
STAGE ONE OF DESIGN WA

INFORMATION FOR DECISION MAKERS

MAY 2019

The following information pack has been prepared to assist Decision Makers in understanding and applying the Design WA Stage One policies. This document has been produced by the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage.

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What is Design WA?

Design WA is a project that addresses design quality and built form outcomes in Western Australia.

It supports the delivery of broad economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits that derive from good design outcomes and facilitates consistent and robust design review and assessment processes across the State.

It is founded on a performance based approach that offers greater flexibility and promotes positive development outcomes. This requires the balancing of competing objectives, understanding the context of a proposal and interrelationships rather than checklist compliance.

Stage One of Design WA is focussed on the development of apartments. The foundation of Design WA is *State Planning Policy 7.0 Design of the Built Environment*. The Stage One suite of policies took effect following gazettal on 24 May 2019.

For further information:

- Release Media Statement
<https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2019/02/New-rules-to-enforce-better-apartment-quality-and-open-space.aspx>
- State Planning Policy 7.0 – Design of the Built Environment
<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/designwa>
- Design WA Stage One Introductory YouTube video
<https://youtu.be/stMOWSdhipA>

Why is it important to link Urban Planning with Design?

Improved links between planning and design are important as it provides better outcomes for the built environment, with a greater emphasis on not just quantity and compliance, but quality and outcome. To date, poor development outcomes have contributed to community angst about infill. A State government response to support greater housing choice and diversity has been developed providing options for members of the community who prefer this type of housing. This includes members of the community who desire to:

- downsize and stay in the community in which they already live;
- live closer to their workplace, reducing commuting time and prioritising recreation and family time; and
- be in closer proximity to vibrant places such as restaurants and shops, complementing individual lifestyle choice.

Perth has grown to over 2 million people, however this growth has predominantly been in the form of detached suburban houses. As a result, the city presently stretches over 150km from Two Rocks in the north to Mandurah in the south.

There are challenges associated with this form of development, as it:

- Makes the provision of public transport more difficult in low density environments – reducing incidental physical activity;
- Is resource intensive – costing more to build, service and maintain particularly from the perspectives of water consumption and energy use;
- Contributes to further traffic congestion – leading to unproductive time for commerce, and less time with family and friends;
- Is not necessarily suitable for the needs of the residents;
- Requires the clearing of bushland and productive agricultural land for residential housing; and
- Transfers the burden of addressing these issues onto future generations.

For further information:

- Perth and Peel @ 3.5 million
<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/perth-and-peel-@-3-5-million>

What is good design?

Good design is not a subjective idea; it can be defined and measured. Importantly, notions of design quality extend beyond taste, style and appearance to encompass functionality, sustainability, response to context, structural integrity, flexibility in use, and cost efficiency both during construction and over the life of the building through reduced operating costs.

Good design endeavours to reconcile multiple concurrent and often competing objectives, and outcomes vary according to the circumstances of each site and project. Greater emphasis and priority is now being placed on design quality and built form outcomes across the State, building on planning objectives of amenity and context.

For further information:

- Page ii – State Planning Policy 7.3 Volume 2: Apartment Design Policy
<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/designwa>

Step change – Compliance to Performance

Planning can often be focused on compliance with specific standards and metrics, and measures proposals against quantitative standards. There are limits to the effectiveness of this approach and it has become apparent that the built outcomes currently being produced do not meet the expectations of the community as a consequence.

Design WA seeks to address this by refocusing the assessment of development proposals against design principles and objectives, to ensure better outcomes that respond to their urban context.

This performance-based approach supports flexibility and innovative practices that were often not achieved under Part 6 of the former State Planning Policy 3.1 R-Codes.

The shift from a checklist 'deemed-to-comply' approach will require a period of adjustment as existing practices and process will need to be modified.

To date, the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage (DPLH) and the Western Australian Planning Commission have been engaging heavily with practitioners including local government planners, architects, designers, building professionals, and developers to assist in the adjustment to the changes introduced through the new policies. Stakeholders have been engaged through face to face meetings, industry group events and training courses. Resources are also provided on the DPLH website including templates, frequently asked questions and case studies.

Beyond this, social media has been used to communicate with industry professionals and the broader community. A series of videos have also been prepared to assist all stakeholders understand the new policy approach. These videos are available to view on the DPLH website.

