

## Residential areas design/planning notes- Creative innovation and the future:

### Background synopsis.-

Recently over 130 mainly professional people attended a new style open ' futures' Forum on all aspects of Strategic Planning, where the discussion agenda was self-generated for one full day, in self-organised groups all creatively focussed on coping with the future and adapting to change in WA. Those participating were from backgrounds representing virtually every collective functional activity in the State that provides services to the public and community.-

It was reassuring to note that there was genuine creative cross-sectoral enthusiasm to identify and share perspectives on problems and to creatively search for potential solutions - towards a challenging and exciting future for WA.

However, relevant here to our Website, ( **Planning for People WA**) a high proportion of discussion groups recognised vital concern for 'real people' in the community, as facing unprecedented change in practically every aspect of their lives – e.g. at home; work; essential travel; leisure options; health and welfare; and education (both initial and continuing through life) .

Importantly there was major concern about personal environmental issues that impact directly on everyone. Particularly the consequences of technological advancements that are making mentally compelling personal internet devices a primary life focus for all ages – resulting in much less physical and inter-personal activity and unhealthy indoor-focussed lifestyles.

This impact was noted to be especially negative for children and requires **major revisions** in the approach by the overall Planning system and commercial property developers. E.g. to both Guidelines and outcome priorities, particularly in terms of site land-utilisation and disposition of services: - Such revisions to focus much more comprehensive design/planning effort in responding to obvious 'Community needs' in residential area development (in contrast to current outcomes that repetitive blanket coverage of standard house types on ever-smaller blocks typically provide).

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***The following notes were assembled from many discussions, those relating in this case particularly to residential development, may assist creative thinking by other people. - (In no particular order of priority)-***

1. There is a need to acknowledge and re-assert the role of local government - in being the closest level of government to the people. The concept of people being the essential stakeholders in their future should be further extended by local authorities being formally expected to positively initiate and manage much higher levels of local community social interaction in all localities within their boundaries – not limited to calling for submissions on proposed developments they were not previously aware of.

2. At sub-division level, the objective must be to encourage through revised Planning guidelines community interaction in a safe, desirable environment and provide more useable open spaces/parks throughout and also distributed retail and social points. Young families under heavy cost/ income

pressure and the financially disadvantaged, may not have the means to provide pleasant outside spaces but certainly benefit from them. These all need to be managed and guaranteed available and operational as soon as sections of sub-division are occupied – not left to chance. This can be more easily done by ‘bottom-up’ involvement of community/ residents in advance – in local planning priority and direction- setting for precincts and hubs through facilitated workshops and other imaginative feedback-seeking mechanisms.

3. There needs to be, appropriate (in the broad sense) affordable accommodation (not 4x2 homes) that facilitate social integration, inclusivity, equity and diversity. This way of thinking can lead to ‘hubs’ being reinforced with a broader cross-section of owners and residents.

4. Liveability needs to be ensured for all age demographics (and in outer Regions focus on the ‘missing generation’ 15-35 that for instance tend to leave and not return).

5. Unrelieved ‘ribbon development’ particularly along road traffic routes (+coast and waterways) has been known for over 50 years to be both socially and economically unsatisfactory planning, yet is still a general feature of sanctioned residential development in WA - why? (Higher densities should nevertheless be encouraged close to interchange points along railway lines.)

6. Much more flexibility in zoning/ density is required to meet social and site conditions. Diversity must be encouraged in housing – a mix of larger homes, smaller units and retirement provision are all needed to create inclusive, vibrant communities with a sense of place and belonging.

7. Walkability is critical for both access to community hubs and habitual exercise - both for young families and other people with financial hardship. This can be a step towards reducing multiple car ownership and higher costs of living otherwise involved – as well as contributing to reducing road traffic congestion. WAPC could usefully ‘mandate’ corner stores and social activity hubs to provide walkable access for day to day convenience goods - and community interaction, in new residential development planning.

8. The current ‘Liveable Neighbourhood’ Guidelines do assist broad subdivision planning to some extent, but do not adequately explore a wide variety of contemporary design/planning aspects particularly related to changes in community need; and need to be more regularly updated and revised. Similarly the ‘Landscape design’ Guidelines do not venture professionally into fully urban landscapes and a companion Guideline should be produced for that purpose.

9. Commercial developers need to change their subdivision thinking and have the will to contribute infrastructure; create a sense of place and community. The Planning regulatory system should be revised to secure positive means to make that happen. Local government should be given the resources and capacity to intervene if necessary to screen out those developers who do not demonstrate that will.

