Australian Institute of Architects

Building a Better Victoria

2026 Victorian State Election Policy Platform

Victoria's cities, towns and landscapes shape how we live, work and connect. As the population grows and the impacts of climate change accelerate, the quality of the built environment has never mattered more. ***Building a Better Victoria*** sets out the Australian Institute of Architects' 2026 Victorian State Election Policy Platform, grounded in three mutually reinforcing pillars:

1. **Advancing the profession of architecture**
2. **Legislating the value of good design**
3. **Embedding sustainability and climate resilience**

Pillar 1: Advancing the Profession of Architecture

A strong architectural profession is essential to delivering high-quality outcomes for communities, government and industry.

Architects bring design expertise, evidence-based thinking and public interest values to the decisions that shape Victoria's buildings, places and communities.

This expertise should inform policy, planning, procurement, regulation, design review, and public engagement from the outset.

Public trust in the built environment depends on independent design leadership, accessible design literacy, and a qualified, regulated, and properly supported profession.

Policy asks of government

1.1 Sustain and strengthen the Office of the Victorian Government Architect (OVGA).

The OVGA provides independent design leadership, improves public confidence, supports better procurement and project outcomes, and helps maintain Victoria's reputation for design

excellence. This is increasingly critical as government accelerates housing delivery, infrastructure approvals and major project delivery, where community trust, social licence, liveability, sustainability and public benefit must remain central.

We will engage with key stakeholders to request that the Victorian Government:

- restore and increase stable core funding for the OVGA;
- protect its independence and strengthen its whole-of-government role; and
- embed design quality, public value and long-term community outcomes early across housing, transport, health, civic infrastructure, public open space, precincts and major government projects.

This initiative is supported by the following allied built environment institutes. A joint letter was submitted in August 2026, with co-signatories including:

- Australian Institute of Architects
- Planning Institute of Australia Victoria
- Australian Institute of Landscape Architects Victoria
- Urban Design Forum Australia

1.2 Secure ongoing funding for Open House Melbourne. Open House Melbourne plays a vital public role in opening architecture, design and the built environment to broader audiences. Through tours, talks, events and public programming, it builds design literacy, strengthens community engagement and helps Victorians understand how good design shapes more liveable, inclusive and sustainable places. The Victorian Chapter has already committed $6,000 in funding to support Open House Melbourne programming and co-hosted the **Density Done Well** programme that focused on how housing design can support liveable, sustainable and connected neighbourhoods across apartments, social housing, build-to-rent communities, medium-density housing and urban villages.

We will engage with key stakeholders to request that the Victorian Government:

- commit to stable, long-term funding for Open House Melbourne;
- support its continued delivery of public programs, building tours, talks and design engagement initiatives across Victoria; and
- recognise Open House Melbourne as a key public-interest partner in improving design literacy and community understanding of the built environment.

1.3 Protect the integrity and independence of the Architects Registration Board of Victoria (ARBV). The ARBV is a specialist, self-funded regulator that protects consumers, maintains professional standards, supports the registration and accreditation framework, and underpins public confidence in architectural services. Following the Silver report, the Architects Act Regulatory Impact Statement and the exposure draft reform process, the Institute, through the Practice of Architecture Committee, made a detailed submission opposing any move that would weaken profession-specific regulation or subsume the ARBV into a generic licensing model.

A joint letter prepared and sent by the Institute, ACA and ArchiTeam set out a united profession position that argued that any reform must preserve independent decision-making, profession-specific expertise, self-funding through registration fees, and Victoria's alignment with national

registration, accreditation and mutual recognition frameworks. It also sought direct consultation with the Institute, ACA, ArchiTeam, the ARBV and relevant departments before any transfer model is finalised, together with clear transitional advice confirming that regulatory arrangements remain business as usual unless formally changed.

This advocacy has already delivered a meeting with Minister Staikos, attended by the Institute, ACA and ArchiTeam, the Government advised that the ARBV is intended to transfer into the proposed Business and Professions Regulator under Consumer Affairs, but that its form and function are not intended to change. Members are expected to have an opportunity to help shape the transfer and final model. A joint Department of Consumer Affairs and Department of Transport and Planning consultation with the Institute, ACA and ArchiTeam is expected before caretaker, with any formal transition unlikely to take effect within the next 12 months.

