changes in legislation and regulation of this kind are to be commended. However, rather than pursuing piecemeal change, the numerous control systems should be redesigned from first principles. There are only a limited number of cases where a review of all controls and their conditions has taken an holistic approach, questioned the need for the controls and or the conditions, introduced new integrated controls and conditions and made them available in a single document.

Yet from the point of view of the resident, the community or the developer, an action for conservation or change is not a segregated one. Conditions applying to an area of land, whether it is a single block, a new tract or a redevelopment area, are conditions that must be taken into account regardless of their category and there is no observable benefit in segregating them under different control categories. Also, by bringing controls and conditions together, the conflicts or contradictions between different conditions become obvious and demand resolution.

The integration and redesign of controls is prerequisite to integrated urban design. The principles which should inform a redesign of controls for a particular area are:
• the key aim should be to achieve an integrated development;
• controls should facilitate, not inhibit good design;
• controls should be particularly explicit with respect to those conditions that determine the quality of the public domain;
• controls should facilitate estate development where the urban design is the paramount matter to be considered, rather than the subdivision of land;
• controls should facilitate a system which permits a single approval, a single appeal and published in a single document, not separated into different functional documents, such as planning, heritage, environment.
In addition to controls that relate to the form and quality of the ultimate development, important controls on staging and title have an impact on the result.

The principles which should be applied to a redesign of these controls are:

- sequential approvals should be facilitated to permit all parties to deal progressively with and determine the essential elements of the overall design while permitting the necessary approvals to ensure security;
- a single land information system and a comprehensive single title system regardless of the form of development, avoiding the need for common property where it is not an essential attribute of the design.

State Governments should examine the potential benefit of amalgamating all legislation that exerts control over development and the use of land into a single Act dealing with approvals and orders. These Acts should be framed to encourage integrated urban design approaches at a local level. On the other hand, a single nation wide code embracing all urban design conditions is not desirable: it would be anathema to objectives of good local urban design in a country as diverse and varied as Australia.

For an explanation of the Federal Government's role in urban design, see Appendix C.

The development industry

The form and quality of Australia's urban environments, and the range of available choice, is significantly affected by the structure, traditions and skills of the development and building industries. The focus of this section is primarily on the residential sector.

The pattern of new residential development at the urban edge has typically been (a) speculative investment in land at the edge of urban areas, ahead of development; (b) land subdivision by the original owner, speculator or land developer, following rezoning for urban development; (c) sale of allotments to individual owners; and (d) house or other building construction contracted by the owner. The distinguishing characteristic of this pattern of development is the separation of the land subdivision and development process from the building process. The way the building industry is organised reflects this development pattern. Large firms form a small proportion of all builders. Small builders who have not traditionally invested in design and who construct a few houses a year predominate.

The system has had some benefits. It has been the means by which young households could put down a small deposit on a piece of land, progressively pay off the land and then use the equity in the land to raise a mortgage to build a house. Its many disadvantages include the segregation of land and building development, and poorly planned residential areas which do not provide good general accessibility, either by integrating public transport or by creating close mixed use neighbourhoods.

A new challenge is to bring about residential development based on accessibility, safety and amenity. This may well need a move to larger land and housing developments and investments in design earlier in the development process. At the same time it is important that the new forms of residential development can be carried out within the present industry structure. This will require much more detailed planning by developers and design before land subdivisions are approved, a situation which is more common in parts of Europe and North America, and which is characteristic of the work of Delfin Property Group, Robina Land Corporation, the Defence Housing Authority and a small number of other developers. The Victorian Urban Land Authority has done useful work with small building firms in achieving better design outcomes.

A further issue is the ownership of land in growth paths of urban areas. In some European cities it is normal for public authorities to acquire land for urban development at the edge of the city. The first significant benefit is the retention by the State of the increases in land value brought about by rezoning. This increment can then be used by the State for physical and social infrastructure. The second benefit is the opportunity offered to the planning bodies to carry out more effective, co-ordinated planning for the area. The third benefit is greater influence over land prices.

The development industry needs to recognise the added value and the economic staying power given to any project or structure by excellent design. It should be an accepted principle that each new development not only has to meet its internal requirements but also must make an active contribution to the public domain. This is significantly the responsibility of the public authority but equally a responsibility of owners and developers and needs promotion as such.
Education

The quality of urban design has an impact on all Australians. It is important that as a nation we share a language about quality, and engage in open and informed discourse about the nature of our cities and towns. Civic organisations, including environmental, heritage and conservation groups, professional organisations, public agencies and universities play an important part in fostering awareness and exchange, but much is to be done to bring design onto Australia’s mass media agenda - and maintain it there. Concerted action of government, professions, educational institutions and industry are needed to encourage our media and to build better public awareness.

But urban form is not in the hands of ordinary citizens, at least not directly. It rests in the hands of developers, elected officials, administrators and - especially - of technical experts, from a wide and variegated range of backgrounds. Two of the most exposed and sharply divided groups are Australia’s architects and planners, and here we face a great challenge of awareness-building and education.

During the Modern Movement, the planning field has become defined as distinct from architecture and design, while architectural education moved further and further towards a preoccupation with context-free building form, the refinement of private space and the sculptural abstraction of an increasingly meaningless public realm.

While the Modern Movement has become largely discredited as main source of inspiration in design, the complexity and unpredictability of urban development processes have become too evident to be ignored any longer. Planners withdrew from spatial, three-dimensional concepts to nurture reflective studies in social geography, formulate public policy in the housing, environment or economic development arenas, or focused on land use, infrastructure and statutory planning skills. The two professional groupings drifted even further apart, leaving the area of urban design largely abandoned: a desert criss-crossed by a number of other highly specialised professions, such as landscape designers, traffic and environmental engineers.

Today, there is an emerging interest to reconnect. The education of designers has an opportunity to be rebuilt. Urban design programs are being reintroduced, as many architecture and planning schools seek to develop broader design skills and bodies of knowledge. The current consensus is to strengthen and formalise cores of urban-design research and educational activities, to inform and benefit the entire range of professions that are engaged in the guidance and maintenance of the physical urban realm. This will require the construction of a body of knowledge in urban design, and the fundamental restructuring of most curricula engaged in the production of professionals across the environmental spectrum.

Education and the organisation of the design professions

As previously described in this report, the way in which organisation structures have separated the design professions has detracted from their ability to deal holistically with urban design problems.

Urban design, not as another discipline but an overarching concern, offers a basis for integrating the work of related professions. As a focus for professional development and training programs, it provides opportunities for planners, architects, landscape architects, surveyors, engineers and designers to bridge the gap that has been created particularly between planning and design. The complexity and pace of twentieth century urban development has put urban design beyond the province of any single profession—urban design is more than ‘big architecture’ or ‘small planning’ or ‘soft engineering’. Urban design components in the continuing education courses of all professional endeavours involved can help rectify this situation.

Education for urban design

Currently, most educational establishments reinforce this disciplinary fragmentation by nurturing neatly defined bodies of knowledge, creating separate courses and qualifications and then joining the push for professional recognition. The educational challenge in urban design terms is to foster connections between professions, and endow them with vision and innovative institutional skills.

Good education in urban design is not only about producing urban designers. Urban design needs to be part of the education of architects, landscape architects, planners, surveyors, engineers and real estate and property managers. These professions may not become experts in urban design or be encouraged to believe they are. They
must, however, begin to understand urban development, its principles, its benefits, its vocabulary and most importantly its processes, so that they know when specialist knowledge is required.

In addition to the broadly based urban design education appropriate to undergraduate teaching of existing professions, there needs to be specialist graduate education in urban design for those individuals with interest and aptitudes from all these disciplines. Programs are needed to incorporate multi-disciplinary problem solving at an advanced level, and knowledge of urban theory, administration culture and history. Isolated learning environments will only perpetuate existing problems and are not encouraged.

Urban design training should include land economics and development finance – to ensure that urban designers have a thorough understanding of the basis on which commercial or financial decisions are made – and should include the relationship between land use and transport – to prevent a designer from supporting narrowly conceived transport plans, and to encourage imaginative solutions, combining transport proposals with urban form concepts.

The Federal Government should ensure that training in urban design becomes part of all programs in architecture, landscape architecture, planning, engineering and surveying, drafting, and real estate development and property management.

It should ensure that tertiary institutions and professional institutes provide opportunities for urban design training for practitioners.

The Federal Government should encourage cross-disciplinary urban design initiatives through its urban funding and ‘Australia Prize’ initiatives, which are described later.

Research

Urban design requires a body of knowledge. This requires research into organisational, institutional and process barriers, the refinement of codes, participatory processes, the development of high levels of creative problem solving in urban design, the evaluation of urban design products, and research into what all Australians value in and want of their cities and regions—their aspirations and expectations.

To advance the quality of urban areas it is imperative to reflect on the decisions that were made about settlements and to see how the ideas employed and processes used have actually worked. Such research is expected in business and science, but the protracted time scales of urban development and the messy quality of the processes make evaluations of this type complex.

Similarly, communities harbour many assumptions and fears about urban change. Establishing a research dialogue with communities about urban design will help create opportunities to address these fears and the incorrect assumptions that characterise current debate about the future of our cities and regions. This requires a mixture of research techniques, often over extended periods of time.

A national Urban Design Research Network

Proposed is a national Urban Design Research Network, with a focus on design applications and outcomes, rather than planning or social studies. It may be associated with other urban research entities, such as the Australian Research Council’s “Centres of Excellence” or the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), but must maintain its own identity. Its charter should be the development of knowledge about urban design and the promulgation of that knowledge across the whole Australian community.

It should be developed as a resource network for urban design, promoting local and international best practice to both regions and city centres and to all levels of government. Its work should be at undergraduate, graduate and practice levels, including research and advanced practice degrees for all involved professions, including Local Government decision makers. Such a network should see its domain as nation wide with a longer term goal of serving the Asia/Pacific region.

Better integration of urban design research activity into the higher education structure must be associated with measures designed to see its activities valued and regarded as important, when compared with the more traditional areas of knowledge. Because research is considered a major indicator of quality in higher education, acceptance of the validity of urban design research by such institutions as the Australian Research Council is central to gaining respect for urban design as an advanced activity across disciplines in tertiary institutions.
Enhanced tools for urban design

Government essentially faces two tasks in producing and implementing urban design programs. With the assistance and support of the community, Government needs to provide principled visions or desirable outcomes, and the programs that can realise them.

Articulating and achieving visions

Increasingly, effective planning organisations are interested in outcomes, rather than the passive pursuit of process administration. These organisations seek comprehensively to define the desired future character of a place, based on firm and public objectives.