This is the beginning of an extended conversation and requires all parties to adopt a genuinely collaborative approach. Ongoing support is being provided by DPLH to ensure this period of adjustment occurs as smoothly as possible.

For further information:

- Page iv and v – State Planning Policy 7.3 Volume 2: Apartment Design Policy <https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/designwa>
- Design WA videos <https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/design-wa-videos>

The 10 Design Principles

To assist with understanding the performance based approach of Design WA, 10 Design Principles have been incorporated in *State Planning Policy 7.0 – Design of the Built Environment*.

- 1) Context and character;
- 2) Landscape quality;
- 3) Built form and scale;
- 4) Functionality and build quality;
- 5) Sustainability
- 6) Amenity
- 7) Legibility
- 8) Safety
- 9) Community

10) Aesthetics

These 10 Design Principles are universal to all built form proposals. They are explained within *State Planning Policy 7.0 – Design of the Built Environment* but are broadly translated to:

- i) Well-designed homes which fit into the local neighbourhood;
- ii) Well-designed homes incorporate quality landscaping;
- iii) A house or apartment should be sized to suit its location;
- iv) Well-designed homes should have a functional layout and use quality materials that will last;
- v) Well-designed homes which minimise energy use and support the environment;
- vi) Well-designed homes are comfortable and welcoming places;
- vii) Well-designed homes are easy to navigate – even for first-time guests and visitors;
- viii) Well-designed homes feel safe, day and night;
- ix) Well-designed homes which respond to community needs; and
- x) Well-designed homes which are aesthetically pleasing and inviting.

This plain-spoken approach is outlined in the guide “*What to look for when choosing a well-designed house or apartment*” guide published by the Department, available on the Design WA website. It is a key tool in explaining to the community and non-built environment professionals the concepts and considerations of good design and has previously been made available during the 2017 and 2018 Open House Perth events.

For further information:

- Schedule 1 – State Planning Policy 7.0 – Design of the Built Environment
<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/designwa>
- “What to look for when choosing a well-designed house or apartment” Guide
<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/designwa>

Apartment Design Policy

The main focus of Stage One of Design WA is *State Planning Policy 7.3 Residential Design Codes Volume 2 – Apartments*, commonly referred to as the *Apartment Design Policy*.

This policy applies to multiple dwellings in areas coded R40 and above, mixed-use developments and activity centres. It effectively replaces Part 6 of the existing R-Codes. As Volume 2 of the R-Codes, it is read directly into Schemes across the State and becomes immediately operational upon gazettal on 24 May 2019 at which time Part 6 will cease to be effective.

Please note that Part 5 of the R-Codes, which relates to design elements for all single house(s) and grouped dwellings and multiple dwellings in areas coded less than R40 will continue operating, and has become SPP 7.3 Volume 1.

No technical changes have been made to Volume 1, though it has been re-published to assist ease of use.

For further information:

- FAQ Design WA Website
<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/designwa>
- Page ii SPP7.3 Vol.2 Apartment Design Policy
<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/designwa>
- Page 3 SPP7.3 Vol.2 Apartment Design Policy
<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/designwa>
- SPP7.3 Vol.1 Residential Design Codes
<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/rcodes>

Discretion and Design Review

It is likely that aspects and some content of the reports as well as some of the supporting information provided to decisions makers – including Responsible Authority Reports – will change. This might include additional reports, plans or diagrams as well as recommendations from a Design Review Panel where one is in place and a recommendation is warranted.

Some templates have been prepared to assist local governments in reporting outcomes of design review, and these may be customised as required to reflect local attributes, requirements and planning frameworks.

A key change will be a shift to the consideration of issues in a more interrelated manner against objectives – in contrast to the previous often linear manner against specific clauses or measures. An example of this can be seen in *Element 3.3 Tree canopy and deep soil areas*. The consideration of this Element cannot be undertaken in isolation as it is closely related to Elements:

- *3.4 Communal open space*
- *4.12 Landscape design*
- *4.16 Water management and conservation*

This list is not exhaustive as trees and gardens provide habitat for fauna, shade, stormwater management and micro-climate benefits as well as improving apartment outlook and amenity. As such, it is anticipated that assessments undertaken and reports prepared for the consideration by Decision Makers will be reflective of outcomes – which again varies due to the unique attributes of each site and its associated context.