10. Local schools – (including pre-schools) are essential to be included and ‘walk-ably’ accessible for young growing families. But they do face particular problems of land-take, particularly in sprawling low density localities where future school expansion will be predictably needed to meet expanding age populations. Multi-level development is feasible if designed-for in advance. Multi-purpose external open space, library/media, sports facilities etc. can also be shared with their local community, but must have

genuine community involvement and secure means of shared/joint management put in place at the outset.

11. The lack of a clear planning process and a State based framework for natural resource management has resulted in a simplistic level of consideration of natural resource management in State and regional planning. Current environmental degradation through planned development, including for major infrastructure, must be directly confronted. Commercial developers must be obliged, particularly in new Residential Development, to recognise natural environment and features as a positive asset to the client community, rather than a hindrance.

12. Inadequate institutional knowledge exists in all Planning Departments on - Natural Resource Management, ecosystems, ecological services, biodiversity, strategic environmental assessments, environmental processes and cumulative impacts.

13. Biodiversity protection and conservation must be methodically reconciled with population growth and resultant development needs. Community discussion and planning importantly should confront and debate future 'values' rather than only narrowly conceived 'initial cost' as at present. Rectifying the progressive costs of degradation can be extremely expensive; and recovery of damaged ecosystems (that exist as free assets to the community) is often impossible.

14. Community engagement needs to be community driven and actively sponsored locally by Local Authorities. Genuine engagement means 'listening' to people before/ during / after - development projects.

15. There is a need to shift the formal planning system mindset to listening to people and be prepared to re-align directions. Local governments need to be positively encouraged (e.g. by WAPC) to go further than what is minimally required in legal frameworks, where that is likely to lead to outcomes more relevant to local community and site circumstances.

16. Young people need to be involved, (planning is a legacy to them), and what do they think? How do planning decision makers capture the high level of engagement they have in social media? There is a need for decision-makers to measure and benchmark engagement levels with the young people and the community generally.

17. To get people off the sidelines and 'into the game', can reduce scatter-gun criticism and get everyone on the same page, working towards the same goals. Initiatives can be actively assisted by Local Authorities such as; - promoting community get-togethers/ street parties/ creating and facilitating community meeting spaces - and many more. Face to face informal involvement with e.g. Councillors brings people and their representatives closer together and aids understanding. – Communication by advertisements, letters and emails are inadequate in a world where practical and personal life-challenges to individuals and families are changing ever more rapidly.

18. The effects of social isolation breed anti-social responses; and even petty crime amongst young people; who form peer-group gangs because they feel excluded and are not helped to feel part of an inclusive local community. Planning policy makers cannot escape a share in responsibility for this

deterioration - that can be traced back to neglect to include professional social psychologists in Planning policy development teams.

19. Developers need to engage with local communities much more positively prior to application stage and be obliged to demonstrate listening and reflecting local opinions in developments, not just the obligatory 'informing'. Planning officers in Local authorities should also participate similarly.

20. Governments should facilitate and put ownership into the community for community projects etc. and adapt their organisations to include social engagement capacity-building as a 'quality assurance' corporate objective. Educating the community so they understand planning in general; why consultation is necessary – and educating planners on how best to engage with community; should be sub-sets of that corporate objective.

(Note lessons from how Emergency management and threats of change to status-quo, like Local Government Reform - bring people together and participating - in being prepared.) These are all components of discovering what drives people to participate and will help to dispel false presumptions - in both directions.

21. Since commercial developers generally do not have an acceptable track record in providing balanced creative community planning and design on residentially zoned land. WAPC should consider a change to the planning system whereby independent site assessment teams take up preliminary neighbourhood plan formation with a creative community-building objective, before developers become engaged. Professional multi-discipline planning teams also available, to propose densities and layouts appropriate to the particular form of site, consistent with WAPC demographic and economic data and with the inclusion of local Community Forums, assisted by the relevant Local Authority.

22. Such fully serviced neighbourhoods with all amenities at the hub are reminiscent of the radiating green-walkway finger plans of Stockholm, retaining connection with natural areas – a principle underlying the Perth Network City strategy - that was to conserve and even create green belts/ natural areas throughout the metro area.

23. Regulations in some cases as applied to residential area planning are currently too onerous and prescriptive, lacking in common sense and inhibiting community-forming innovation. Cluster type innovative solutions would give space for vegetation, provide shade and reduce air conditioning loads/costs, common use green/ natural areas possibly acting as wild-life corridors, vegetable gardens and places for kids play. – All proven to be important for mental health and well-being.

**24. Taken together, all the above could improve residential planning for the future immeasurably. Connecting all these ideas together, could maintain a variety of densities, open/ green/natural spaces and sustainable design with a future community-creating objective. All combined for a win-win outcome in Planning for People in WA.**

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