Outcome-oriented organisations will involve communities, to ensure that public objectives and acceptance and support for the implementation of the vision is achieved over the long haul. There are a range of techniques which enable (a) the setting of benchmarks or performance standards to help guide the shaping of a vision; and (b) the involvement of communities in a more productive manner than the usual process of distributing a draft plan for comment.

Setting benchmarks

Two examples from the United States illustrate possible State or national urban form policies. The State policy document 'Oregon Benchmarks' outlines policies and achievement indicators for a wide range of quality of life factors. It contains an urban design strategy for structuring urban environments into more localised, walkable and transit-based mixed use communities. Key benchmarks set tangible targets for livability, mobility, community design, transportation and access, and public safety.

Such benchmarks aim at a high-quality, mixed use and walkable urban environment based on strategies for action which are supported by priority State budgeting. These strategies often involve multiple agency co-operation.

The California Local Government Commission prepared and adopted the 'Ahwahnee Principles' documented in Strategies For Livable Communities (California Local Government Commission, 1992). These principles focus on the need to change to a more sustainable urban form with a higher quality urban structure at both the regional and community scale, and on the need for Local Government to review its existing planning controls and develop more creative development control tools.

At the national level a document entitled Vision/Reality: Strategies for Community Change was produced in 1994 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, together with the American Institute of Architects. This document promotes the need for partnership between all levels of government, and business and community interests.

In Australia there have been several efforts to define national goals for urban environments, including the eleven National Objectives produced by the Council of Australian Governments in 1994. A similar set of objectives with more explicit reference to urban form and design as a basis for national regulatory reform, is being prepared for the Planning Minister's conference.

At a national level, the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development and the National Greenhouse Response Strategy have set out a range of objectives and actions. A further stage of that work will explore principles relating to urban form.

The Australian Urban and Regional Development Review

This Review provides a clear and present opportunity to focus on this translation. The four key components relating to urban transport, the environment, livability and costs of urban sprawl all point towards the opportunities for significant change in the way Australian cities and towns are structured, function and look. It is vitally important that the physical form implications of the Review's proposed recommendations are addressed.

Design workshops

Governments and advocacy groups seek ways in which community groups, other interest groups, professionals, bureaucrats and political leaders can be brought together in goal-setting, envisioning, design and problem-solving processes. Design workshops can demonstrate the process and value of 'inquiry by design' and are characterised by presentation of design principles, practice and the experience of working in mixed profession groups. While most frequently used for training
purposes, this form of workshop is also particularly valuable as a non-adversarial way of generating ideas and options, of de-mystifying the design process, and of providing the opportunity for discussion and debate on the philosophical shifts needed for a good quality public realm.

Similarly, 'charrettes' are design-based alternatives to the conventional planning process, focused around an intensive, publicly-interactive program involving a team of urban designers and appropriate technical support working closely with all key participants. Charrettes are suited to large and complex infill or re-development sites. Not only can they produce well-resolved, design-based planning outcomes. They are also fast and economic, allow more effective public participation, and can generate understanding and consensus.

Urban design advisory or review panels
Panels of people with relevant urban design experience can be established by development regulators such as local or State Government, to provide directions to and advice on development applications and proposals.

Urban design competitions
It is essential that competitions be more commonly used throughout Australia. Experience from Europe and other parts of the world demonstrates that competitions not only generate economic benefits that far outweigh the relatively minor costs, but also provide other benefits, such as design innovation, professional education and public awareness, as well as the nurturing of young and promising creative talent. (See Appendix D for more information.)

Urban design awards
Award programs for urban design proposals and completed developments can generate both rigorous assessment of projects and publicity for good outcomes. The national 'Walter Burley Griffin Award' for architects, the 'Design For Living' award in Victoria and the City of Caulfield Medium Density Housing Award are three examples.

Voluntary bodies and associations
The quality of urban areas is unlikely to improve greatly unless there is active interest and involvement from citizens. Especially important are the voluntary associations and bodies, operating independently of governments, which take up issues, comment on development proposals and generally act as environmental watchdogs. Australia has a proud record of voluntary associations. They have played very influential roles in changing public and media opinion and government policy - witness bodies such as the National Trusts, the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Wilderness Society.

There is an evident need in Australia for bodies concerned with the quality of urban design, such as the early South Australia Civic Trust, or the UK Civic Trust. The Commonwealth could provide important support for associations of this kind by providing grants to local amenity groups as it does for environmental bodies.

Statutory bodies and governmental programs
Statutory bodies with mandates to review the design quality of major development proposals can have an important influence on the design quality of urban environments. In other countries, the UK for example, bodies of this kind have been established with independent responsibility to comment on proposals, to recommend the call in of applications for ministerial decision and to report to Parliament.

National programs have also been initiated overseas to document areas in municipalities in need of urban design or conservation attention. The Municipal Atlas program in Denmark is one such example.

Implementing visions through development applications
A crucial element in the implementation of an urban design vision is the consistent application of development control rules. These rules can be quite rigid or they can be expressed in general terms, seeking merely to achieve conformity with certain performance measures. An outcome-focused organisation will draft the rules to suit the desired outcome for the particular place.

However the rules are expressed, there are likely to be pressures on the consent bodies. The rules in codes and the interpretation of them over time establish the
values of properties. There will always be pressures to bend the rules in the particular case in order to add perceived value. Good urban design needs consistency in the application of rules to ensure that the system is respected and the long term design objectives are achieved.

At the same time there is a need for flexibility to fit new development into existing environments and to encourage the use of good designers. Rigid rules make it difficult to reward excellence and innovation. The advantage of moving to outcome focused organisations is that they should be better able to select the right set of rules for the particular place.

Codes

Development control codes should be directed at achieving outcomes. They should:

- clearly state the outcomes to be achieved: they should be area-specific and articulate the desired character;
- respond to local characteristics of climate, environment, topography and lifestyle;
- set out the extent of discretion to be exercised;
- be formulated with a mixture of quantitative and prescriptive, and qualitative and performance requirements.

The achievement of urban design objectives depends on the careful management of development in both the private and public realm. For development guidance and control there are a wide range of urban design techniques available for use by regulators and educators. These include:

- Urban design strategies: usually produced for an existing local area such as a town or regional centre, and comprising plans and reports covering key issues and aims, precinct objectives, design opportunities and constraints, proposals for action in relation to public realm improvements, design regulation of new development, upgrading of existing buildings, and associated management and funding responsibilities. Strategies should link expenditure and regulation. Townscape improvement strategies and Main Street revitalisation programs are typical examples.

- Urban design briefs: written and illustrated documents specifying urban design requirements for a future development site or precinct, covering connections and linkages, building massing and street frontage detailing, distribution of uses, landscape and open space requirements. These have been used in the City of Melbourne.

- Urban design codes: produced at Federal, State or Local Government level, are performance-based, and applying to both new and existing urban areas. Well known Australian codes include the national AMCORD and Victoria’s VicCode.

- Prescriptive codes, defining outcomes in terms of a particular approach, are also found particularly in some heritage precincts. The UK Essex Design Guide is probably the best known. They consist of a series of charts designating urban structure in streets, blocks and building types, and regulations defining built form, architectural detailing, parking, site configurations, street layout and landscaping. Performance-based codes provide greater flexibility for developers but require higher skills and understanding amongst designers and regulators. Prescriptive coding is easier to administer and is ideally suited to major developments being built by a single developer.

- Urban design guidelines: written principles and graphic illustrations outlining desirable urban form for a particular area and/or topic. They are usually less location specific than briefs, and broader and less formally linked to the regulatory development control process than codes.

Review of planning controls

Most current statutory frameworks at State level have the capacity to incorporate far more urban design-supportive policies, objectives and controls than presently exist. Statutory planning mechanisms in Australia are based on land use segregation and quantitative standards, with recent broadening of the scope of control. South Australia’s requirement for ‘Desired Future Character’ Statements for every zone provides a good opportunity to define specific urban form and urban design intentions. Victoria’s design-based codes or briefs can be incorporated into the planning scheme at a State, regional or local level. There is considerable scope for research into codes, into evaluating recent code innovations, such as AMCORD and VicCode, and into ways of transforming them into tools that can be locally
adapted. The evaluation should include the Commonwealth LARP and ILAP programs which deal with organisation and planning aspects of Local Government.

Inter-governmental relationships

Local Government bodies are multi-purpose governments responsible for defined areas. They are the level of government closest to people, and in most instances responsible for administering areas in detail. Recent reforms to the legislation and the employment practices of Local Government have equipped them to take a more outcome focused approach than was possible in the past. Local Government is therefore ideally suited to be responsible for the implementation of urban design.

Herein lie several challenges. The first is the very proximity of elected officers to the local electorate and concomitant individual and local community pressures. This can be a great strength when the tasks of preparing visions for the places in the council’s area are being undertaken. On the other hand local pressures can result in the weakening of urban design controls and the loss of the vision over time.

A second challenge is the occasional need to take account of regional and national interests. The local electorate may not be the only group with a legitimate interest in a vision for a particular area. Indeed, there can be great benefit in relating regional and even national concerns to local interests. The relative significance of these interests will vary with the scale and nature of particular projects and places.

Successful, outcome focused organisations seek practical organisational arrangements for working together across agencies, both horizontally and vertically. By working together there can be joint ownership of solutions rather than domination of one level by the other. There can be respect of divergent positions rather than the denigration of one level by another which so characterises many of the present arrangements.

Another challenge is related: the inherent logistic difficulty of coordination and collaboration of distinct organisational entities and their various briefs and cultures—horizontally as well as vertically, requiring advanced management, communication and personal motivational skills.

A key challenge is also the importance of clarifying the respective roles of elected officials and technical staff. In other words: strategic planning and rule setting should be more firmly separated from decisions on individual matters than is currently the practice at the Local Government level. If elected officials are not involved in individual decisions there will be greater pressure on them to clarify the actual intent and meaning of codes and other rules. Where the one group is defining the rules and then applying them in individual cases there is less need to be clear at the outset about what is desired as an outcome and to set down the rules to achieve that outcome. Moves to separate bodies making decisions from those determining the fate of individual applications can not only be made at local levels, but also at other levels of government.

Major redevelopment projects

With governments restructured to concentrate on outcomes, different means to achieve outcomes can be encouraged. This includes various means of managing the design of large urban developments. Where there are large sites with one long-term, single owner there is a greater possibility that the interests of the site owner and the public interests will coincide. The existing planning and control systems assume that the land is held by many individual owners which have to be coordinated. The administrative law based systems often have a rigidity which does not allow the realisation of advantages which can be obtained from a long-term developer operating under some form of development agreement.