Positive built form outcomes will have to show the ability to balance competing priorities and respond to context.

To support with the design evaluation, Design Review Panels can assist in considering the various design variables. Design Review Panels are:

- Established and administered by local government to provide design advice to support decision making;

- Independent, to provide fair, reasonable and professional design advice with regard to SPP 7.0 and the local planning framework;
- Advisory in nature – they do not hold not decision-making powers; and
- Only one part of the overall evaluation by a Decision Maker – additional planning considerations such as engineering, natural hazards like bushfire or flooding, environmentally sensitive areas etc. also form part of the decision making process.

A Design Review Panel conducts an evaluation in accordance with its Terms of Reference against the SPP 7.0 Design Principles to provide advice on the design quality of the proposal. This advice is just one of several matters that the decision maker needs to consider when making a decision.

Please note that for significant proposals, or proposals of strategic importance, the design review process may be undertaken by the State Design Review Panel. The State Design Review Panel is administered by the Office of the Government Architect and chaired by the Government Architect. Further information can be found by contacting the Office of the Government Architect.

For further information:

- Page 36 SPP7.3 Vol.2 Apartment Design Policy
<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/designwa>
- Design Review Guide and accompanying templates
<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/designwa>
- Website of the Office of the Government Architect
<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/OGA>

Objective and Evidence Based Decision Making

Where an application is to be determined using the Apartment Design Policy, all assessment is undertaken against the objectives of the policy, ensuring apartments:

- Provide residential development of an appropriate design for the intended residential purpose, land tenure, density, place context and scheme objectives;
- Encourage design consideration of the social, environmental and economic opportunities possible from new housing, and an appropriate response to local context;
- Encourage design that considers and respects local heritage and culture; and
- Facilitate residential development that offers future residents the opportunities for better living choices and affordability when seeking a home, as well as reduced operational costs.

Decision Makers play a critical role in the planning, governance and development process. It is critical that decisions are made on proposals that:

- Encourage design that is responsive to site, size, locality and geometry of the development site;
- Allow for variety and diversity of housing choices where it can be demonstrated this better reflects context or scheme objectives;
- Ensure scheme objectives are satisfied; and
- Ensure certainty in the timely and consistent determination of proposals across State and local government.

Although the onus is on the proponent to demonstrate how each of the Elements Objectives have been met, the Decision Maker will need to carefully consider the assessment report evaluating the proposal against the Element Objectives of the Apartment Design Policy, in addition to the operative planning scheme and relevant policies. It is important that the Acceptable Outcome pathway is not interpreted as a 'deemed-to-comply' list but rather that the focus is on determining the extent to which the proposal has met the objectives of each Element.

The process of deliberation will need to consider the competing objectives for the site and to evaluate the extent to which the proposed development considers the context and priorities.

Robust decision making should be supported by evidence and justification. Like the request for the demonstration of the "thought process" by Proponents in the design of their proposal, Decision Makers should also demonstrate evidence of this as part of decision making.

Decisions that are supported by evidence and justification enable Proponents and the community to better understand the reasoning behind the decision. This will allow an appreciation of how and why a particular decision was reached. Proponents are also then more likely to be receptive where modifications are requested or required. This approach will assist the Decision Maker in the event of a subsequent application for review of the decision to the State Administrative Tribunal.

For Further Information:

- Page 2 – SPP7.3 Apartment Design Policy
<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/designwa>

Community Benefit

The community is a key beneficiary following the introduction of the new policies as new buildings will be designed in consideration of their surroundings. Depending on the situation, sometimes its preferential that new development resembles (or blends in) with its surroundings while in others, the development should have its own distinct character and appearance. This requires proposals to consider, respond and interface with the surroundings ensuring greater consideration of current and future aspirations of its location.

When apartments are well-designed, there are improvements in residents' quality of life as well as reductions in maintenance and operational costs. With more natural light, greater energy efficiency, enjoyable outdoor spaces, gardens and other amenities that are constructed to last, new apartments will be able to adapt over time to meet the needs of future generations.

The benefits of good design ultimately go beyond each building with well-designed homes contributing to better streets, neighbourhoods and making more liveable towns and cities.

For further information:

- "What to look for when choosing a well-designed house or apartment" Guide
<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/designwa>
- Design WA Stage One YouTube video
<https://youtu.be/stMOWSdhipA>

FURTHER INFORMATION

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