



The Hon. Elise Archer MP

Attorney-General
Minister for Justice
Minister for Corrections
Minister for Building and Construction
Minister for the Arts
Minister for Heritage

The Hon. Michael Ferguson MP

Minister for Finance
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport
Minister for State Growth
Minister for Science and Technology

Date: 14 May 2020

By email to: Minister.Archer@dpac.tas.gov.au & Michael.Ferguson@dpac.tas.gov.au, cc:
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Dear Minister Archer and Minister Ferguson,

On behalf of the Tasmanian Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute), thank you for the invitation to attend the Joint Civil Building and Construction Forum on Wednesday April 15, and the meeting yesterday with Master Builders Tasmania and commercial operators, both from architecture and building firms. This was a very useful forum, and we would welcome future meetings such as this. It is clear that the industry as a whole is going to feel the impacts of COVID-19 for a long time.

To date, economic support packages have focused on helping business stay solvent and retain core staff as well as providing a safety net of support for workers who have unexpectedly become unemployed. The Institute commends this support and our members have found this to be invaluable at this time.

The Institute would like to assist in any way we can to ensure the viability of the industry moving forward and have some suggestions regarding potential stimulus projects below. In all projects, in order to ensure a quality built outcome, it is critical to have thorough client briefing, realistic budgeting and community consultation.

Firstly, the Institute believes that any stimulus should be for the benefit of everyone as equally as it can be. This should include focusing on projects that are spread across the state and that differ in size so that they are suitable for both small, medium and large

practitioners across the design and construction process. Architects have the unique design ability to be able to add value to all projects, be this a toilet block or a large-scale health project.

We have had comments from members that there were issues with the Building Education Revolution (BER) which resulted in a number of firms taking on multiple projects which was too great for their staffing levels, and other firms missing out completely. We would be happy to assist in identifying the size and capacities of Tasmanian architecture firms.

While time is of the essence, it is critical to acknowledge that while design work can be fast-tracked to a degree, it still takes time to design a building properly to ensure the best quality outcome, which results in the process taking at least between four to six months, depending on the size and complexity of the project. Architects have the ability to provide cost effective designs, from the layout of the building through to detailing and material selection, and quality for budget that considers not only the built cost, but the usage and maintenance costs of the building (whole-of-life cost) after it has been built. It is important that design is undertaken prior to any construction commencing to ensure that delays don't occur further down the track.

Architects are either working from home remotely or have adjusted their office spaces to maintain social distancing and are practicing high levels of hygiene. As such, architects are in a unique position in that they are able to continue operating almost as normal during this time.

We would also like to highlight that master planning is critical for high-quality outcomes that are well-thought out and provide long-term solutions. This will help avoid some of the shortfalls of the BER program and provide an ongoing contribution beyond any stimulus packages.

While the above are our primary concerns and suggestions, we have compiled further suggestions from our membership below.

Actions required

1. Keep the building and construction industry operating as an Essential Service as long as activity adheres to government guidelines and health and safety regulations.
2. Keep government open for business.
3. Bring forward building projects as industry stimulus in readiness for strong recovery that future-proofs the economy - not just transport projects.
4. Develop a clearly identified pipeline of future work (short and long term).
5. Develop a task-force to help keep the state's building and development industry operating both now and after the pandemic has passed, by identifying projects that can be fast-tracked to ensure a steady stream of work going forward.

Underlying principles of stimulus packages

- It should not just be a case of what can be spent quickly, but what is most needed.

- Governments must Identify initiatives that deliver a long-lasting dividend from Commonwealth and State investment.
- Existing health, educational, housing and infrastructure projects that are currently in process should be fast tracked through government to market.
- Projects in the fire ravaged regional communities of Australia should be fast tracked as a matter of urgency with a focus on building back better.
- Focus should be placed on projects of a variety of scales and locations. This would enable a spread of the dollar value across local, state and federal governments, regions, towns and cities in an equitable manner for small, medium and larger companies.
- In all projects, large or small, energy efficiency and sustainable design need to be a priority and should focus on the integration of both renewable energy sources and passive and active energy systems.
- All projects, whether new or upgrades, need to have a focus on equitable and quality design.

Potential stimulus

Process

Governments must keep regulatory approvals flowing through State agencies and local government.

Governments of all persuasions should be encouraged to implement a temporary but necessary freeing up of potential planning bottlenecks and fast track approvals provided they meet acceptable standards of planning compliance and construction regulation. This process could also be expedited by relaxing supporting information requirements (with these then becoming a condition of the permit).

We encourage fast tracking of the planning process but emphasise the importance of quality outcomes for both the built environment and the public domain and the importance of sufficient time for design prior to construction commencing.

Most importantly, the approval processes need streamlining so work is not held up at the local government level. This might require additional assistance to local governments.

Incentives for private sector projects to both commence and continue should be considered. This could be by way of governments subsidising fees for approvals, including development applications, building applications and change of use applications, for a period of time, and waiving renewal fees for extensions of time where this encourages projects to commence in the short term .