A long-term developer is likely to be interested in adding value rather than trading in permits. It should be possible to give the landowner a greater say in the detailed outcomes, invoking enlightened self-interest. But frequently, enlightened self-interest – civic commitment – is too unreliable a base for achieving good outcomes, and especially empowered area development authorities are formed. There have been a number of such experiments in managing the planning and development of large development areas: Canberra, the Rocks, Sanctuary Cove, Yulara or Darling Harbour. These developments illustrate both the advantages and dangers in creating special development authorities. They deliver environments that are frequently criticised as being too sterile, exclusive, mono-functional, privatised or commercial. The challenge is to encourage greater commitment in development authorities. This can be done by defining performance criteria, by providing for public interest watch dog and community involvement.
Where there are large redevelopment areas with a number of land owners the challenge is to obtain a shared view of the outcomes and agreement on the staging of development.

The current Better Cities program includes major redevelopment projects at East Perth, Lynch's Bridge, Ultimo-Pymont, Honeysuckle and Fortitude Valley/New Farm and offers a significant opportunity to compare the methods and success of methods used.

The opportunity that the Adelaide-based Multifunction Polis offers is to develop much needed models for urban change, based on long-range visions. This opportunity must not be missed.

5 Recommendations

Immediate steps for the Commonwealth

By boldly speaking to a real need, the creation of a Prime Minister's Urban Design Task Force has touched a nerve in Australia. It has already supported urban design by its very existence. Now that the original group's task is complete, we advocate that immediate measures are taken to follow up this important initiative.

5.1 We urge the Prime Minister to discuss with the Premiers and Chief Ministers (a) ways in which legislative reform could be achieved; and (b) ways in which State and Local Government agencies could be restructured to build organisations that are accountable for, and capable of, the production of high quality urban design outcomes.

5.2 We recommend that a National Urban Design Review be carried in innovative ways, and across a number of institutions. It could be run with modest resources, might involve private sector funding, and should be focused on outcomes. See Appendix A.

5.3 We advocate that an Australia Prize in Urban Design be instituted, to reward best achievements and to build a national body of knowledge. It is described in Appendix B.

5.4 We recommend that the Prime Minister:

- entrust the responsibility for implementing the recommendations of this report to a portfolio Minister;
- takes action to influence the quality of the urban environment through the management of the Commonwealth's assets, lands and programs and through the greater use of urban design and building competitions for key sites under its jurisdiction;
- ensure that an existing body, such as the National Capital Planning Authority or a new agency, is available to give expert urban design advice and assistance for Commonwealth programs.
Recommendations for improving the quality of urban design in Australia

Improving Australian Cities

5.5 Central city areas require support to develop design-oriented strategy plans, bold policy instruments to temper the vagaries of the real property markets, quality minded civic leadership and enabling institutional settings.

It is recommended that the Commonwealth consider whether particular central areas are of national significance and if so support the preparation of urban design plans for these areas.

5.6 Many metropolitan regional centres and many regional cities require Local Government reform, better skills in development strategies, urban design strategies for community development and reduction in car use, and more sophisticated regional design approaches.

A number of regional areas in Australia, such as Cairns and the Cairns region and the Latrobe Valley, are experiencing change through co-operative associations of councils or amalgamation of councils. This offers opportunities for introducing reforms which can improve the quality of urban outcomes.

It is recommended that the Commonwealth encourage the capability for good urban design, particularly through assistance to Local Government for organisational reform and urban design training.

5.7 Rural towns need to recognise and respect their traditional developments. Careful design guidance is needed both in phases of growth and reduction in size of the settlement.

It is recommended that the well established programs of Main Street in New South Wales and Townscape in Victoria, which build on local design character and local pride, are further encouraged and that other States and communities introduce similar actions.

5.8 Many of Australia's existing outer residential suburbs need to be improved and their future development guided by innovative design and development concepts.

It is recommended that particular attention be given to the quality of suburban areas through improvements

- in the organisation of Local Government and relevant statutory authorities;
- in the range of available staff skills;
- in legislative systems;
- in the structure and dynamics of the building industry; and
- in the systems of title.

5.9 Coastal towns in particular are subject to considerable pressures for change.

It is recommended that Federal and State Government assistance to these coastal towns encourage organisational change and improved urban design outcomes.

Because of the extent of the pressures for growth and the complexity of councils and levels of government involved, it is recommended that special attention be paid to coastal development. Particularly required are:

- plans of settlement
- plans for conservation; and
- a positive program for the purchase by governments of development rights for particularly important coastal sites.

5.10 Aboriginal urban and remote settlements require a radically different approach from that currently pursued, to allow for genuine design responses to fundamental needs of kinship affirmation and health.

Because of the profound cultural links between an area, its people and its urban design, it is recommended that the Federal Government takes
particular care to involve Aboriginal communities in the fostering of culturally appropriate development which will result in benefits to health, environment and the quality of life.

Improving government and industry performance

5.11 Governments and their agencies have the major responsibility for achieving improved urban environments, especially with respect to the public domain. It is recommended that the role of all governments in achieving better design outcomes be broadened across the range of available measures. Governments should:

- provide urban design rules, regulations and legislative controls;
- lead through responsible management of their own facilities and lands;
- provide incentives for good design;
- foster awareness through research, teaching, publication and other information;
- provide the strategic planning frameworks within which high quality environments can be developed; and
- restructure and resource their administrations for quality-oriented decision making.

5.12 Government organisations need to be reformed and oriented more towards urban design outcomes, rather than the basic process and procedures of public administration.

Infrastructure provision typically involves the separate planning, design and construction of individual elements and sometimes the utilisation of conservative technologies.

It is recommended that, instead of being structured along traditional sectorial lines (roads, hydraulic services, housing, etc), infrastructure agencies be organised in accordance with the funder/provider principles outlined in this report and with funder organisations being mandated to achieve integrated urban design and development outcomes such as “proximity”, “access” or “shelter” rather than kilometres of roads or numbers of dwelling houses.

It is recommended that staff within government “funder” organisations be broadly educated and supplied with a range of skills that are relevant to achieving urban design outcomes.

It is recommended that where Federal and State Governments are of the view that they must maintain their sectoral structure, they introduce explicit urban design outcome requirements and mechanisms to ensure that an integrated approach and result is achieved.

5.13 The multitude of enabling and regulating systems, ie zoning, subdivision, building regulations, land title provisions and heritage controls, hamper the achievement of good urban design. Currently action has been taken by Federal, State and Local Governments in a number of programs, Local Approvals Review Program (LARP), National Building Code (NBC) etc but action needs to be accelerated and be more comprehensive.

It is recommended that enabling and regulating systems be reformed to achieve integration of provisions and processes. This might include:

- integrated approval processes which permit staged approvals
- integrated appeals systems
- single land information systems which incorporate urban design controls
- codes which directly address the achievement of desired future urban design objectives for specific areas
- single title systems
- flexible land use zones
- effective impact assessment.

It is recommended that the Federal Government review the range of urban design programs such as the Local Approvals Review Program (LARP), National Building Code (NBC), Integrated Local Area Planning program
5.14 A major problem in the fostering of good local urban design is the difficulty many people have in judging design. Major decision makers would welcome some training in the principles of good urban design.

It is recommended that opportunities for open learning processes for elected members and mid career courses for key staff on urban design be introduced.

It is recommended that initial approval bodies and appeal Courts consider whether urban design decisions could benefit from the assistance of advice from expert design panels.

5.15 The existing structure of the land development, building and finance industry is fragmented, and consists of a mixture of:

- a small number of firms which undertake comprehensive estate developments
- a large number of small firms which solely carry out land development and whose product is serviced blocks; and
- a larger number of small businesses and individuals who build houses on serviced blocks.

Some in the industry have been grappling with the means of achieving urban design outcomes in these circumstances, and have introduced comprehensive plans, sale conditions, covenants and development approval requirements, with significant market success.

It is recommended that all governments encourage this approach to an integrated estate product together with the introduction of approval requirements which require a framework for the completed development, not just for serviced blocks of land.

It is recommended that the Federal and State Governments explore with the industry, financial incentives which would encourage greater emphasis on these urban design outcomes.

Urban design education and research

5.16 Urban design is a product of a number of participants - designers from a variety of professions, financiers, developers, builders and the staff of governments. Its improvement therefore requires the recognition that a large number of people are involved and that their skills and the opportunities to support them require appropriate education and information.

It is important to acknowledge that change will not occur simply by introducing a new and isolated specialisation of urban designers.

A number of educational actions are required to expose the range of professionals and decision makers, both elected and non-elected, who shape the urban environment, to urban design issues and methods.

It is recommended that cores of education and research in Australia, be strengthened in ways that inform and benefit the entire spectrum of professionals involved, planners, architects, engineers, surveyors and so on.

It is recommended that the Federal Government explore with those concerned the most appropriate means of communicating urban design issues and methods to the various groups involved.

It is recommended that the Federal Government explore one or more "open learning" education programs as a means of disseminating urban design approaches to decision makers and their staff.

It is recommended that "mid career" courses on urban design be established to assist those currently involved to broaden their skills.

5.17 Research is especially needed on codes and control mechanisms, community participation techniques, people's needs and expectations - especially cultural factors of urban form - and other aspects of the success and failure of urban design interventions.
It is recommended that special attention be given to these research needs by the Commonwealth, perhaps by an extension of the mandate of the The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

It is recommended that the Australian Research Council's approach to "Centres for Excellence" be extended to include Urban Design.

Enhanced tools for urban design

5.18 There are many tools that could be better used.

It is recommended that all governments review their current approaches and expand them to include design workshops, charettes, design advisory panels and urban design awards.

It is recommended that governments at all levels make much wider use of urban design and building competitions as is the pattern in other countries.

Use of existing programs

5.19 The current Federal Government Better Cities program in partnership with State Governments and the involvement of Local Government has established twenty six area based urban strategies across Australia over the past three years. This program set out to take a co-ordinated approach to good urban design and has generated a variety of urban management models, comprehensive design concepts and integrated development actions.

It is recommended that the Federal, State Governments review these urban management models and the approaches generated by the Better Cities program to examine successes and failures and the principles that should be applied to future development and redevelopment projects.

Case Studies

The following are case studies of a small selection of good urban design initiatives in Australia:

- Sydney Harbour, New South Wales;
- Southbank, Melbourne, Victoria;
- Wollongong, New South Wales;
- Western Suburbs, Melbourne, Victoria;
- Ross, Tasmania;
- Seafood, South Australia;
- Port Douglas and Port Douglas Shire, Queensland;
- Fremantle, Western Australia;
- City of Melbourne, Victoria.

The Task Force is most grateful to Roger Holloway (Western Suburbs), Berta von Bibra (Ross), Cr. Michael Berwick (Port Douglas), Cheryl Chaffer (Fremantle) and Rob Adams (City of Melbourne).
Sydney Harbour: Nature in the City

The built part of the city of Sydney has been overlaid over a strong natural structure of ridges, headlands, forests and waterways. Unlike many other great cities in the world, this natural heritage has survived so that in Sydney Harbour wild nature rather than its cultivated counterpart, exists alongside the cultural heritage of buildings, parks and roads. This now provides a rich and dramatic mix of timeless nature, historic settlement patterns and twentieth century development.