The Institute has also maintained direct discussions with the ARBV throughout this process. These discussions have focused on the proposed transfer of ARBV functions into the broader Business and Professions Regulator, the need to preserve the ARBV's specialist role and independence, and the importance of ensuring member concerns are represented as the reform process develops.

We will engage with key stakeholders to request that the Victorian Government:

- preserve the ARBV's specialist architectural expertise, independent decision-making, complaints handling, disciplinary functions, professional standards and public protection role;
- ensure any transfer to a broader regulator retains profession-specific governance, transparent accountability and self-funding arrangements;
- maintain Victoria's alignment with national registration, mutual recognition and accreditation frameworks so Victorian architects are not disadvantaged interstate or internationally;
- formally consult with the Institute, ACA, ArchiTeam, ARBV and relevant departments before any reform model is finalised; and
- provide clear transitional guidance so members, practices and consumers understand that regulatory arrangements remain business as usual unless formally advised otherwise.

Pillar 2: Legislating the Value of Good Design

Good design enables essential infrastructure that improves liveability, affordability, climate resilience, productivity and long-term value.

Victoria's housing, infrastructure and climate challenges require design quality to be embedded from the start. Architect-led design can help deliver homes and public buildings that are faster to approve, cheaper to run, adaptable over time and better aligned with community, accessibility, heritage and climate outcomes.

Design-led approaches support more efficient housing delivery by enabling repeatable, high-quality typologies, stronger planning certainty, improved use of local materials and better whole-of-life value for government, consumers and communities.

Decisions made early shape cost, speed, quality and long-term performance. Investing in design upfront reduces delay, waste and risk.

Policy asks of government

2.1 Reform Victoria's public procurement system to prioritise quality, long-term value and local capability. Victorian taxpayers and ratepayers deserve procurement practices that prioritise better value, faster delivery, stronger regional economies, support for small business and higher-quality public assets. Current procurement settings can place disproportionate weight on lowest fee rather than capability, design quality and long-term outcomes. This can reduce quality, increase lifecycle costs and diminish public value.

While broader contract and procurement reform is required to treat professions equitably, the following recommendations are critical to embedding the value of good design in Victorian projects:

1. Mandate quality-based procurement.
2. Embed architects and design expertise from project inception.
3. Eliminate unpaid tender design work.
4. Reduce instances of projects being re-tendered after early design stages to obtain lower fees.
5. Eliminate unfair contract terms at inception and at point of novation

Architects and consultants are frequently required to undertake significant design work during procurement processes without compensation, creating waste and discouraging participation by smaller firms. Procurement requirements and panel structures can also make large public projects less accessible to smaller, emerging and regional practices.

We will engage with key stakeholders to request that both the Victorian Government and Local Governement embed best-practice contracts and procurement principles across public projects, including through professional development content for government audiences.

2.2 Build on Density Done Well to support better quality housing in established areas and inform discussions on legislative change.
The Victorian Chapter has demonstrated leadership through the Density Done Well exhibition, which showcased 30 architect-designed Victorian housing projects and has been used by government agencies to inform housing and activity centre discussions across the state, from its initial launch at Parliament House through to subsequent exhibitions with Open House Melbourne (OHM) as a public-interest platform for design literacy, advocacy and community engagement.

The Density Done Well program delivered the following opportunities and exposure:

- Demonstrated architect-led housing outcomes through public programming with key local government stakeholders, including the City of Boroondara and Hawthorn Arts Centre;
- Elevated the Institute's housing advocacy during the July Open House Melbourne Festival weekend through a visible public program at local civic venues;
- Strengthened local government engagement by positioning Density Done Well for council-hosted programming and future municipal collaboration; and
- Reinforced the case for ongoing Open House Melbourne funding by showing its value in connecting design, councils and community audiences.

Victoria still faces a housing supply challenge, but growth must also deliver liveability, sustainability and long-term public value. Density Done Well shows how well-designed medium- and higher-density housing can support affordability, productivity, reduced cost of living, health outcomes, walkability, social connection, ageing in place and climate resilience.

Recent planning changes may affect housing quality, though their impact is not yet clear. The proposal is to extend the Density Done Well dialogue to assess those impacts and inform future legislative change.

2.3 Modernise heritage policy for adaptive reuse

Heritage is essential infrastructure for the future. Existing buildings and places are valuable resources that contribute to climate resilience, housing delivery, economic productivity and the creation of distinctive, liveable communities. The retention, adaptation and reuse of existing buildings is one of the most effective ways to reduce embodied carbon, minimise construction waste and retain the cultural, environmental and economic value already embedded in our cities and towns.

