



Summary

Australian cities and towns are formed by our culture. They must continue to evolve sustainably, whilst ensuring an economic and social future.

Urban Design guides the evolution of cities and towns, in responding to changing cultural values and determining outcomes in the public's best interest. Urban Design aims to maximise public benefit by ensuring development is coordinated and assessed in relation to long term urban outcomes. Urban Design ensures that overall sustainability is improved with every initiative that effects a physical change to a city or town.

The Australian Institute of Architects (The Institute) has three major concerns that should be addressed.

- The continued expansion of cities into their hinterland is not sustainable, and government policy must be aimed toward measures that increase density and amenity in existing areas.
- The need for greater co-ordination of existing data on the physical and social characteristics of cities and towns.
- The need for appropriate Urban Design processes to ensure adequate regulatory focus on the public domain.

Urban Design research provides valuable data. Analysis of this data, and subsequent design processes support the everyday interaction of society in urban environments.

The Institute believes that Urban Design and related planning controls should not extend into the private domain beyond ensuring reasonable amenity and building standards, as well as an appropriate relationship between public and private domains.



Background

The first consideration of Urban Design is the public domain. Public domain refers to the layout and design of the streets, infrastructure, parks and squares; and the hierarchy of public space and buildings, community facilities and monuments that represent our urban culture.

Many factors influence the design of the public domain, including the underlying geography and historical pattern of development. In successful urban areas, the public domain provides access to the benefits of the city to all people. Urban Design should ensure the public domain is continuous and that infrastructure, universal access and circulation using public transport is equitably distributed. Urban Design provides the setting for public events and the everyday life of cities and towns focussing on achieving high levels of public amenity and flexibility.

Architecture is a substantial contributor to the design of our cities and towns and which, compared to Urban Design initiatives, occurs over a relatively short time period. Urban Design involving many private property owners takes place over a longer term. Urban Designers have a duty, as guardians of the public domain, to ensure its improvement and increasing sustainability.

The Institute believes that three major concerns require attention by government, Institute members and the community:

The continued expansion of cities and towns into hinterland

The continued expansion of cities and towns into their hinterland is not sustainable and should be checked. In most areas, density and amenity need to be increased in order to maximise the efficiency and sustainability of infrastructure in particular, that of public transport. The Institute does not support government urban policies, for mature cities with existing large areas of developed land, that result in new land releases.



Ensure adequate co-ordination of, and access to, information on the physical characteristics of major cities and towns

Access to comprehensive information on the physical characteristics of our major cities and towns is a fundamental basis for Urban Design practice. Urban Design research provides data on the existing and past composition of cities and towns, and evaluates processes of change in relation to increased sustainability. Governments at every level are in the best position to secure comprehensive research data to assist Urban Design practice and those interested more generally in cities and towns.

Unwarranted controls over architecture in the private domain extending beyond the interrelationship between the private and public domains

Urban Design also considers the interrelationship between the private and public domains. The private domain is diverse, individual and changing, while the public domain is more continuous, interconnected, cohesive and permanent. The private domain is dependent on the public domain. In turn, control over private land is best derived from its interrelationship with the public domain.

Whilst accepting of this relationship, the Institute believes that the design of the private domain should remain relatively private and free from unwarranted control, unless warranted by public interest. This allows density on private land to be maximised in areas of high public amenity, thus improving the efficiency of infrastructure. Accordingly, the practice of architecture, which is also controlled by legislation, could then ensure reasonable amenity and appropriate building standards, in order to contribute more effectively to the process of change in cities and towns.



What Governments and Universities need to do

Minimise further expansion of our cities

- Support and facilitate the containment of Australian cities. Avoid responding to concerns of housing affordability with initiatives that increase the size of cities and compromise sustainability.
- Minimise the need for further expansion of urban areas by increasing density, amenity and public transport in existing areas.

Research

- Coordinate data available from Australian, State/Territory and local government sources, and establish a comprehensive national database of the physical characteristics (ie Urban Design data) of major cities and towns. The data should include three-dimensional mapping of Australian cities and be coordinated with other non-physical data, for example, census data. The data should be freely available at local government offices throughout Australia.
- Governments at every level should commit funds for new urban design research focussed on the sustainable design of cities and towns.
- Establish local and State/Territory government resources and funding to ensure mandatory and comprehensive data revisions to reflect changes to the built environment as they occur.
- Ensure that university research policy encourages significant increases in Urban Design research that aids the improvement of our cities and towns.