The value of these aspects of the harbour has been recognised by the community and formalised by government as safeguards for the future. In some places, local communities, through their local councils have progressively reclaimed waterfront land from private ownership; in others they control building heights on private land so that the natural or historical qualities are conserved; in others again they predetermine the palette of species to be used in most of the planting in an area and involve the community in specialist bushland management programs. In areas which have been assessed as having a broader regional or citywide value, the principal investment has been from the State Government working with the local authority as in the case of Sydney Cove, Darling Harbour and some of the islands. The Commonwealth has also been involved in foreshore work in areas under its ownership and jurisdiction such as Garden Island and the Quarantine Station at North Head.

Lessons

It is worth asking what the lessons of the harbour are for other parts of Australia, particularly those along the coast where decisions are being made about the future form of urban and natural areas.

The first it could be suggested, is the dedication of key natural resource areas as open space as part of the city, rather than outside or beyond it. While many of the headlands, ridges and islands in the harbour were originally reserves for strategic military or communications purpose, they have been progressively valued for other reasons, as parts of the urban ecosystem or for their contribution to scenic quality and recreation.

These dedicated strategically located open spaces are an example of major principles of urban design: firstly, the importance of paying attention to context when carrying out developments or making changes in a place; secondly, the importance of the public domain in contributing to the overall structure and character of an urban area; and thirdly, the importance of natural areas as a balance to built form in urban compositions.

The next lesson the harbour provides is the way its water edges are used by the community as places of informal play, or ritual and ceremony. Unlike many other parts of the world, much of the water's edge in Sydney has remained in the community's hands as part of the public domain and while its care has been patchy across the city, most of the waterfront is now actively managed in some way by the Local or State Authorities which control it. Consequently, there is a rich variety of waterfront places for Sydneysiders and visitors alike to enjoy on the harbour, from the informal walking, beaching, sailing and picnicking that characterises suburban harboursides, through to the waterside cafes and promenades in urban centres and the great ceremonial and gathering centres such as Sydney Cove and Darling Harbour.

The harbour thus functions as a social setting at all levels from personal and local through to formal and symbolic. In urban design terms, its special qualities rely on a combination of the natural setting, the water, rocks, vegetation and sky; the overlay of built fabric to support pedestrian activities such as gathering, movement, display and play; and the final essential ingredient - people.

The last lesson to be learnt from Sydney Harbour is the surprising and now conscious, mixture of indigenous vegetation and wild nature with the most modern forms of development. Many cities around the world combine natural and built forms but in the main, cultivated nature is used because those settlements were established in farm and pastoral landscapes. Because of its rocky terrain and poor soils, the harbour was never a place of agriculture and in many places the bush remained. Open space design in Australian cities has for long excluded indigenous vegetation from the palette of plant materials it has drawn upon. Around Sydney Harbour bush vegetation is now often combined with the most modern of built forms, by design, as an expression of an Australian sense of place and relationship between nature and human artefacts. The bush joins with the city, adding a vigorous expression of the city's ecology to the buildings, open space and roads around the harbour, and bringing the wildest of birds and animals into its heart.
Southbank Melbourne: a new recreational focus for the city

The stretch of the Yarra River east of Princes Bridge has long been regarded as one of the delights of Melbourne. Its tree-lined edges, its grassy banks, its walking and bicycle paths and its adjoining parklands have given pleasure to generations of Melburnians. By contrast the city section of the river west of Princes Bridge has long been neglected and ignored, treated as a traffic artery, lined with semi-industrial uses and isolated from the city by rail lines and yards.

In late 1982 a program was begun by the Ministry of Planning and Environment (Victorian Government) to transform this city section of the Yarra. The principles that were adopted for the replanning of the area were that:

- the city and the river should be linked closely together and connections made wherever possible over or under the yards and lines
- the river area should be planned to become the recreational and leisure heart of the city
- appropriate uses which reflect the leisure and recreational themes should be found for all buildings fronting the Yarra
- roads running along the edge of the river should be closed and these spaces turned into pedestrian promenades
- there should be a human scale to the buildings directly fronting the river. Building heights should not exceed six storeys

Since 1982 major changes have taken place along the river. A new boulevard, Southbank Boulevard, has been opened connecting Queens Bridge to St. Kilda Road. Another new boulevard which will eventually connect Queens Bridge to Port Melbourne has been partially completed and the final section is now under construction. These two boulevards will make major additions to Melbourne's network of grand boulevards. The two roads running along the southern river edge have been closed. The river frontage from Princes Bridge to Queens Bridge has been redesigned and landscaped as a pedestrian promenade. A new pedestrian bridge has been built across the Yarra. A new walkway has been built along the northern edge of this river precinct and new planting introduced beside it.

Southgate, the development adjoining the Concert Hall, has introduced an attractive range of restaurants, cafes and shops. On the north side of the river the Banana Alley vaults development has also brought cafes and shops to the river and connections between Flinders St. and the river. The Melbourne Convention Centre has also been built on the west side of Spencer St. adjoining the World Trade Centre.

Under way is the construction of the new Melbourne casino which includes the refurbishment of the next section of the Southbank between Queens Bridge and Spencer St. Bridge. The river edge treatment proposed is similar to that of the newly completed section. A new exhibition building is being constructed opposite the Convention Centre. On the north side plans are being developed for the section of river frontage between Queens Bridge and Spencer Street.

How successful has this development been?

The overall strategy devised in 1982 and 1983 can first be recognised as an outstanding success. The basic themes of the strategy have held fast despite all pressures and difficulties. The overall restructuring of road networks, river edges and the redevelopment of the land fronting the river is taking place in accordance with the overall strategy. It has been followed and fully adopted by successive ministers and cabinets and by successive governments.

Southgate and Southbank have also been outstanding successes with the people of Melbourne. In a detailed survey of the behaviour and attitudes of visitors and users of the central city carried out in 1993 Southbank and Southgate were identified as the part of the central city which visitors and users now most enjoy—and by a considerable margin.

The urban design quality of the new precinct, although mixed, has often been of a high quality. Most commentators agree that the quality of design of the public works, that is of the river edge treatment, the promenades and walkways and the new pedestrian
bridge is outstanding. The commercial buildings so far built, although not all of distinguished design, have been of an appropriate scale and have incorporated uses on the ground level at least which have been appropriate to the precinct. The most successful by far is Southgate.

The major disappointment is that one large new building, the Esso headquarters building, now under construction in the middle of this highly successful precinct meets few of the criteria originally set for the area. It is a high security building. It has no public uses on its ground floor. It is a thirteen storey building which will be seen and experienced in entirety from the river promenade.

The initial plans for the Casino building by contrast do maintain public uses along the river edge and an appropriate scale. It is to be hoped that these principles will continue to be observed as the detailed plans are developed and the buildings are constructed.

Lessons

The first key lesson concerns the overall strategy. It is important to have a bold and comprehensive strategy and to stick with it. The strategy must be flexible enough to incorporate new opportunities as they arise but it must have some key components which should not be able to be altered for short term advantage only. No development should be permitted which might achieve some short term gain but which would prevent the achievement of a much larger longer term benefit. This was achieved for the replanning of the river area of the city in Melbourne but not without great effort.

Although strategies of this kind seem obvious and unexceptionable in retrospect they are not seen in this way when they are first introduced. Most people find it very hard to conceive of the possibilities of large changes. The planning agency does not control the public land; it is usually in the hands of other agencies which may have quite different short term agendas of their own. Real estate agents and valuers who may play very important advisory roles assess opportunities on the basis of existing uses rather than of potentialities.

The critical requirements of a successful strategy could therefore be summarised as:

- a bold plan
- a recognition that it may take a very long time to implement the whole plan; that there will be many stops and starts along the way
- a recognition that the time taken to implement the strategy is unimportant and that what is important is the quality of the development.

- flexibility to incorporate changes and new opportunities as they arise
- capacity to stop developments and initiatives that would destroy the long term benefits of the plan
- scope to get started on a part of the strategy to show its potential while building up support for it
- an initial project of very high quality to demonstrate the opportunities and to set the standards for the future.

The second important lesson is that the most successful developments require both public sector and private sector contributions. The requirement of the public sector is that it devises the overall strategy, assembles land parcels and makes them available in an appropriate form, sets the development guidelines, and carries out the public works. The public works must not just be seen as the provision of basic infrastructure, roads, sewerage, water etc. They must include high quality design of public areas. Southbank would not have been the success that it is without this very high quality of public design. Similarly control of the design quality of the private development in precincts of great importance to the city should be seen as a key role for the public sector.

The private sector also plays a crucial part. The parameters must be very clearly set for private sector development and strongly adhered to. Detailed negotiation about uses and the quality of design must take place. On Southbank there have been great successes, such as Southgate, partial successes and some failures as with the initial Costain River Edge development and major disappointments as with the Esso development. The failure of the latter development, the plans and designs for which have been significantly criticised, is largely a failure of public will; departures from the development guidelines for the precinct should not have been allowed. The failure is also one of corporate responsibility. Very large corporations could be expected to pay more attention to the impact of their developments on public life in precincts of great importance to the city. The overall disappointment here is that the good and bad lessons from the earlier developments were totally ignored.

The final lesson is that design really matters. High quality of design brings great rewards.
Wollongong Foreshore: orchestrating investment from three levels of government and the private sector:

Fire cities are a product of many fine decisions made over time. In the early 1980s, the city of Wollongong targeted its magnificent but neglected foreshore as the place where it would concentrate efforts to improve urban and cultural quality. The foreshore was its great communal resource — its public domain — and the place where all the community could gather in its many groups and ways. What the City Council did over the next decade is a great lesson for many Australian cities and towns because of the breadth and length of its vision.

The city commissioned specialist consultants to develop strategies for the entire foreshore and therefore a context within which it could target works, direct specific projects and programs, negotiate budgets and establish the framework for private works in the vicinity. As Federal and State Government funding came available (such as that from the Commonwealth for Local Capital Works, the NSW Government’s Estuary and Foreshore Program and the State’s Heritage Grants) the city was ready to target the next stage of its improvements and work out mechanisms for each group to contribute in cash or kind. It also used the plan as a basis for consultation with the community and for negotiations with developers to ensure that their works could contribute.

In this way Council has been able to make dramatic improvements to the three kilometre stretch of foreshore readily accessible from the CBD and the principal area of high density residential development in the city. In selected ways, it has also been able to extend those improvements beyond this area. The works to date include:

**Improving natural and cultural resources**
- restoring a coastal lagoon and drainage system to improve water quality and diversify wildlife habitat;
- rebuilding a major frontal dune and replanting the fore and hind dune;
- rehabilitating selected historic foreshore sites;
- installing interpretive signs.