Victoria's heritage places contribute significantly to local identity, tourism, investment confidence and community wellbeing. They provide character and continuity in a rapidly changing environment, helping create places that people value and identify with. As governments seek to address housing affordability, climate change and productivity challenges, heritage should be recognised as part of the solution rather than a constraint to growth.

Adaptive reuse demonstrates how heritage conservation and contemporary development objectives can work together to deliver sustainable outcomes. Well-designed heritage projects can support additional housing, new economic uses and revitalised public spaces while retaining the qualities that make places unique. However, regulatory complexity, inconsistent decision-making and a lack of clear policy direction can create uncertainty for building owners, investors and communities, discouraging the retention and reuse of existing buildings.

There is an opportunity for Victoria to modernise its heritage framework by better integrating heritage, planning, housing and climate objectives. A renewed policy approach should recognise the role of adaptive reuse in reducing emissions, supporting housing choice, strengthening local economies and delivering high-quality places. This includes creating clearer pathways for adaptation and encouraging innovative design solutions that balance heritage values with contemporary needs.

We will engage with key stakeholders to request that the Victorian Government:

- Recognise adaptive reuse as a key climate action, housing and circular economy strategy within planning and heritage policy;
- Improve alignment between planning and heritage approval processes to reduce duplication, delay and uncertainty;
- Develop clear state-wide guidance that supports well-designed adaptive reuse outcomes;
- Introduce incentives that encourage the retention and reuse of existing buildings, particularly for housing, community and employment-generating uses; and
- Support research and data collection that measures the environmental, economic and social benefits of adaptive reuse and building retention.

Pillar 3: Embedding Sustainability and Climate Resilience

The built environment must reduce emissions, protect communities and restore environmental systems.

Victoria's climate targets require buildings and infrastructure to move beyond minimum compliance. Architects can help deliver low-carbon, climate-resilient and resource-efficient outcomes when sustainability is embedded early in planning, procurement, design, construction and operation.

This requires performance-based regulation, whole-of-life carbon thinking, circular construction systems, adaptive reuse, nature-positive design and stronger accountability through delivery.

Architects are essential to transforming Victoria's built environment for net zero, climate resilience and long-term adaptation.

Policy asks of government

3.1 Adopt a Reuse First strategy for the built environment. Victoria cannot afford to keep throwing away valuable buildings and materials while facing a housing shortage, rising construction costs and increasing waste. A practical Reuse First approach would unlock housing through adaptive reuse, support local manufacturing through recycled materials and reduce unnecessary demolition.

This should focus on regulation, procurement and planning reform, including expanding the principles of Recycled First beyond transport infrastructure to schools, hospitals, social housing, government offices and public infrastructure.

We will engage with key stakeholders to request that the Victorian Government:

- adopt a Reuse First strategy that supports more homes, less waste, lower construction costs and local manufacturing;
- modernise building regulations to move beyond a minimum-standard mindset toward long-term resource productivity;
- extend recycled and circular material procurement requirements beyond transport infrastructure; and
- coordinate existing government spending, including waste and recycling programs, sustainability programs, manufacturing support and clean economy investment, to support circular built environment outcomes.

This would ideally be supported by the development of events targeted at both members and stakeholders showcasing the benefits of adaptive re-use as a base case position, and linking in with the national work underway on the Carbon College.

3.2 Mandate energy adaptation of public infrastructure across sectors. Hospitals, schools, TAFEs and universities should be treated as critical climate infrastructure, not simply public buildings. Climate risk information should be embedded into the planning, design, procurement and upgrade of health and education assets.

Every public building should work harder for Victorians and be capable of operating during prolonged heatwaves, bushfire smoke events, severe storms, flooding and energy disruptions. Climate-resilient public buildings protect essential services, reduce future operating costs and avoid higher retrofit costs in coming decades.

We will engage with key stakeholders to request that the Victorian Government:

- require new public assets, including hospitals, schools and office buildings, to prioritise full electrification, with limited, evidence-based exemptions where essential services cannot yet be electrified;
- support staged electrification pathways for existing public buildings, recognising site, infrastructure, cost, funding and service-continuity constraints;
- embed climate risk information into planning, design, procurement and upgrade processes; and
- treat climate-resilient hospitals, schools and universities as preventative health, education and community infrastructure.

Authorised by Royal Australian Institute of Architects, 41 Exhibition St, Melbourne