



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

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Mr Peter Monks
Director, Planning and Development
Urban Design Framework Comments
City of Perth
GPO Box C120
PERTH WA 6839

Dear Mr Monks

Comment on the Urban Design Framework

I was appointed as Western Australia's (WA) inaugural Commissioner for Children and Young People in December 2007 pursuant to the Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006 (the Act).¹ Under this Act, I have responsibility for advocating for the half a million Western Australian citizens under the age of 18 and for promoting strategies and outcomes that enhance the wellbeing of children and young people.

Under section 19(g) of the Act, I have responsibility to monitor and review written laws, draft laws, policies, practices and services affecting children and young people.² Section 20 provides that in carrying out all of my functions I must have particular regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and to those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged for any reason.³ The Act provides that I must observe four guiding principles:

- Children and young people are entitled to live in a caring and nurturing environment and to be protected from harm and exploitation.
- The contributions made by children and young people to the community should be recognised for their value and merit.
- The views of children and young people on all matters affecting them should be given serious consideration and taken into account.
- Parents, families and communities have the primary role in safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of their children and young people and should be supported in carrying out their role.

¹ Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006, WA.
http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/wa/consol_act/cfcaypa2006418/

² Ibid, p10.

³ Ibid, p11.

Caring for the future growing up today

I am also required to have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and the best interests of children and young people must be my paramount consideration.⁴

It is with these responsibilities in mind that I submit comment on the draft Urban Design Framework to ensure the needs and views of children and young people are considered. The comments I have made aim to highlight issues for children and young people in the built environment, and to encourage organisations to consider the needs and views of children and young people as it steers public policy into the future.

Background

The built environment refers to everything around us that is constructed or adapted by humans and includes all buildings, structures and spaces where people live, learn, work and play. Houses, shops, schools, parks, roads and rail, recreational and community facilities all make up the built environment.

The physical surroundings in which children and young people grow, influences and shapes their interaction, development, and experience of life into adulthood. Consequently, the built environment impacts in some way on all children and young people.

Given this widespread impact, the built environment is a new portfolio area that my Office is currently focussing on. My particular focus on the built environment is to encourage the development of child friendly communities where children, young people, and their families – as well as the wider community – benefit from a built environment that is welcoming, fun and safe; an environment that is accessible and inclusive and that enhances the health and wellbeing of children.

There is a growing recognition that the built environment particularly influences health and active lifestyle choices, especially walking for transport, yet little is known of the effects on long-term health and behaviour. Research⁵ tells us that the design of neighbourhoods is associated with levels of walking, cycling and use of public transport, together with a sense of community, positive mental health, depression and asthma.

Key Issues

The issues associated with the built environment and more specifically the impact on children and young people are wide ranging and include:

- Health – the incidence of obesity has increased due to the physical inactivity of children, blamed in part on their environment.
- Safety – there are concerns by both children and their parents on community safety in open spaces and certain urban environments.
- Transport – the planning and design of communities has left a greater dependence on the use of cars.
- Green Spaces – planning developments lack provision of green natural open spaces in the community for children and young people to explore.

⁴ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Available: <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>

⁵ Billie Giles-Corti, Sally Kelty, Stephen Zubrick and Karen Villanueva, How important is the Built Environment?, Centre for the Built Environment and Health, School of Population Health, University of Western Australia and Centre for Developmental Health, Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, 2009

- Facilities and Services – some communities are without basic amenities. Services are often an after thought in newly developed areas.
- Lack of social interaction – all of these issues impact on the social interaction of children and young people and their development in the longer term.

Areas for Consideration

The key areas to consider in finalising the Urban Design Framework (UDF) are:

- **Development of child friendly communities** – The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child⁶ states that all children and young people have a right to a clean environment and a safe place to live. In response to the Convention, UNICEF devised a framework for defining and developing child friendly communities, the Child Friendly Cities initiative.⁷ The framework translates the process needed to implement the Convention by national government into local government action. The initiative is a system of local governance, committed to fulfilling children's rights, including their right to:
 - Influence decisions about their city
 - Express their opinion on the city they want
 - Participate in family, community and social life
 - Receive basic services such as health care and education
 - Drink safe water and have access to proper sanitation
 - Be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse
 - Walk safely in the streets on their own
 - Meet friends and play
 - Have green spaces for plants and animals
 - Live in an unpolluted environment
 - Participate in cultural and social events
 - Be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability.

The framework aims to guide cities and other systems of local governance in the inclusion of children's rights as a key component of their goals, policies, programs and structures to create urban environments that promote good health and wellbeing. It is built on the premise that "a child friendly city is a people friendly city" and a place where children feel safe and secure and are able to explore and learn about the world.

Recommendation 1: That the City of Perth consider the UNICEF framework for defining and developing child friendly communities, the 'Child Friendly Cities' initiative.