**Improving circulation and access**
- constructing a variety of carparks for the entire area to facilitate access and establish a positive image and design standard;
- introducing a bushwalking circuit and picnic areas to the bushland area;
- constructing a cycle way to create a "bicycle spine" from Thirroul in the north to Windang in the south a distance when complete of over 25 kilometres;
- progressively creating an urban promenade near the CBD by rationalising vehicular traffic and providing furnishings of paving, seats, lighting and trees.

**Providing recreation facilities**
- upgrading the local “home” football ground and its setting;
- constructing a less able playground, along with additional playgrounds;
- upgrading the recreational settings of existing picnic and parking areas by planting, paving, furnishing and lighting;
- coordinating the provision of restaurants and kiosks in the area to provide a variety of facilities.

When works are to be done, they are done to a predetermined design as part of the whole and are simple and robust. They set the standard of civic expectations in the area. One of the first works was the construction of a carpark and access area to service and benefit both the community foreshore and a new hotel being developed nearby. The next component is likely to be funded by a developer according to Council’s plans.

In all, about $3 million has been spent in the last five or six years, of which about ten per cent has been contributed by Wollongong
Case Studies

Council. The private sector, the State and Federal Governments have provided the rest in roughly equal proportions. The usage of the foreshore area in this time has increased dramatically. It has become a focus for the full range of community activities and those of visitors to the region. On a typical sunny weekend up to 10,000 people of all ages and backgrounds can be seen using the area.

Lessons

The development of the Wollongong foreshore has many lessons for the urban design of similar areas. It demonstrates the power of a well resolved design to direct activity over time. It demonstrates the variety of things that go to make up good urban design, from the design of infrastructure such as drainage, roads, carparks and the full range of alternative forms of access; to the care and design of buildings and facilities; to the restoration and creation of natural and cultural landscape areas. It demonstrates the power of local government in setting standards in design and construction and defining the local character it wants for its area. Finally, it demonstrates how much communal will at a local council level can achieve over time, if it is focused, systematic and uses design intelligently.

Western Suburbs Action Program - Melbourne

The Western Suburbs of Melbourne lie on a sparsely-treed basalt plain to the west of the Yarra and Maribyrnong rivers. Early in the history of Melbourne industrial activities were established in the area. The Western suburbs have since continued to develop as a major industrial area. Today there are clusters of older industrial activities along the Maribyrnong and Yarra, huge new complexes such as the petrochemical groups and some areas of noxious industry. As the industrial areas expanded so did the residential areas. Often the boundaries between industry and housing were poorly managed. By the beginning of the 1980s conflicts between industry and housing were becoming acute. The area had furthermore received little state government attention and as a consequence the overall urban environment was in very poor condition.

It was in this context that the Western Suburbs Action Program (WSAP) was initiated in 1982. Its objective was to improve living conditions and the environment in the west. The project focused initially on the five most industrialised municipalities of the inner west, where conflicts between industry and residents were most apparent, and where community interest groups were expressing the greatest concern. It commenced with community consultation over two years (1982-84). The consultation program had three stages:

Issues identification (including Facts Booklet, multi-language pamphlet and community groups, a community attitudes survey and three project teams);

Investigations (three project teams comprising people from community, local government, and state agencies, with planners as facilitators);
Improvements to the physical urban fabric

These focused on redevelopment sites, "derelict" public land, waterways, parks and transport corridors, especially in prominent "gateway" locations. Many large and important projects were initiated or supported ranging from the Westgate Lower Yarra Project (including Westgate Park) to the Lynch's Bridge Anglias housing projects. Strategic plans were also prepared for improving the urban fabric including a combination of works, planning changes and other actions.

Greening of urban areas

Two main initiatives of the Program were:

- The Landscape Advisory Service was established at the Western Region Commission. This team played and continues to play a central role in design support and project implementation to municipalities and community groups in the region.
- The "Go Green" urban revegetation program, was formed and funding provided to Greening Australia (Victoria) to develop and implement. This program was offered metropolitan-wide and continues today as GAV's Urban Program, providing grants, training, design support and guidance to community groups.

Celebrating social and environmental history

WSAP promoted and supported the formation of the Living Museum of the West, a community-based eco-museum celebrating the social, environmental and working history of people in the region. The Museum is based at Pipemaker's Park beside the Maribyrnong River, and recently celebrated its tenth birthday.

Sustainable development

Early work on habitat protection, recycling, pollution reduction, strategic planning for open space and environmentally healthy households has recently been given a stronger focus through the Habitat Melbourne Project. The Habitat project, using seeding funds provided through WSAP, is now developing as a far-reaching model for integrated and sustainable urban development in the region between Melbourne's western suburbs and Geelong. The program is attracting wide interest.

Evolution of WSAP

From 1985 the Program evolved into annual grants for community groups and community-linked projects. Submissions were assessed by an Advisory Committee with representatives from government...
agencies, unions, industry, conservation and community interests, and ranked according to how well they addressed the themes and key objectives of the Program. These objectives were themselves open to review to embrace emerging issues in the community and changes in the role of the funding Department. In 1989-90 the Program was extended to all metropolitan regions as the Metropolitan Area Improvement Program, in a 'grants for community initiatives' format. The program was abolished in 1992.

Lessons

The Western Suburbs Action Program was a pace-setter for community involvement in planning in Victoria. It pioneered a different style of planning. It emphasised collaborative process between community interests and government agencies, and nurtured mutual cooperation as its means of achieving outcomes. The planners did not profess to know all the answers to the problems raised by the community, indeed ownership of a problem was perceived to be a necessary step in finding the solution. This was evidenced by an approach that treated community perceptions and concerns with respect, and sought to involve people in investigating issues and proposing solutions. Designers and landscape architects were an integral part of the teams, particularly in the conceptualisation and development of projects to improve the environment. Throughout this process planners and designers behaved more like 'experts on tap' rather than as 'experts on top'. The Program undoubtedly made a significant contribution to:

- creating a better 'image' for the west, both in a superficial sense and in the more fundamental sense by consistent performance over a ten year period which saw the demise of 'the deprived west' stigma.
- evincing a more caring and responsive attitude from government agencies and industrial enterprises towards the residential community and environment in the region.
- building a network and sense of trust with key groups and dedicated people in the region that was a potent source of goodwill, legitimacy, cooperative action and valued outcomes.

Early concerns that the offering of grants would open the floodgates of worthy applicants that could not be satisfied, proved to be unfounded. The conundrum 'how much do we have to know before we act?' was resolved in practice by the early identification of demonstration projects for physical improvements, leaving the more intractable issues (for example pollution problems and land use planning for safety and amenity near industry) to be worked through over time.
Ross—new uses in a historic setting

The town of Ross lies in the Midlands area of Tasmania. It was an early settlement and military post on the overland route between Launceston and Hobart. During the 1830s and 1840s many fine buildings and the Ross bridge were built using the plentiful supplies of freestone locally available. The bridge, designed by John Lee Archer, is one of the oldest and most significant surviving from the early settlement of Australia.

Today Ross is one of the finest nineteenth century stone villages remaining in Australia. The most significant buildings fronting the main street are from the first half of the century with the proportion and harmony of the period. Solid and void are restful, details are customary and well used. Other buildings, mainly from later in the nineteenth century, fit comfortably alongside the earlier colonial Georgian structures. There are some buildings from the turn of the century and one or two post war structures but none are contemporary. There is consequently a visual harmony along the length of the street.

The street vista is mostly free of commercial or modern intrusions. Signs are at eye level and commercial notices are deliberately held below eye level. The street has an avenue appearance with uniformly mature bordering trees. There is no intrusive long term parking and little of the usual insensitive street furniture. Kerbing, often a most destructive visual element in historic streets, has been sensitively handled. It was reluctantly installed in response to the recent increase in visitor traffic. There has only been a small amount of unnecessary elaboration of historic facades or inappropriate commercialisation.

How has Ross maintained this character

Ross has been fortunate in two things, the lack of commercial and building pressure until the last decade and a relatively static population. Other towns have, however, had the same conditions and failed to conserve their historic character. The preservation of Ross has not been all good chance and inadvertence. In Ross there has first been vision and leadership from prominent citizens who have had a strong continuing interest in keeping and enhancing the best aspects of the village. An early battle fought and won was to preserve the post office. Post offices in other historic Midlands towns suffered horrible defacements. Ross's post office was fiercely defended. Several citizens have also taken an active part in the restoration of important buildings and their transformation into new but sympathetic commercial uses which have helped to support the town financially while maintaining and enhancing its character.

Two initiatives illustrate the way that local citizens have worked together. The first is Rodeo Inc. which has been the main source of funds for the removal of overhead wires and poles in the main street. The second has been the Tasmanian Wool Centre. The Wool Centre's objectives have been specifically historic conservation and interpretation. It has begun a program, financed by its business surpluses, for the preservation of historic buildings in the town. Councillors have also played an active part in these fund raising activities aimed at the conservation and development of the village and district. This process is continuing. Very recently the Commandant's Cottage adjacent to the Female Factory site has been partially refurbished and now houses a National Parks and Hermitage display. This leadership has helped to preserve the character and integrity of the town until more formal controls were able to be introduced.

A Planning and Design Ordinance was introduced in 1987. The ordinance has subsequently been revised. Its application has not perhaps been as consistent as it might have been, the concept being at the time of introduction a strange one to Council and its officers. Nevertheless its very existence has been an effective control because of the tight-knittedness of the community.

Lessons

The conservation of Ross has been a model of community effort. It demonstrates what can be achieved by strong and visionary leadership. The achievement in Ross has not only been to conserve the historic character of the town but also to find viable new uses for old buildings. The adaptations and new enterprises in Ross have also provided a new economic base to support its citizens. Ross has thus not suffered the economic decline and level of depopulation
experienced in so many other small Australian rural towns. Through these actions Ross has become a household name across Australia.

The main lesson from Ross is the demonstration that a sustained effort to maintain and enhance the urban quality of an area can have aesthetic, community and economic rewards. The achievement at Ross is furthermore an investment that is likely to continue to give rewards to its citizens for a long time into the future.

Seaford South Australia: Rethinking Suburban Form

Although most new residential suburbs in Australia appear amorphous and without structure or focus, this is not necessary nor is it the only pattern of suburban development to be found in Australia. Many suburbs of the last century, for example, had clearly defined forms. There are endeavours in some parts of Australia today to make new suburbs that achieve that coherence again but with the efficiencies of density, energy conservation and mobility that are expected today.

