

Please quote: 1174970 CR:fh

30 August 2011

Department of Infrastructure and Transport
Major Cities Unit
GPO Box 594
CANBERRA ACT.2601

ourcities@infrastructure.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

Creating Places for People - An Urban Design Protocol for Australian Cities

Thank you for the invitation to comment on the Draft Framework for Creating Places for People -an Urban Design Protocol for Australian Cities.

Purpose

The creation of an Urban Design Protocol for Australia is commended; as it elevates the key role urban design has in the delivery of attractive, sustainable functional and prosperous cities.

'Urban design' is a term which has increasingly been used in respect to the planning of urban areas, however, it is a term which has not been clearly defined or understood. Creating a definition, common language and framework for the practice and delivery of urban design is therefore supported, given the key role urban design plays in improving the quality of cities and also in delivering other strategic objectives (such as population and housing growth through infill development).

Definition of World Class Urban Design

The definition of both 'world class' and 'urban design' are reasonable. Whilst arguments could be presented to change or massage elements of the definition, little would be gained. Having a common language is the most important outcome.

What is lacking in the paper however, is detail outlining the key role and advantages of good urban design. Such is considered necessary, so planning authorities and government agencies recognise and appreciate the value of good urban design and so that interest is generated to ensure it is a focus at all levels of planning. In general, the advantages and benefits are broad, including; social, environmental and economic. A better understanding of why a strong focus should be placed on urban design is required.

.../2

Whilst the Protocol seeks to reinforce excellence in urban design and architecture as a national interest, the framework alone will not achieve this. Further information, education, resources and potentially financial incentives may be needed to achieve this aim.

The definition of architecture broadens the traditional definition of architecture. This could lead to some confusion and potentially a different term should be used. One option may be to use the term 'place making', which arguably deals with the interface between built form and urban spaces/public realm.

Goals and Principles

The summary chart of goals and principles is reasonably clear and easy to understand.

In addition, the five goals and 12 principles are all logical, appropriate and generally reflect sound planning and urban design practice.

The key issue however is in respect to implementation. The draft framework provides scant detail or guidance in respect to how the goals and principles may be integrated into the strategic, policy and statutory frameworks that are the jurisdiction of state/territory and local government.

The protocol refers to the intent of the urban design principles to 'guide' proponents towards the five goals. It is questioned as to how the proponents will be informed of the Protocol? Also, what incentive/requirement is there for proponents to have any regard to the Protocol?

The draft framework refers to a toolkit which is intended to include a range of strategies and solutions which can be used to achieve the desired outcomes. The toolkit, (not supplied), will be critically important as this will need to include 'real world' and pragmatic solutions which can be readily picked up and adopted. A template suite of policies for adoption would be a useful in assisting the implementation process. Ideally they should be drafted to suit a range of circumstances and jurisdictions.

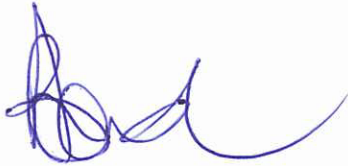
Summary

In summary, the framework is considered to be a reasonable basis to foster urban design excellence in Australia. Information, education, goals and principles are a sound building block to achieve this aim.

What will be critically important are the incentives, resources and tools developed to implement such outcomes. These supporting measures, as yet not available for review, will essentially be the critical conduit to ensure the sound theories, goals and principles are adopted and implemented. Unless the benefits of the tools and ultimate outcomes are made clear, and the tools are of a form that can readily be adopted, then there is a risk that the Protocol will be ineffective in delivering its stated objective.

If you require any further discussion in relation to this application, please feel free to contact me on [REDACTED].

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Brendan Dowd', with a stylized flourish at the end.

BRENDAN DOWD
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

cc: Applicant