⁶ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Available: <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2ccr.htm>

⁷ UNICEF, Child Friendly Cities. Available: <http://www.childfriendlycities.org/>

- **Participation in planning** - children and young people as members of the community and users of the built environment have their own set of wants and needs yet are rarely consulted on design and planning issues. The needs of this group are different but no less important than for adults. The active participation of children and young people in the design and planning of communities and public open spaces is vital in ensuring the aims of the UDF are met – to make the city more active and functional and improve its attractiveness as a place to live, visit and do business.

A research report by the University of Melbourne and Victoria Health ‘Vertical Living Kids’⁸ provides a snapshot of children and young people’s views of living in high rises. The objective of the report is to provide advice in creating supportive high rise environments for children living in Melbourne. One young person in the consultation, an 11 year old girl living in a private high rise explains: *“I don’t usually go down to the courtyard because people don’t like it when you play games and be loud. And there aren’t many kids in the building.”*

The report makes a number of recommendations to State and Local Governments, including that consultation take place with children and young people and action be taken on the findings. The aim being to inform the development of child friendly city policies and assist in developing inner and central high rise environments that are responsive to children’s needs.

My Office has produced a participation guide⁹ to assist organisations to involve children and young people in decision making about services and activities. This guide details the steps to be taken in the participation process and identifies a number of ‘best practice’ examples to draw on. The NSW Commission for Children and Young People developed ‘built4kids’,¹⁰ a guide to specifically increase the participation of children in planning built environments.

There are also other resources to consider, in particular, the UNESCO ‘Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth’¹¹ manual designed to conceptualise, structure and facilitate the participation of young people in the community development process. It is targeted at urban planners, municipal officials, community development staff, non-governmental organisations, educators, youth-serving agencies, youth advocates, and others involved in the community development process. The manual’s core ideas and methods have been field-tested in a wide range of urban settings in both developing and industrialised cities through the work of the UNESCO ‘Growing Up in Cities’ project. Case studies from project sites help to demonstrate the methods in action and show how they can be customised to meet local needs. They provide lessons and insights to help ensure a successful project, and highlight the universal applicability and value of young people’s participation.

Recommendation 2: The City of Perth consult and actively engage with children and young people as part of the ongoing development of the Urban Design Framework and in implementing the Vision for Perth 2029, and considers their views in all decision-making.

⁸ Dr Carolyn Whitzman, Ms Dana Mizrahi, Vertical Living Kids, University of Melbourne, 2010

⁹ Involving Children and Young People, Participation Guidelines, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, 2009

¹⁰ built4kids, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2009

¹¹ David Driskell, Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth: A manual for participation, UNESCO, 2002

- **Community infrastructure and accommodation** – the City of Perth identified in the UDF the need to increase density of the city centre. In order to meet this need the City of Perth must consider the upfront provision of suitable accommodation and facilities that cater for children, young people and their families.

A recent presentation¹² based on research by the Director of the Centre for the Built Environment and Health at UWA highlights how to maximise benefits and minimise the harm in increasing the density of population in urban areas. The factors found that should be considered in urban development include:

- The location of accommodation near transit, shops and services.
- Reduce stress by avoiding noise and exposure to pollution.
- A location that engenders community engagements not social isolation.
- Open space that caters for multiple user groups and reduce conflicts between users.
- Provide a divers range of housing stock including family-sized accommodation.
- Determine what facilities are required if not already in existence such as schools and child care facilities.

In new developments it is important to consider community infrastructure in particular, school planning. In a report¹³ on lessons learnt from the development of Eco-Towns in Europe, issues such as deliverability, economic viability, building new communities and creating a sense of place are considered.

The report includes case study¹⁴ examples whereby shops and restaurants were encouraged to move in early by low or rent free periods and the use of temporary spaces. A church started off in an empty shop and schools were provided or re-provided on site to coincide with the early phases of development, and were designed to be flexible.

The report recommends¹⁵ that all communities should have a balanced population, with a mix of housing that reflects demand in the wider areas, and the community is closely engaged in building up the social infrastructure. This will be achieved through supporting development through planning the social infrastructure, such as health, education and meeting places, in parallel with the spatial masterplan. Also, providing a balanced range of tenures and house types with the ability to move easily from one to the other.

Recommendation 3: The City of Perth consider and plan for the development of the city centre for inhabitation and use by families as well as for business, workers and residents without children.

¹² Professor Billie Giles-Corti, Increasing densities: Building communities not just buildings, Centre for the Built Environment and Health, UWA, 2010. Available:

http://www.planning.wa.gov.au/2010_Increasing%20density_WAPC.ppt.pdf?id=2203

¹³ Nicholas Falk, Simon Kaplinsky, Barry Munday, Beyond Eco-towns, URBED and PRP, 2008

¹⁴ Ibid, pg18.

¹⁵ Ibid, pg25.

Conclusion

The Vision for Perth 2029 provides an exciting opportunity to help shape the city over the next two decades. I encourage the City of Perth to consider the needs of children and young people and their families.

In this submission, I have highlighted three recommendations that could assist the City of Perth to focus effectively on their needs and children and young people's.

I would be happy to discuss the content of this submission further and assist in the development of the State's capital as a child friendly city.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Scott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

MICHELLE SCOTT

Commissioner for Children and Young People WA

7 April 2010