Seaford in South Australia is such an example. In Seaford on the southern edge of Adelaide a joint venture between State and Local Governments has embarked on a ten year program to create a mixed residential and commercial area on a 729 hectare site. The aim is to create a community that is integrated with the surrounding neighbourhoods as well as having a character of its own.

Objectives have been agreed for the project, which include the development of a broadly based, diverse and balanced community; maximising access to a full range of community facilities; developing the area with a strong urban character; and providing for the establishment and growth of business enterprises and local employment.

Such goals required the coordinated involvement of many players, many professional skills and both private and public interests. The successful consortium for the project was selected on the basis of the vision it demonstrated. Fundamental to the proposal was a high quality of social planning and urban design. The submission proposed a relatively simple but convincing physical outcome that
would manifest the stated goals. That vision was expressed as a structure plan that integrated the new development with the adjacent suburbs, responded to the natural qualities of the place and defined economic benefits to the investing partners.

The key elements of the concept are:

- a dominant main road well connected with the rest of the development which is broken up through the main town centre to establish a sense of place and to provide traffic calming;
- a strong emphasis on the design of the public realm for amenity, personal safety and accessibility, including a focus on arranging buildings and uses on adjacent land to contribute to surveillance and activity;
- integration of pedestrian and cycle networks into the local street system to ensure good surveillance and accessibility;
- provision of a reserve for a future rapid transit link connecting the Seaford town centre to Adelaide;
- good on-site storm water detention with managed open flow in retained creek beds which jointly provide the major linear open spaces;
- a high level of local street connectivity both within the development and into local communities;
- local parks surrounded by streets and development frontage, providing an efficient local open space system with good surveillance and marketability;
- local street-fronting traditional village centres around cross roads, incorporating shops, community facilities, local work places and school buildings within five minutes walking distance of most residents;
- the Seaford town centre designed as a lively activity focus of two storey buildings addressing and overlooking streets and squares. Uses are carefully mixed for compatibility and after hours activity;
- town centre off-street parking in small well-distributed parcels managed by the public authority;
- a good mix of lot sizes and types giving a residential density of around 115 dwelling per hectare, with medium density housing integrated into the centres and around open space;
- a joint venture Community Trust that funds open space development and community services delivery.

Seaford is being developed by a multi-disciplinary team of planners, designers, engineers, architects and landscape architects and

including the local council. The role of the urban designer has been absolutely crucial in ensuring that the development maintains its focus on the quality, amenity and safety of the public realm. The social planner's role was also critical in ensuring the provision and integration of a wide range of community facilities.

Early investment in establishing a high quality public realm has been critical. At each development phase, the public streets, parks and squares and drainage ways, is established up front. Residential, commercial and community uses all front these public areas, rather than backing on to them, to make the public domain safer and more active.

Purchasers have so far responded positively to the new environment and to what they perceive as the "open feel" of the development even though over 40% of the allotments are smaller than conventional lots. Two centres have been established with two schools and the linear parks and boulevard are being constructed progressively with each stage. Numerous local parks have also been constructed. Early investment in the public realm has set the standard and defined the quality of the place.

The design of Seaford, particularly its urban design for crime prevention, accessibility and public transport, with mixed uses linking streets, and good integration with adjacent communities, has provided a strong marketing advantage for the project.

Lessons

The planning, design and development process of Seaford offers urban design lessons that are widely applicable in new suburban development:

- it emphasises integration of planning and design processes to achieve social, economic and environmental goals;
- it emphasises integration and mixing of uses to create richness and variety rather than separation and segregation—between uses and between new and old areas;
- it emphasises the importance of clear qualitative and quantitative objectives against which to evaluate extended work programs and a great variety of work components;
- it emphasises the importance of defining a vision of the public realm and a structure by which to guide all new private development to achieve this public realm vision.

It finally shows that investment in high quality integrated design and early development of public facilities can have many rewards, social, environmental and commercial.
of landscape experience, the maintenance of the sugar industry, the development of a sustainable tourism industry based on the Shire’s special characteristics, and the development of pleasant and functional residential settlements.

This aim is intended to be achieved through specification of a fine balance between development and conservation, which permits and encourages appropriate opportunities for viewing and experiencing the Shire’s special attractions, but also involves acknowledgment of the following principles:

a) The Shire’s environmental qualities are valuable and vulnerable to change;

b) The Shire’s infrastructural resources are relatively scarce;

c) Some forms of development are not appropriate and therefore undesirable in the Shire; and

d) There may be a need to limit the extent of development to maintain the Shire’s intrinsic desirable attributes.

In relation to d) above the commitment to growth of urban areas and tourist facilities is limited in the planning scheme to a particular, specified level. There is no commitment to growth beyond that level, and the option to reject growth beyond that threshold is to be protected.

The planning scheme goes on to state that most of the Shire is designated either Protection Area or Productive Rural Area and that the urban areas provide for compact expansion of the existing urban centres with the edges defined if possible by major physical features.

Tourism development is intended to be concentrated in Port Douglas with limited development in a number of other minor nodes so as to retain the remainder of the Shire in a relatively undeveloped state.

The Strategic Plan and the Development Control Plans prescribe a maximum level of development for tourist and other facilities which is not to be exceeded in the life of the plan. The plan allows for growth to about 20,000 people, about double the existing population.

In Port Douglas itself the stated aim of the Council has been to endeavour to ensure that those features which contribute to Port Douglas’s village atmosphere and charm are protected and maintained. Height limit controls have been imposed (nothing above a coconut tree), and active encouragement has been given to developers to replicate the Queensland vernacular and to provide lush, tropical landscaping, where possible on the site itself and extending out onto the road reserve.

Within the proposed new town plan there are further elaborations of these requirements and principles to include:
building orientation
examples of appropriate roof forms, materials, fenestration
detail, verandah
style etc.
street landscaping
window shading

To enhance the character of the town the Council is developing a
landscape plan. It is investigating species themes for the town overall
and for individual streets.

To protect residents from invasions of privacy the plan also divides
Port Douglas into Tourist Accommodation Areas and Residential
Accommodation Areas.

Lessons

The growth restriction and management policies of the Douglas
Shire provide an outstanding example of enlightened planning and
management of the coastline. They have protected an area of great
natural significance from unsuitable development and ensured that
Port Douglas has preserved its village qualities and scale.

The proposed new planning scheme explicitly expresses the
principles and basis on which future planning and management of
growth will take place to ensure that this achievement will not be
destroyed in the future. It is a remarkable statement of far-sighted
policy-making. The Shire’s strategies and new controls for Port
Douglas seek to further protect and enhance the character of the
township.

In composite these policies provide models and examples for all
coastal settlements.

Fremantle: a model of community conservation
and design

Fremantle, the principal seaport of Western Australia, is situated
on a belt of coastal limestone and sand at the mouth of the Swan
River, some seventeen kilometres from Perth city centre. In the early
years Fremantle was the most prosperous settlement in Western
Australia, at one time making a claim to become the capital. From
this early prosperity Fremantle has inherited a stock of historic
buildings and streetscapes of the highest quality.

The distinguishing feature of the development of Fremantle in the
last twenty years has been the way the Council and community have
managed the conservation of this heritage and the further
development of the town around it.

One of the most important milestones in the early years of this
conservation program was the formation of the Fremantle Society
in 1972. The Society initially helped to mobilise public opinion for
new council policies to support the protection of historic buildings.
It has since then continued to play an important part in Fremantle
affairs. The Society’s oral tapes have formed the nucleus of the
library’s collection. Its very extensive survey of Fremantle buildings
has been used by the Council for conservation planning. The Council
has further recognised the Society’s work by actively involving it in
decision-making about the historic character of the town.

The Council was quick to respond to these community initiatives
and in the early seventies commissioned a major study, published
in 1974, of the ways in which the heritage of Fremantle might be
conserved. Thus when the Commonwealth Government’s National
Estate grants program was initiated in 1974, Fremantle was well
placed to take advantage of it. One of the first National Estate grants was used to purchase the Dux building and the two adjacent nineteenth-century houses all of which were about to be demolished. Following resubdivision, rezoning and the attachment of protective covenants the houses were resold and the proceeds used to restore the Dux building. Subsequently three infill houses were built to reinforce the residential character of the area. The Council has also used National Estate grants to restore the former Asylum building, now used and managed by the Council as the Fremantle Museum and Arts Centre, and to restore the Fremantle market, today a major attraction for local, interstate and overseas tourists. More recently the Council has used the funds available from the sale of surplus property to restore the Moore’s building, part of which has been leased and part reused as an arts exhibition and workshop facility. These are examples of the way Council has used and continued to roll over the funds made available to it.

The Council began the task of rewriting the planning scheme in the late seventies. The Fremantle Strategy plan was published in 1981. The town planning scheme report was further revised in 1982 and 1985. A new town planning scheme was then written to give the Council flexible powers to manage the complex urban environments of the city.

The Council also perceived that regulatory town planning was not enough on its own and that the conservation of the city's heritage could only be achieved by the right kind of development. In 1984 it therefore appointed a city architect and set up the Architecture and Heritage section within the Planning and Development Division. The aim was to implement a policy of positive planning by promoting appropriate private projects and by the Council showing the way and taking an active development role itself. Properties which had been acquired for demolition were retained for preservation. Other properties were acquired and reused or resold with covenants. Following an extensive review of its investments the Council established the Preservation of Historic Buildings Reserve Fund so that a proportion of investment income could be set aside for the purchase and conservation of significant buildings.

The Council also works closely with developers to ensure that development takes place in accordance with its strategies. Much new investment has as a consequence flowed in to Fremantle in a form compatible with the historic character of the town. Although a significant part of that investment took place in preparation for the America's Cup, growth and development has continued to occur with the conversion of several unused woolstores to residential apartments, the establishment of Notre Dame University in a restored and adapted warehouse complex, new inner city housing developments and the establishment of new sidewalk cafes and specialty shops and services following the reinstatement of traditional shopfronts and verandahs.

In sum Fremantle’s achievement has been based on:

- a development control system which requires planning approval for all development and which has paid close attention to detail (urban design, architectural integrity and city function);
- architectural and urban design staff available to focus on the quality of physical appearance and overall civic contribution of all new development proposals;
- the encouragement of active involvement of the local community in assessing proposals and in the design of public spaces;
- planning policies strongly focused on urban conservation, integration of new infill projects, adaptive re-use of buildings (eg warehouse conversions to residential);
- inter-active street frontages (ie retail/commercial uses at the ground level);
- urban design strategies for public spaces (inc. streets) focused on pedestrian linkages, vistas, shelter, meeting places, etc;
- management of Council's extensive property portfolio to achieve community benefit (eg heritage restoration; adaptive reuse and) as well as commercial viability;
- tourism strategies focused on the community (eg the Fremantle Festival, largely community based and promoting local artists, local lifestyle and local business);
- recognition of the positive contribution made to the character of the city by the diversity of the City's socio-economic and cultural mix;
- the maintenance of healthy relationships between the City and the Port of Fremantle (eg promotion of the identity of Fremantle as a port city; recognition of the importance of the port activities to the economic life of the city).

