

7.4 Quality Public Domain and Public Spaces in Yarra

Why is this important?

A well designed public domain brings comfort, safety and connectedness to its users and attractive public spaces add to the activity and vibrancy of places.

Improving the public domain in Yarra would require:

- Emphasis being given to the quality of the whole municipality, not just special places.
- Reflecting the essence of the character of inner Melbourne in the local character of individual neighbourhoods.
- Consistency in design treatment for public domain works.
- Addressing sustainability principles in the design, and promotion of environmentally sustainable technologies such as WSUD.
- Enhancing walkability and social interaction.
- Implementing accessible design principles to ensure inclusion of people with disability.
- Integrating public art with public domain improvements.

The Urban Design Plan at Section 7.1 emphasises the need for a special response to the overall public domain in Yarra. It identifies elements of Yarra's overall urban structure that require special consideration and are important for reinforcing the image and character to the City. However there are other more specific elements that contribute to the quality of Yarra's public domain which are listed below:

- Local streets
- Footpaths
- Kerb extensions
- Laneways
- Street trees, flora and fauna.
- Street furniture
- Incidental open spaces

Issues:

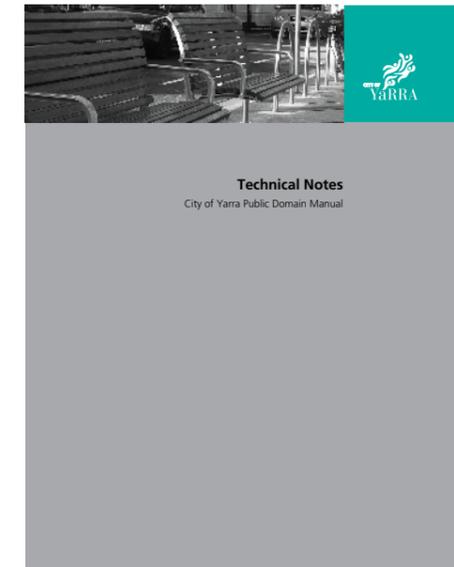
- Need for a consistent vocabulary of street furniture.
- Frequent disruption of footpaths by an increasing number of driveways.
- Poor public realm response to laneways.
- Need to maximise opportunities for small public spaces and pocket parks.
- Lack of integration of public art.
- Dominance of hard paved surfaces in urban areas and activity centres, generating heat.
- Need to identify unsafe areas for amenity improvements.
- Need for a more integrated approach to asset based capital works.
- Barriers to access of public domain, facilities and spaces by people with a disability.
- Lack of integration between government agencies for maintenance and upgrade of their assets.

What has been done?

- To guide the design of the public domain across Yarra, a Public Domain Manual is being prepared. Within the manual technical notes have been prepared for street furniture.
- Council has committed to deliver four public open spaces in four years. Public spaces at Balmain Street and Stanley Street have already been completed.

What needs to be done?

- Complete the Public Domain Manual to include paving, lighting, signage etc., seeking advice from an accredited access consultant where appropriate.
- Promote an innovative and best practice approach in public domain and public space design.
- Include ESD principles in public domain improvements.
- Implement accessible design principles to improve physical access to built environment, facilities, parks, open space, signage, roads and footpaths.
- Seek opportunities for softening of hard paved spaces wherever possible.
- Develop guidelines, policies that help avoid disruptions of footpaths.
- Seek opportunities for integrated planning, delivery and upkeep of government owned infrastructure.
- Seek opportunities for integrating public art with public domain improvement.
- Seek opportunities to provide for accessible public toilets and related signage.
- Actively promote opportunities for greening local streets.
- Promote opportunities for greening of incidental open spaces.
- Require large developments to improve the abutting public domain.
- Advocate for new common spaces in large developments that can also be used by the public.



7.5 Processes and Practices That Promote Good Design

Urban design requires a multidisciplinary response as it involves buildings, places and people. Successful implementation of the Strategy will require that Council utilises a range of tools and practices to improve the urban design outcomes in the municipality.

Tools

A range of tools is available for the planner and urban designer to assess development proposals and as tools in the negotiation to achieve good urban design outcomes.

What are the existing tools?

Existing tools include:

