

Nicholas Temov
Senior Planning Officer
Policy and Priority Initiatives
Department of Planning
140 William Street
Perth WA 6000

Dear Nicholas,

Re: Design Guide feedback

The Property Council of Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Design Guide for Multi-Residential Developments.

The Property Council of Australia is the peak industry body for the property development and investment sectors in WA. In regards to the Design Guides, the Property Council's members include major property developers who specialize in infill development and many of whom have been involved in the practitioner working group for the *Planning Reform for Better Design project*.

After consulting extensively with our members, The Property Council would like to raise some serious concerns about the proposed Design Guides which are considered unreasonable and have the potential to affect the feasibility of built form developments. On balance, we do not support the proposed Design Guides in the current form.

The draft Design Guides is an onerous and overly controlling document which, if exercised 'with discretion', by authorities opposed to density, will significantly hinder critical urban development, impact housing affordability and stifle innovation. The level of opposition in the development industry to the draft in its current form is so great that the Property Council will be compelled to raise the objections with the Minister for Planning.

The Property Council would like to make the following recommendations that will assist the Department of Planning in introducing a Design Guide which promotes flexibility and excellent urban design:

- **The Design Guide should provide best practice design advice and good examples to guide future residential multi-unit development and ensure favorable consideration by a DAC process and ultimately a Design Assessment Panel (DAP). The process should not be so rigid that every DA must adhere to the criteria outlined in the design guide**

- **Application of the Design guide should rest with a revised Design Advisory Committee (DAC)**

It is generally accepted that the design quality of a building is an essential component of its long term success. The design quality of the cities, towns and neighbourhoods are therefore equally important for the long term success of WA. This is an aim that the Property Council Of Australia supports, however, the proposed Design Guides will make this harder to achieve and will lead to ‘cookie-cutter’ developments or worse, developments becoming unfeasible.

Design Guide should not be prescriptive and only provide best practice design advice

The intention of the Design Guide should be to provide best practice design advice and good examples to guide future residential flat development. In its current form, the Design Guide is an overly controlling document with many of the design criteria being onerously prescriptive. The Design Guide should rely on principles and performance standards as the criteria by which development applications should be assessed, rather than the application of universal controls. Each development site has constraints and opportunities which shape a design solution. Prescriptive controls will hinder the ability of designers and developers to reach these design solutions for unique sites making some projects unviable.

The Design Guide should not be seen as standards but rather guidelines. The Design Guide, if kept in its current state, could be used by Councils as a de facto Development Control Plan (DCP) that apply the design criteria as absolute metrics. Perth is currently seeing a wave of anti-development sentiment and the Design Guide could be used by Council’s opposed to density to stop developments.

The prescriptive nature of the Design Guide has further implications when considering the feasibility of developments and housing affordability. Stringent design controls, as outlined in the Design Guide, will lead to significant cost implications for developers. This will either make developments unfeasible or lead to developers passing on the costs to consumers. Ultimately this has a significant impact on housing affordability.

Recommendation

- **The Design Guide should provide best practice design advice and good examples to guide future residential flat development and ensure favorable consideration by a DAC process and ultimately a Design Assessment Panel (DAP). The process should not be so rigid that every DA must adhere to the criteria outlined in the design guide**

Applying the Design Guide

To ensure the integrity of the Design Guide, and that it is not used by Local Government's as a Development Control Plan (DCP), it must be applied to a Development Application by an independent panel of design experts. It is unreasonable to expect Local Government, who has little expertise in design quality, to carry out the functions of a Design Advisory Committee (DAC). This situation will lead to judgements that are not focused solely on the design of a building and will weaken the Design Guide and the development assessment system.

A reformed DAC system can play a crucial role in the development assessment process. If the body is accessed early on the DA process, it increases certainty for the developer in the early stage of the project and reduces assessment times. This body can strengthen the development assessment body by using its expert design knowledge to apply the Design Guide to a development. This design advice can in turn inform Local Government and Development Assessment Panels (DAP).

Recommendation

- **Application of the Design guide should rest with a revised Design Advisory Committee (DAC)**

In *Perth and Peel @ 3.5 Million*, it is identified that the preferred model to meet the population needs of Perth is the connected city growth model. This model includes a target of 47% infill development. Reaching this target seems an improbable task with the current low rate of infill development, which is currently below 30%, the absence of infrastructure provisioning and local government planning systems. According to current trends Perth will require an effective rate of infill development over 50% in the next decade and over 60% in subsequent decades.

The proposed Design Guide will add even further pressure on reaching this target and will make it impossible to achieve. The Design Guide should support and guide developers and Local Governments to achieving good density outcomes which enhance communities. In its current state, the Design Guide will act as a brake to achieving these outcomes.

As outlined above, this feedback is designed to assist the Department of Planning in introducing a Design Guide that is not onerously controlling, stifles innovation, makes developments unfeasible and impacts housing affordability.

We understand that a Design Guide can be a useful tool in promoting excellent and sustainable design which can create an active, livable and beautiful city. However, this will be impossible to achieve with the Design Guide in the current state.

We look forward to continuing our dialogue regarding the key recommendations outlined in our feedback.

Kind regards,



Lino Iacomella
Executive Director