Lessons

Today Fremantle has an urban quality which is recognised across Australia. It is also one of the best known and admired historic areas of Australia internationally. This has been achieved by strong and enlightened leadership, active partnerships with community groups and very imaginative use of grants and the Council's own financial resources. Few local communities and authorities in Australia have been as quick to identify the value of their urban heritage, to recognise the threats to it and to take effective action before it was too late. As a consequence while other historic areas have lost theirs, Fremantle has protected and enhanced its urban heritage. It has also shown how growth and development can be achieved and absorbed without loss or damage.
The Council and community have also shown leadership in other ways. The Council has long supported state heritage legislation. In its absence it has made the most of the regulatory powers available to it and demonstrated what might have been achieved in other areas had heritage controls been in force.

Fremantle is in many ways a model for Australia of locally inspired urban and community design. The challenge for Fremantle in the future is to apply the same care and imagination to the parts of the city that lie outside the historic core and to manage the gentrification occurring in the city. It is promising at least that this is a challenge well recognised by the City.

The City of Melbourne—An Urban Design program in Local Government

Over the last decade the City of Melbourne, spurred on by a strong political agenda developed in the 70s, has implemented a comprehensive urban design strategy for inner Melbourne. It started in 1983 with the work on the Strategy Plan, adopted by Council in 1985. This led to the setting up of an urban design unit with a mandate to implement the 1985 Plan. The City’s approach to urban design has grown to the stage where it now has national recognition.

The success of the strategy has been its broad base and its aim to reinforce the city’s strengths rather than drastically change them through grand plans and mega projects. Central to this approach have been clearly articulated strategies and design philosophies supported by both the politicians and the officers.

The urban design strategy pursued by the city has eight component parts.

1. Strategy Plan

This was a modest and achievable strategy which laid down the actions and policies that the City would be required to implement if it was going to produce a better urban environment. The basis was to concentrate on achievable actions and to do away with the “grand plans” of the earlier 1975 plan. Such things as undergrounding trams in Swanston Street were seen as no longer appropriate and the more modest but achievable goal of increased pedestrian amenity within Swanston Street became an adopted action. Much of the work carried out in the Strategy Plan was based on the City’s existing character. The plan aimed to reinforce the strengths and qualities of the City.
2. A design philosophy - Grids and Greenery

While most Australian cities have an abundance of strategy plans or vision documents few have a text that outlines a clear urban design philosophy for the City. Since 1987 the City of Melbourne has been guided in its development by a seventy page document *Grids and Greenery*. Developed as a companion document for the 1985 Strategy Plan it underlines the need for the city to recognise the effects of constant change and to have in place a set of design principles that ensure that this gradual or incremental change is harnessed to reinforce those aspects of the city that strengthen its character.

*Grids and Greenery* deals with the character of inner Melbourne. It covers the entire area of inner Melbourne as defined by its natural topographic features. It is a design philosophy based on the development of the public domain.

Its aims are modest and are firmly rooted in a study of both the "history and present state" of Melbourne's urban framework. Unlike strategy plans and vision documents it is satisfied to accept what is good about the city and to employ an incremental approach to building on the city's strengths. It works at all levels from the detailed to the large scale and almost ten years later is still a key reference for development in Melbourne today.

3. Master Plans

Within the Strategy Plan there was a need to develop master plans for various special areas in the City. In the main, these have concentrated on the parks and gardens, but other areas such as the river and City edges also required detailed attention. The existence of a clear strategy and philosophy supported by achievable master plans, has enabled forward city budgeting to be done together with the raising of money from other private and public sector agencies - in a consistent way throughout the City.

4. Action Plans

Unlike the master plans, the action plans tend to cover precincts or specific issues and deal with both physical actions and activities. A typical example would be Postcode 3000 which has concentrated on encouraging inner city residential development.

5. Urban Conservation Controls

One of the most important exercises carried out in the late 70's and early 80's was the introduction of urban conservation controls throughout the City of Melbourne. In the areas outside the central City the conservation controls have formed the basis for much of the development control that has taken place. They have retained the historic amenity of these areas and contributed to their economic vitality. As tourist attractions their impact on the general economy of the state is yet to be quantified but should not be underestimated.

6. Streetscape Plans

As part of the overall desire to improve the physical amenity of Melbourne, streetscape plans dealing with tree planting and open space have been produced and each year form a large part of the capital works budget. A typical example would be the work carried out in Carlton. Here the development of Lygon Street and the consistent treatment of street tree and road works has helped reinforce the character of this important inner city area.

7. Development Control.

In the CAD a set of guidelines has been produced to support the planning scheme and to deal with issues such as the setting back from street frontages of new commercial development. Undoubtedly the most successful exercise has been the preparation of development controls carried out in conjunction with the owners and developers. An example is the Commonwealth Block Plan developed for the Telecom site in Exhibition Street. In this instance, a short concise document produced prior to the architects brief being completed, allowed the City and the future developer to work closely together and minimise disruptions through the approval process. The result has been the retention of a quality streetscape and relative freedom for the architect in the design of the office tower. Other development control mechanisms such as advertising guidelines have been put in place.

8. Technical Notes

Technical Notes have been produced to ensure consistency of treatment of many of the day-to-day details used throughout the City. They cover such things as street furniture, kerbs and paving details. The early development of these details has allowed a consistent approach on all projects and easy dissemination of information to developers and the community. It has also allowed the Council to produce a distinctive range of street furniture from which it now generates an annual income from use of the designs in other municipalities.

Lessons

Using the above framework, the Council has been able to implement a large number of projects of varying scales from the stone paving of up to 40% of the central city's footpaths to the closure of Swanston...
Case Studies

Street and the introduction of a unified range of street furniture. By having in place an understandable and consistent strategy, the Council has been able to raise resources beyond its normal means. In the period described above, more than half of the work undertaken by the City of Melbourne in the CAD has been carried out using funding from non-Council sources. For example, the closure of the top end of Russell Street was undertaken using State Bicentennial funding. Swanston Street received State Government funding, the bluestone paving of footpaths has largely come from developer levies and many of the traffic works were paid for by VicRoads. All of these were carried out to a consistent and on-going urban design strategy. The quality of this Strategy was recognised in 1992 by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects when it awarded the Urban Design & Architecture Division the "Walter Burley Griffin" National Award for Civic Design.

The City of Melbourne experience illustrates what can be achieved if cities develop and follow a strong and clear urban design agenda. To operate without such a framework is a mandate for ad hoc development and its inevitably confused and destructive results. The City's achievements, however, show that to be effective the agenda must be supported by a range of tools and measures including strategies, statements of design philosophy, action plans, streetscape plans, historic conservation controls, development controls, technical guidance and the like.

Appendix A

National Urban Design Review

The Task Force's efforts should be translated into a nation-wide review of current urban design practice in Government, industry, professions, and academic and research institutions. It should examine

- the State of development and administration of urban design programs and projects with local, State and Commonwealth involvement, with a particular view towards learning from recent Commonwealth urban development projects;
- the performance of semi-private development authorities;
- industry practice and standards;
- professional groups and their efforts to further the practice of good urban design;
- the State of higher education in urban design, including professional development;
- the general skills base in urban design in Australia;
- the opportunities for linkage between urban design concerns and the State of urban and regional development in Australia;
- the opportunities for linkage between urban design concerns and the Australian Urban Export Strategy;
- the State of research into urban design processes and products;
- the State and appropriateness of urban design theory and criticism in Australia;
- other relevant matters.
Appendix B

The Australia Prize for Urban Design

What is the Australia Prize for Urban Design?
The Australia Prize for Urban Design is a program of two awards of high prestige—one for built work and one for plans and ideas—to be initiated by the Prime Minister in coordination with Government agencies and public and private institutions. These awards will identify successful and highly promising innovations in city building and urban design. Honoured will be the very best of design contributions to the performance of cities and their quality of life.

What is the program’s basic premise?
The basic notion underlying this concept is that everyone involved in city building can benefit from a better nation-wide sharing of insight into intelligent urban design innovations, and the nature of exceptional individual and group efforts in this field.

What gap does it fill?
There are national awards in most other fields, in design, the arts and the sciences, yet no such recognition of design excellence in the sustaining and improving of urban quality exists to date across the entire range of disciplines that are associated with urban design. There are, however, precedences for individual disciplines such as the Royal Australian Institute of Architects’ Walter Burley Griffin Award and Royal Australian Planning Institute awards, and in other countries, such as the Prince of Wales Prize administered at Harvard University, or the Rudy Bruner Award for Excellence in the Urban Environment.

Why call it the ‘Australia Prize’?
The Federal Government can and should lead in identifying by example, demonstration and analysis what constitutes excellence in urban design.

What will be the benefits of the awards?
The Australia Prize will be the first awards of national and even international prestige to further city building and design, and other creative and responsive forms of urban development, as a recognised field.

Specifically, the program will have three major effects. For one, it will reinforce and amplify extraordinarily promising or successful efforts in critical realms of the building and sustaining of urban communities, wherever in the nation they may take place.

Secondly, the research leading to the presentation of an award will yield invaluable information on the patterns, nature and direction of positive urban change, as well as useful means and channels for distributing such insight. The information gathering process will afford the maintenance of a unique network, a community of exceptional thinkers and activists in urban design and city building.

Thirdly, the award will contribute to the continuing effort to conduct and perceive urban investment and construction activities as efforts in the overall, sustainable improvement of living conditions in the city regions of Australia. Reports on the awards, in existing media and national fora run in the cities hosting the winning projects, will deepen and broaden the mission.

What are the evaluation categories and criteria?
Premiated will be efforts of outstanding quality that meet all award criteria, or projects and initiatives of particular excellence in individual aspects. Judges would look for candidate projects that

- demonstrate design excellence;
- distribute benefits widely in the population;
- produce environmental benefits;
- are of local significance;
- are relevant to the contemporary world;
- leave open the possibility for continuing adaptation and change;
- forge connections with the past.
What kinds of awards will be given, and how frequently?

Two types of awards could be presented. The Australia Prize should be given for programs, projects and efforts that have been tangibly in place and functioning for a period of at least three years, sustaining the test of time with exceptionally high success, and extraordinary and credible continuing promise. A second type of award, the Australia Prize Vision Award, will be bestowed for exceptional plans and well-documented ideas.

While the Australia Prize Vision Award will be given for ideas, projects and programs that are not yet executed, these will need to indicate a very high degree of technical, institutional and societal promise, feasibility, practical usefulness and other response to the award criteria. The award period may be annual, biennial or triennial. The selection committee and the support staff may elect not to give an award in a given period.