In order to move projects on the list of possible toward shovel readiness, more effort needs to be placed on getting the design, documentation and approvals for such opportunities underway as soon as possible.

Projects

The focus would be on projects that benefit the community, create jobs and provide an economic as well a social benefit. These would include:

1. Make new public and social housing a priority and fast-track housing projects with a socially responsible housing mix: 30/40/30 – affordable (key worker) 30%; private 40%; and social 30%. Existing buildings could also be repurposed for housing. This could incorporate some of the recommendations of the [Inquiry into Housing Affordability](#).
2. Make improvements to education facilities that increase equitable access for children in vulnerable circumstances and fix basic problems with existing buildings that will have a lasting benefit such as condition upgrades, disability access and energy efficiency.
3. Fund quality community buildings and public spaces – these have proved invaluable during the current restrictions and will also be required as our population grows. This could include extensions-to, upgrades or maintenance of regional Tasmanian sports and cultural precincts.
4. Fund aged care housing (facilities & independent living) – ideally as part of mixed-housing developments, not stand-alone. Projects like the Goulburn St housing project currently under construction and commissioned by Richard Gilmour, are an ideal example of this.
5. Fund public healthcare facilities (in particular in regional communities – new buildings and/or upgrades to existing).
6. Invest in green spaces – urban design, landscape and especially waterways and catchments that support sustainable places and human health and wellbeing. This would include parks and landscape infrastructure, especially the provision of accessible play areas.
7. There are many projects for which grant applications have been prepared and either put on hold or rejected due to lack of funding in previous rounds. These would include many local government upgrades and initiatives to public amenities, regional tourist initiatives or community projects. These could be revisited as they are ready to go essentially.
8. Smaller town centre and amenities upgrades especially in regional and developing density suburban areas. Many areas are under-done in terms of place amenity with poor paving, public domains and landscape infrastructure. All local councils need to re-set with regard to public amenities and invest across their municipalities in new design-led public amenities outcomes that create safe amenity environments for everyone. This could be assisted by additional grant funding to Local Government for community infrastructure projects in 2020/2021 and beyond.
9. Design-led urban planning projects to support inclusive, nurturing and walkable neighbourhoods along with active transport projects – that is cycle and pedestrian linkages and hubs.
10. Built heritage maintenance and adaptive re-use of existing buildings.
11. Fast forward planning policy to introduce the ‘Medium Density Residential Development Standards’ and planning code as per the Hobart City Deal.
12. Fast-track all Tasmanian ‘City Deal’ projects.

13. The City of Hobart has produced and commissioned many reports, including the Gehl Report and the Inner-City Action Plan, and elements of these could be actioned. This is also the case in Launceston, and likely in other larger municipalities.
14. A focus in Hobart needs to be on the inner-city and the public transport corridor to ensure that development is close to infrastructure and existing services. Inner-city development is also critical in Launceston, which has been encouraged already by the Launceston City Deal, and should continue.

Other Options

- Architects could provide additional paid services to Government, outside of building work and at a more academic level, eg: research projects, policy reviews/input, master planning reviews/input, knowledge sharing (web-based public seminars/workshops).
- There is an opportunity for architects to assist government agencies to strategically plan for the future. Architects are strategic and can be pivotal in responding to a need for changing environments and to plan the way we live, work etc in this fast-paced change environment we find ourselves in.
- Expert panels should be utilised to make decisions.

Policy

1. Buy local - we need to recognise the capability that exists in the State/country and ensure that it is supported so that we retain these skills and capacity into the future.
2. Make architecture fees tax deductible like accountants or financial advisor fees.
3. Ensure that there is gender equity within the workforce. We suggest that procurement processes for stimulus projects aim for gender equity targets in line with the Institute's Gender Equity Policy (refer attached document). Current Tasmanian Government EOI/tender processes already embed zero tolerance to violence against women which is fantastic, and Local SME statements aim at ensuring the local economy is supported. Gender Equity targets could be addressed in the Local SME statement. The Tasmanian Government Women's Strategy highlights leadership and participation, and financial security as two of the government's key concerns for women - so this would be an active measure on these two fronts.

The Institute would like to express our concern about the effects of the delay of the State budget until September 2020. We are concerned that this delay will result in the funding for government building and construction projects also being delayed, which would have a substantial effect on the local building and construction sector.

We have reached out to members to determine the extent of projects, both public and private, that have been stalled, either as a result of coronavirus or prior to this for other reasons. These projects are by no means an exhaustive account and form a small snapshot of stalled projects across the state. Some members have been unable to share

the projects they have been working on due to confidentiality clauses. These projects are in the process of being collated, and we will send these through as soon as we can.

Once again, we thank you for your support of the building and construction industry, and we look forward to working together to ensure that the industry is able to stay afloat during the months ahead.

Yours sincerely,



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Tasmanian President
Australian Institute of Architects



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