Resources

- Provide appropriate resources for Urban Design practice in the implementation of new public works.
- Support architectural competitions, that are appropriately run and remunerated, or qualification based selection processes for significant Urban Design services.



Policies

- Fund a national review of Urban Design policy and practice to improve understanding of how our cities and towns can increase their economic, social and environmental sustainability.
- Establish a National Built Environment Design Policy and appropriately resourced Minister with a portfolio for the Built Environment.

Planning and Urban Design controls

- Reform planning legislation throughout the nation to ensure appropriate focus on development outcomes that support the continuity of our urban culture that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable
- Require the national coordination of planning and urban design terms and definitions used in legislation, local government policy and urban design plans to provide consistent, comprehensible policy and to assist community engagement with the development review process.
- Reform planning and Urban Design controls throughout the nation to focus on the design of the public domain, provide appropriate controls that encourage high quality architecture and ensure that participation in the approval process focuses on issues affecting the public domain.
- Require decisions on the built environment in local authorities to be informed by people with appropriate expertise



What Institute Members need to do

- Acknowledge the value of Urban Design in architectural practice.
- Support initiatives that increase the sustainability of cities and improve the public domain. Challenge restrictive and inappropriate development controls with architectural solutions that reflect positive Urban Design outcomes.
- Record and submit case studies, to your Minister for Planning, that demonstrate poor or excellent Urban Design controls by local government.
- Get involved with the local community and the Institute to lobby State/Territory and local government for new Urban Design controls that promote sustainability, diversity and recognise the essential input of architects.

What all members of the community can do

- Support and vote for politicians who actively pursue environmental, social and economic policies that directly target sustainable development and improved public infrastructure, including public transport.
- Advocate for development that provides excellent levels of public and private amenity at higher densities to make our cities more sustainable.
- Oppose unsustainable metropolitan land releases.
- Support development applications that are environmentally sustainable, encourage diversity, have clear community benefits and are well designed.



Institute related initiatives and activities

- Annual Urban Design awards at Chapter and National level.
- Annual national awards in for Urban Design combining submissions from members of Planning Institute of Australia, Australian Institute of Landscape Architects and the Institute.
- Leading the public debate on initiatives that affect the design or management of the public environment.
- Regular briefings, discussions and general involvement with key decision makers in planning, including State and Territory Ministers for Planning.
- Advocating for the re-establishment of an Australian Government Architect, with appropriate resourcing, to assist in developing a national policy on the design and management of urban environments owned or controlled by the Australian Government.
- Advocating that all States and Territories have a Government Architect
- Promoting the study and discussion of Urban Design issues at Institute Chapter events, the national conference, publications, symposia etc.



Further Information and Links

- The Institute requires Urban Design data that accurately maps cities and towns. At a minimum this would include the following elements: geography including topography, major natural features, landscape elements; the layout of public land including various infrastructures (such as street layouts, public transport routes, parks and reserves); the hierarchy of public space and buildings including community facilities and monuments; private land including its division and titling; and, private building footprints and heights. The data should be in three-dimensional form in virtual models. The mapping should also record changes of these elements over time.
- Institute members were part of Prime Minister Paul Keating's Task Force reporting on the state of Urban Design in Australia in 1994. Refer to the document: 'Urban Design in Australia – Report by the Prime Minister's Task Force' 16 November 1994.
http://www.udf.org.au/archives/2003/udfq_63_september/index.php
- Australian Institute of Architects Urban Design Awards available on the Institute website.
<http://www.architecture.com.au/i-cms?page=1.19.10609.3411.1194.1195>
- Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) in the UK. <http://www.cabe.org.uk/>
- State Environmental Planning Policy 65 NSW for the Design of Multi-unit Residential Housing.
www.planning.nsw.gov.au/asp/pdf/06_0127_appf_sepp_65_comp_table_taa.pdf