

# CREATING PLACES FOR PEOPLE: AN URBAN DESIGN PROTOCOL FOR AUSTRALIAN CITIES

## COMMENTS FROM WESTERN AUSTRALIAN STATE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Western Australian State Government agencies are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Framework for an Australian Urban Design Protocol. This response coordinates the comments from the Department of Planning and other relevant State Government agencies, except for the Office of the Government Architect and LandCorp, which we understand, will be submitting their own comments.

We are pleased to see:

- The work of the Planning Officials Group coming to fruition, and perhaps this foundation work could be acknowledged in the Protocol
- Definitions of the terminology so we have a common language
- A common set of design objectives
- Aspirations to meet the highest level of design excellence
- The placement of this protocol in the wider planning reform context

We offer the following constructive comments in the spirit of making the document more user friendly and effective.

### Presentation:

The repetition within Chapter 3 (Summary of Goals and Principles) and with Chapters 4, 5 and 6, was found to be confusing to the reader. To overcome this, we suggest that, if a summary is desired, it take the form of a single graphic, possibly based on the following which clearly shows the relationship between and across the Goals and Principles:

PRINCIPLES \ GOALS	PROSPERITY	SUSTAINABILITY	LIVEABILITY	LEADERSHIP	DESIGN
LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE		Life-cycle		Context	
				Life-cycle	
				Excellence	
			Engagement	Engagement	
DESIGN FOR PEOPLE			Comfortable		Comfortable
			Active [Sic: Vibrant]		Active [Sic: Vibrant]
			Safe		Safe
			Pedestrian Scale		Pedestrian Scale
DESIGN ABOUT PLACES	Connected	Connected			Connected
	Diverse				Diverse
					Enduring
	Enhancing				Enhancing

*Note: The 'Active' principle in the 'Liveability' goal should possibly be 'Vibrant' or the Protocol will have thirteen principles rather than the twelve mentioned in the Protocol.*

*Creating Places For People: An Urban Design Protocol For Australian Cities  
Comments from Western Australian State Government Agencies*

*\*Note: this is not a formal submission from the Department, but a collection of comments from a number of State Government agencies*

This could be followed by separate chapters on:

- The Goals – which could use what is already in Chapter 3, but expanded so that the reader does not need to separately reference the National Urban Policy
- The Leadership and Governance Principles – bringing together the relevant content from the current Chapters 3 and 4
- The Design for People Principles – bringing together the relevant content from the current Chapters 3 and 5
- The Design Principles for Place – bringing together the relevant content from the current Chapters 3 and 6

### **Title:**

The title is given as *'Creating Places for People: an urban design protocol for Australian cities'*, whereas the text uses *'Australian Urban Design Protocol'*. It would be clearer if a single name was used throughout, and if 'Protocol', rather than the full form, was used consistently as the abbreviated form throughout the document.

Also, the use of and difference between 'Protocol' and 'Framework' could be clarified.

### **Purpose:**

A section could be incorporated to provide greater clarity around why the Protocol has been developed, including what it seeks to achieve, how the document works toward achieving the projected outcomes and how jurisdictions are intended to use it.

### **Target Audience:**

The intended audience could be made clear at the beginning, and should then guide the style and language used throughout the document.

### **Contents of the Protocol:**

References throughout the document to 'Protocol', 'Framework', 'Toolkit' and 'Case Studies' could usefully be explained as to exactly what each is and where they can be found.

It would seem that the 'Protocol' comprises the 'Framework' (ie, the current document) supported by a separate 'Toolkit' and a separate set of 'Case Studies', the latter two probably being dynamic and available through a website rather than as a finite document. If so, this should be explained in this document.

### **Relationship to other policies and guidelines:**

A graphic to support the textual description of the hierarchical and other relationships between the Protocol and the other policies, strategies and documents referred to would be useful for the reader to easily see and appreciate the complementary nature of these.

*Creating Places For People: An Urban Design Protocol For Australian Cities  
Comments from Western Australian State Government Agencies*

*\*Note: this is not a formal submission from the Department, but a collection of comments from a number of State Government agencies*

**Scope:**

The applicability of the Protocol to regional cities is acknowledged in the document, but could be emphasised throughout.

## Specific Issues (in the order in which they occur in the document):

**World class** – The definition of World class urban design lacks reference to the link between the planning and design of the built environment and improved health outcomes, a key basis of creating places for people.

**Urban Design** – Urban Design also has the potential to contribute to governance frameworks in addition to the economic, environmental, etc, which are mentioned.

