



19 August 2011

CREATING PLACE FOR PEOPLE

AN URBAN DESIGN PROTOCOL FOR AUSTRALIAN CITIES

I fully support the development of an Urban Design Protocol for Australia. Please accept the following comments as my submission.

I am addressing five issues. They are:

- Definition
- The Need for Clarity of the Different Design Processes
- Perceptions and World Class
- The Role of the Spatial Structure
- How to Introduce a Design Based Process for City Intervention

Definition

The Protocol would be strengthened by a clear definition.

Urban design is not a well understood concept in Australia and tends to focus on public domain design rather than strategic urban design. A clear definition of what urban design is would be helpful. e.g. Urban Design is a design process which occurs at a range of scales. It is multidisciplinary; iterative and structures the various elements [including space] of the city at different scales. It primarily concerns:

- the land,
- the spatial structure
- the built-elements/buildings infrastructure etc.

Possibly use a similar definition as the Royal Australian Institute of Architects [RAIA] definition. [Under review]

The Need for Clarity of the Different Design Processes

Urban Design

Urban Design is the design of the spatial structure by the built elements relative to the land. It occurs at a range of scales It determines the spatial structure of both the public and private domain. The quality of the spatial structure and the quality of the individual built elements are related and interdependent

Public Domain Design

Public Domain Design is the design of the public areas, streets / parks etc.

Architecture / Infrastructure Design

Architecture and Infrastructure is the design resolution of the built elements in the urban context.

Done properly the design processes are iterative and inter-related but they are separate design exercises – often carried out by different professions e.g. architect or landscape architect. Clarifying where the



design processes occur; how one design process relates to another and how they relate to the planning system would be a valuable inclusion in the protocol.

Perceptions and World Class

The perception of urban design as “local” is Anglo/ Australian/American. This is not the understanding of most European countries. If Australia is to be world-class then it should be based on world’s best practice – which is Europe Spain, France, Holland etc. Here interventions into urban areas use a design process or series of overlapping design processes focused on outcome prior to establishing uses and development controls. This design processes are allocated sufficient time to ensure that they are done properly; are appropriately funded and that the outcomes are rigorously tested to ensure that they meet the stated objectives. In contrast the Australian system uses a zoning methodology focused on process and in which the design process only applies to some of the individual elements.

Possibly some examples would help clarify what elements are involved in the design process at the different scales and where the design process should occur relative to the planning process. This would provide a clearer understanding of design at a range of scales. Examples such as Emscher Park Germany [Regional design]; Berlin/ Hamburg/ Barcelona [Precinct design] [or Australian examples where possible e.g. Pyrmont Point]

The Role of the Spatial Structure

Given that “Space is the primary organizing element of urban morphology” That is, space is the primary organizing element of an urban area it is particularly relevant that the protocol:

- introduces this concept;
- contains reference to the role of space as a major determinate of the quality of an urban area
- outlines the benefits of a design process to create and inform the spatial structure of an urban area.
- outlines how the design process determines the spatial structure of an urban area.

How to Introduce a Design Based Process for City Intervention

It is also relevant that the protocol outlines ways in which a design based process incorporating all major stakeholders including transport etc could be introduced at the city scale and how the wider community could be involved. This could be done by way of examples such as Paris [“retrofitting” the city; accommodating growth; new transport etc using design projects based on an overall comprehensive design], Vancouver with scenario testing, a strategic direction and design interventions. This would enable an evaluation of the success of the different approaches.

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