What will the selection procedure look like?

There will be several paths to identifying final candidates and winners, and several steps within these paths. The Prize recipients will be identified by both nomination and first-hand research. A network of distinguished critics, academics, professionals and other reviewers will be called upon to nominate candidates, supplying a brief profile of their accomplishments. Research staff will request follow-up documentation and information from project authors and agencies, corroborate and pre-screen the material, as well as compile documenting dossiers for the jury. Both sources may be examined by an internal technical review board, and submitted for final evaluation and voting by the selection jury. The selection jury will consist of between five and eight eminent individuals from a variety of fields: architecture, urban design, economics, landscape architecture, arts, social science, public policy, public administration, ecology and environmental sciences, etc. Jury membership may rotate, and will be by appointment by the organising Prize board.

What might the sponsorship profile look like?

It will be essential to secure a well-balanced, broad-based support structure, in terms of endorsement, technical support and financial endowment. Government, educational institutions and private sponsorship will give the Prize the respectability and viability that will be indispensable to its success.

How might we go about realising the award program?

Support from professional organisations, Government agencies, the press, professions and industry may not only make the award financially more viable, but, if judiciously handled, may also help in building credibility and prestige for the Prize.
Appendix C

Future Directions for the Federal Government

The Federal Government initiates actions in a wide range of policies and programs which impinge on urban design, including:

- as a direct participant in the development, construction, ownership or occupation of particular urban elements, such as buildings, airports, roads;
- as a direct and deliberate influence through policies and programs which are specifically directed at outcomes or processes in the urban field, i.e. they are urban policy specific;
- as an indirect and sometimes unintended influence through policies and programs which are not overtly urban policy, i.e. they are not urban policy specific.

Historically, Federal Governments have varied their involvement in urban issues according to their views on the acceptable degree of direction they should provide to market forces and according to their views on the acceptable degree of involvement in matters which some would argue are the province of State and Local Governments.

The reality is that a significant number of Federal Government actions, such as immigration and taxation policies, have a marked affect on urban areas, both in their structure and in their detail. The key issue is whether such impacts are in response to deliberate objectives about our urban areas or whether it is an unintended consequence of actions relating to other objectives.

The current Federal Government has policies and programs which are deliberately directed at influencing our urban areas, and the Prime Minister's initiative in establishing this Urban Design Task Force is a further demonstration of its position.

In part this is based on a recognition of the importance of the efficiency and quality of Australia's cities to the performance of the national economy and to our international competitiveness, especially in attracting investment.

In part it is based on a concern with the achievement of national economic, social and environmental objectives, most of which are affected strongly by the way Governments manage urban development and by the way the private sector performs.

A direct participant

The Federal Government and its agencies are significant builders, developers and users of our urban areas. However their actions do not always contribute positively to the urban design of the particular area, and this may be in terms of urban structure, (that is the relationship of residence, employment and transport) or in terms of detailed design, (that is the quality of the design and the way in which it relates and contributes to the heritage, activities and streetscape of its locality).

The Federal Government contributes significant funds through its transport infrastructure and its building construction. In some cases these physical investments are funded without regard to the urban design consequences or opportunities which could arise. The Commonwealth should seek to achieve better urban design outcomes from its funding of various construction programs, and this should be addressed in the current Australian Urban and Regional Development Review.

On occasions, Federal Government business enterprises have ignored approved planning policies and urban design criteria and hidden behind the condition 'that the Commonwealth cannot be bound'. They thus gain an unfair advantage in business competition and have, at times, damaged the urban design, environmental or tourism values of an area.

Federal Government business enterprises should observe approved urban design requirements applying to a location, except where they can demonstrate that these requirements are quite inappropriate. In these circumstances conditions should not be ignored--negotiated changes should be sought.

The Federal Government's NCPA is a body with urban design expertise.

Not only should it aim to lead by example in the quality of what it achieves in Canberra, but also the Federal Government could benefit from wider use of its own skills, across its range of responsibilities.

The Prime Minister has taken the initiative of establishing this Urban Design
Task Force. The implementation of the recommendations in this Report would greatly benefit from a nationally recognised authority which could work within the Commonwealth and with State and Local Governments.

An augmented National Capital Planning Authority may offer one such opportunity. It could take responsibility for the task, in a restructured and enhanced form.

If this was accepted, it may be appropriate to change its name, appoint a new board and review its functions. The new authority could be responsible for the Federal Government's urban design program, for assistance to Commonwealth departments in meeting urban design commitments and still retain the present authority's special responsibilities for the National Capital.

Specific urban policies and programs

There are a range of initiatives which are specifically directed at particular components of the urban area or to the urban area as a whole.

It is in this realm that, historically, Federal Governments are most specific about urban objectives and where in recent years there has been an increase in urban policy initiatives.

Examples of specific urban policies and programs include:

- the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement;
- the National Housing Strategy;
- the National Urban Development Program (NUDP) which brings together a range of initiatives:
  - Integrated Local Area Planning (ILAP);
  - Green Street Program;
  - Housing Choices Strategy;
  - Local Approvals Review Program (LARP);
  - Local Government Review of Residential Regulations (Triple-R);
  - Australian Model Code for Residential Development (AMCORD) and AMCORD URBAN;
- Urban Futures;
- Housing Industry;
- Urban Export Strategy.

These programs are significant initiatives which respond to specific needs. They lie within the single Portfolio of Housing and Regional Development and this offers an opportunity for them to be reviewed and restructured to better serve urban design outcomes. This could complement the work of the Australian Urban and Regional Development Review.

- Australian Urban and Regional Development Review:
  - This Review seeks to link urban and regional planning and management processes across all levels of Government, and over a range of key policy areas from employment to environment, transport and energy.
  - A primary aim of the Review is to seek out initiatives which achieve the highest possible standards of social equity, economic efficiency and environmental quality from the estimated $46 billion per annum invested by both public and private sectors of urban development.

- The Better Cities program:
  - The Better Cities program is very specifically focused on the integration of activities in a particular area, that is, within "area strategies".
  - Through funding improved urban management and investment in 26 selected areas (inner urban, fringe urban and provincial cities) the Program aims to demonstrate how improved management can lead to better economic, social, environmental and urban design outcomes.
  - Access is a key focus of the program - access to appropriate and affordable housing, access to transport alternatives, access to the facilities and services of the urban area. Integration of different urban activities within an area strategy is the means by which this access can be achieved.

To achieve this level of integration and of access the program requires great attention to urban management and to the co-operation and co-ordination of the three spheres of Government and the private sector.
However the final product will be assessed on the basis of its urban design and therefore this program is particularly pertinent to considering the problems of achieving urban design objectives.

The Better Cities program therefore offers an opportunity for comparative assessments of methods used and urban design outcomes achieved.

In cases of explicit urban policy, the Commonwealth should seek 'best practice' results and promote the results to ensure that the results of the demonstrations are widely known and can be adapted and adopted by others.

Indirect influences

Government policies affecting financial matters, immigration, employment, regional development, environment, infrastructure and many other matters have a wide-ranging and major affect on the social mix, form and rate of growth of our cities and therefore on their urban design.

They generate a range of ideas, information, and inquiries, which must be assumed to influence policy. It is useful to list them to provide a global coverage, but they will not be pursued in detail in this paper:

- The Economic Planning and Advisory Council;
- Population Growth and Immigration;
- Ecologically Sustainable Development;
- Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Emissions;
- Industry Commission Inquiries into Taxation and Financial Policy Impacts on Urban Settlement; on Urban Transport;
- Resource Assessment Commission Coastal Zone Inquiry;
- The Report of the Regional Development Task Force;
- The National Advisory Committee on Housing and Urban Development (NACHUD) which now incorporates the earlier Australian Housing Industry Development Council (AHIDC);
- The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute;

- The Working Group on Housing and Urban Development of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG);

A number of Commonwealth responsibilities such as immigration policy have had a major impact, both positive and negative, on the growth of our two major cities and an impact on all other cities, yet are not urban policies.

Similarly, regulations on overseas investment in urban development have a major impact on housing, on the development of our inner city areas and on tourist regions, yet are not urban policies. The urban impact of such policies should receive much greater attention at the time of their approval and this would be assisted if submissions to Government were required to highlight the likely impact on urban areas.

In general, the Federal Government needs to raise its own awareness, and that of its agencies, of the impacts "on the ground" of its policies and programs.

Only by recognising those impacts, and especially their contribution to good or poor urban design outcomes, can the Federal Government become a leader, or at least a responsible partner with other Governments, in addressing urban design issues in this country. This country.
Appendix D

Competitions

In Europe competitions constitute one of the most common tools used for the improvement of urban areas. In 1993 there were some 600 design competitions in Germany and some 1000 in France. Although there are many different forms used, the most typical competition types are those concerned with: urban design ideas; urban design realisation; building ideas; building realisation. Design/build competitions are not considered by European urbanists as real competitions.

It is estimated that the competitions add between 1 and 2% to the overall cost. Much of this money might well be spent in submissions, objections, negotiations with authorities, hearings, etc. when developments are carried out without competitions. Economic benefits to the city from the quality of development are seen to far outweigh any short term additional costs. The other benefits of competitions most frequently mentioned are:

- the opportunity the competition process offers to introduce new thinking through the brief. Often mentioned are new environmental requirements.
- the opportunity for education of all those involved through the interaction that takes place between protagonists, public officers, jurors and designers.
- the opportunity the competition offers to talented young designers to make their first mark. Many of the most successful European designers began their careers with winning entries in competitions.

In Germany there are other ways in which competitions are used to help promising young designers. Young practices are employed to develop the documentation and to carry out the basic analysis for the pre-jury stage to give young designers support and to get them familiar with the competition process. The process is scrupulously open and transparent even to the taping of jury discussions. Cost is controlled by budgets being stipulated in the briefs. The pre-jury analysis assesses each entry against the brief requirements including budget.

Competitions can be imaginatively used by Governments in other ways. The UK Arts Council has initiated a series of competitions for different arts activities. One such competition is for the UK City of Architecture and Design for the year 1999. Cities have to submit bids setting out the programs and projects that will be initiated for and during the year. The bids must include a commitment to match the Arts Council’s funds. The competitions are widely recognised as effective ways of stimulating local interest.

The bid from Edinburgh, one of the contestants for the 1999 City of Architecture and Design, has, for example, been supported by the local and regional authorities. It has already led to the establishment of a semi-independent Architecture and Design Centre which acts as a collecting point and forum for ideas and new initiatives. The Centre run by a consultant designer has already arranged twenty new design competitions and the preparation of a new design charter. Other initiatives planned are displays, educational programs from primary upwards, demonstration projects, sister city projects, visits from famous designers and so on.