**Architecture** – Special attention to Architecture is important, especially as it is sometimes taken to mean ‘urban design’, but it should be emphasised that it is only one of a number of crucial aspects to be considered in creating a great space and is a subset of urban design.

It is important to correctly identify the role of architecture (in the context of single buildings or developments) as a component of urban design. In all cases, the aspirations of a single building / development must be subordinate to the urban design objectives. In some cases the urban design framework for a place might call for a monumental or individualistic building, however, this same individualism can be detrimental if applied to a street where every building is designed in this way and therefore undermines much more important and broad urban design objectives. Buildings must play nicely with each other to contribute to overall objectives rather than going it alone as architectural heroes.

*“Poor architecture can detract from good urban design .....”* (p.5) is misleading. Award-winning buildings can have hugely detrimental impacts on urban design. It could be made clearer that in an urban design context ‘good architecture’ means ‘appropriate architecture’.

**Aspects of urban form** – If the concept used in the diagram (pp.6-7) is sourced from the Commission of the Built Environment as it seems, then this should be acknowledged.

‘Public Realm’ is indicated at the wrong level on the figure and should also be shown to be relevant to higher order elements.

The figure only indicates ‘social and economic’ fabric but environmental fabric is also relevant.

**Density + mix** – The use of ‘intensity’ rather than ‘density’ may be more appropriate, where ‘density’ has connotations of residential applications, while ‘intensity’ more generally refers to achieving an urban return from land that is not necessarily residential, or commercial, civic, etc.

**Height + massing, Streetscape + landscape, Façade + interface** – These elements are poorly defined and confusing. For instance, the simple issue of proportion of building heights to the dimensions of the public space that they define is one of the more fundamental aspects of fine grained urban design. Although it is a function of Height and Massing, Streetscape, and Façade and Interface, it is tangentially referred to under each of these sections but at the same time is, conspicuously, not explicitly referred to by either.

**Prosperity goal and Sustainability goal** – Recognising that these goals are adopted from the National Urban Policy, the Prosperity goal could be broadened to include social and economic prosperity, not specifically related to living affordability. Similarly, the Sustainability goal could be broadened to reflect the social and economic aspects that also contribute to sustainability.

*Creating Places For People: An Urban Design Protocol For Australian Cities  
Comments from Western Australian State Government Agencies*

*\*Note: this is not a formal submission from the Department, but a collection of comments from a number of State Government agencies*

**Leadership goal** – refers to ‘strong’ governance but ‘sustainable’ governance may be more appropriate. Once the funding or program associated with ‘strong’ governance is wound up, continuation (of the funding or program) could be at risk.

**Design principles for people** – The Protocol identifies parks and open spaces as a means to build a vibrant community, however, it must go further by defining the importance of active spaces for sporting pursuits as well as passive recreation areas. The importance of active recreation must be recognised early in the strategic process to avoid an oversupply of passive spaces that perform only a singular function for the community.

The inclusion of principles for people and places and importantly active and passive space development within the framework, will ultimately provide guidance for decision makers to incorporate design elements that will provide a sound basis for quality and inclusive community development.

**Design principles for places** – More emphasis could be placed on ensuring design is robust and adaptable and preserves our heritage and culture, possibly through an additional principle, to ensure that urban spaces can be responsive to the changing nature of our cities and is also responsive to climatic conditions.

**Life-Cycle / Enduring** – These could make reference to flexibility and / or adaptability of a place rather than restrict it to life-cycle which implies a limited timeframe and use, and not sustainable best practice.

**Comfortable** – This could include reference to infrastructure and amenities as an attribute in making people feel comfortable and welcome.

**Vibrant** – This could make reference to creating places that are vibrant to *encourage* people to be around and that include active and passive open spaces.

**Connected** – This could include reference to transit-orientated developments as a related concept, increasing places that are connected.

**Diverse** – This could include co-location as a related concept, increasing diversity and experiences to choose from.

**Safe** – The Design for People could incorporate reference to lighting design.

Department of Planning (Western Australia)  
19 August 2011

## **Comments from Disability Services Commission Draft framework: 'Creating places for people: an urban design protocol for Australian cities'**

This paper comprises some general commentary about people with disability and the importance of Urban Design taking into account these needs and some comments on specific elements of the Urban Design Protocol.

### **General comments**

How we design communities is of great importance to people with disability, along with all other citizens, in order to facilitate meaningful opportunities to participate in all aspects of society.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that 20.6% of Australians have a disability. It is projected that by 2025 this figure will have increased to one in four Australians having a disability. As a result Western Australia will look substantially different with many more people who have a disability, most over 65 years of age, and there will be many more seniors than younger people. Western Australians will live in changed economic, social and environmental circumstances.

The State Government has adopted Count Me In: Disability Future Directions as a long term strategic plan to develop a Western Australia which embraces and progresses the vision where all people live in welcoming communities that facilitate citizenship, friendship, mutual support and a fair go for everyone. Count Me In has three key areas of focus:

1. Economic and Community foundations.
2. Participation and Contribution in all aspects of life.
3. Personalised Supports and Services.

In relation to Economic and Community Foundations, well-planned communities linked to community facilities like streamlined transport are fundamental to creating accessible, welcoming and stimulating places to live. Good planning means designing new communities and renewing older communities in ways that enable people to move around easily and safely – in their homes, outside their homes, on footpaths, in cafes, getting to schools, parks and other amenities.

Creating buildings, products and environments that are usable and effective for everyone is vital if all Western Australians are to live with security and ease. To achieve this, the principles of universal design need to be applied to private and public housing as well as the surrounding community.

The Disability Services Commission has been working with the building and design sectors on the 'Liveable Homes' initiative to increase the number of private and publicly funded homes that are built with universal access. 'Liveable Homes' are easy to move around in, easy to use, open-plan and designed to maximise space in key areas of the home. 'Liveable Homes' ensure people of all ages and abilities can live or visit with comfort, and the intent of the draft Protocol appears consistent with this focus.

The Disability Services Commission is committed to the concept of 'ageing in place', which refers to the practice of planning and providing additional services to allow people with disability to remain in their own homes and communities as they

age. How communities are designed is an important element of ensuring that 'ageing in place' is effective.

The Disability Services Commission recognises the importance of housing and community design and works closely with the Department of Housing so that accommodation can be provided for people with disability that meets their daily living needs, including proximity to transport, shops, etc.

Urban design that takes into account the needs of people with disability will help to minimise the risk of people with disability making complaints of inaccessibility and exclusion under the Commonwealth 'Disability Discrimination Act 1992'. Ultimately accessible and inclusive urban design will be cost-effective and will eliminate the need to make costly changes later.

The draft Urban Design Protocol presents another opportunity to build upon recent work in access and inclusion for people with disability like the 'Disability (Access to Premises Buildings) Standard 2010' to:

- provide for equitable and dignified access to new buildings and those areas of existing buildings that undergo renovation or upgrade that requires a building approval; and
- provide greater certainty to those involved in the design, construction, certification and management of buildings in relation to the level of access required in the buildings covered by the Premises Standards.

The Disability Services Commission also recognises that the draft Urban Design Protocol has the opportunity to add parallel value to reforms in disability services across Australia. For example, improving the portability of an individual's disability services funding when they relocate to another State or Territory is assisted when urban design reflects a welcoming perspective to people with disability. The knowledge that communities are designed in this manner fosters greater confidence about moving and eases the transitional challenges that occur when people with disability relocate.

### **Specific comments on the Draft Urban Design Protocol**

The following are provided as comments about specific pages of the Draft Urban Design Protocol with suggestions that would further augment the positive impact of the Protocol for people with disability:

Page 3 – case study examples with a particular focus on the urban design needs of a range of people with disability would be a welcome and valued addition.

Page 4 – urban design can influence the economic success and socio-economic composition of a locality' is a valid statement and it should be recognised that how communities are planned can have a critical impact on people's capacity to be included in community life.

Page 5 – the photograph of Paddington Reservoir Garden illustrates well certain Building Code of Australia requirements like Tactile Ground Surface Indicators and stair nosing for people with vision impairment. A photograph that also encapsulate access for people who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices, like smooth level transition, would add value to the concept of seamless accessibility as part of urban design.

Page 8 – using the term 'all people', rather than 'people', in the 'design principles for people' would further emphasise the diversity of needs in the community and the broad consideration required when approaching principles of urban design for maximum effect.

Page 9 – changing the third goal of the Urban Design Protocol to 'cultivate healthy, **inclusive** and cohesive communities' would further emphasise the focus of the design considerations extends to the needs and participation of all Australians.

Page 13 – the Disability Services Commission supports the recognition of legibility (of appropriate signage) and way-finding identified in the 'Design Principles for Place'.