- Urban Design Charter: Provides a basis for good urban design in Victoria.
- Yarra Planning Scheme: Provides guidance for the built form for the City of Yarra in heritage and non heritage areas. The existing provisions provide sufficient statutory basis for planning decisions. However the drafting is repetitive and often lengthy and there is a need for changes to provide consistency between heritage and built form policy.
- Structure Plans: Provide an opportunity for addressing urban design issues, particularly in activity centres, which are implemented through the Planning Scheme.
- Urban Design Frameworks: Similar to structure plans but have a greater emphasis on built form and the design of the public domain. They have been developed for specific precincts in Yarra including town hall community hubs and precincts which are seeing considerable change. Examples are Richmond Town Hall UDF, Collingwood Town Hall UDF and the Cremorne and Church Street Precinct UDF.
- Site Specific Design Guidelines: More detailed guidelines for specific, usually larger sites and strategic redevelopment sites. They provide useful guidance in dealing with key redevelopment sites for large development proposals. Examples are the Channel Nine site, Collingwood TAFE site etc. These can also be referenced in the Planning Scheme.
- State Government's design guidelines: The State government has published a set of design guidelines for specific aspects such as for higher density residential developments, safer design, activity centres etc.
- Photo Documentation Database: Yarra has developed a database of good design examples. It is a dynamic database that can be updated from time to time to remain current and valid.
- 3D modeling: 3D modeling of development proposals has been used as an effective tool for better understanding the visual impacts of some of the larger proposals.
- There are also specific policies, strategies and local laws relating to community issues, ESD outcomes, improving access, walking, cycling, use of public transport and community health and wellbeing.
- Council's Access and Inclusion Policy and the *Difference is More Disability Action Plan 2010-2013* commits to best practice in accessibility design.

What needs to be done?

- Council consider being a signatory of the *Victorian Urban Design Charter*.
- Further work to suggest changes to the Yarra Planning Scheme in order to include objectives, design guidelines and principles consistent with this strategy. The Amendment should also provide consistency in the language and to link (where necessary) different provisions relating to design outcomes.
- Prepare urban design guidelines and urban design frameworks for large sites and areas where major change is likely to occur.
- Explore new tools such as *Do and Don'ts* to address typical urban design issues in different settings.
- Explore opportunities to actively promote inclusion of ESD principles in new development.
- Promote new tools and innovative urban design solutions to help address new community issues such as bill posting, graffiti etc.
- Promote design discussions and design awards to advocate for benefits of good design.

Practices

Design Assessment of Development Proposals

What are the existing practices?

The current practices that influence the design aspects of a new development proposals include:

- Pre application meetings with the applicant or his/her architect or consultants: Pre-application meetings are organized by statutory planners. In certain large proposals external urban design advice is sought for pre application discussions.
- Design advice from urban designers through discussions: Currently, design discussions are held on weekly basis between the statutory planners and urban designers for planning proposals requiring design advice.
- Post planning application design discussions with the applicant or his/ her architect or consultants: Statutory planners are involved in discussions with the applicant in negotiating design outcomes of the application.
- Urban design referral process: The urban designers provide urban design advice for planning applications. There are other aspects of design, such as heritage or, traffic for which individual advice is taken from subject matter experts.

What needs to be done?

- Urban designers to be regularly involved in pre application meetings.
- Urban designers to be involved early in the referral process. Their involvement at further information stage can help improve the design outcomes of the application.
- Create a 3D modelling base for the municipality to assess impact of new developments in larger context and its interface to the surrounding areas.
- All development proposals for large developments should be accompanied by an accurate 3D image.
- Integrated design advisory meetings for all key development proposals, involving different units of the Council such as urban design, traffic, heritage, strategic planning, ESD, arts and culture, open space, disability access and inclusion.
- Establish a panel of accredited access consultants in consultation with Council's Disability Advisory Committee. All large public domain improvement projects to include an access appraisal or advice from an access consultant.
- Statutory Planners to receive regular on-the-job training in relation to urban design issues.

Council's Own Building Projects

What are the existing practices?

- Relevant business units and departments of Council are involved in the development of Council facilities such as Library and Cultural Services, Youth Services, Recreation etc.
- Currently the business unit responsible for the service and Council's Building Projects and Asset Management unit have the responsibility of coordinating the design and implementation of such projects. In some cases urban design advice is sought.
- Council is actively promoting ESD outcomes through its Strategic Planning, Statutory Planning, Urban Design, Environmental Management and Recreation and Open Space Planning units.
- Under the Disability Action Plan Council is actively promoting access and inclusion outcomes for people with a disability to remove barriers to physical access and participation in the economic, cultural and social life of the community.

What needs to be done?

- Council to lead by example in its own projects demonstrating best practices.
- Council's Urban Design Unit and other units such as the Traffic, Parking, Environment, Statutory Planning (including heritage advisors) etc need to be involved early in the process.
- Adopt an integrated service delivery approach to maximise urban design benefits for various outcomes.
- Demonstrate ESD outcomes in Council buildings.
- Demonstrate access and inclusion outcomes in urban design, capital works and project planning through utilising the advice of accredited access consultants and consultation with the Disability Advisory Committee.

Public Domain Improvement Projects

What are the existing practices?

Current practice of management of public domain in Yarra includes:

- New projects
- Renewals
- Reinstatement works

Different business units in the Council are responsible for management of different assets and services.

What needs to be done?

Forward capital works planning with an integrated service delivery approach is required to improve certainty of project funding. This would result in:

- Process improvements for better project management.
- Better coordination of various Council services for development, use, upkeep and maintenance of its public spaces and assets.

8. References

The Urban Design Strategy is closely aligned with the following documents/strategies of the Council:

- Council Plan 2009-2013
- Yarra Planning Scheme
- Yarra Environment Strategy - Towards Local Sustainability 2008-2020
- Yarra Economic Strategy 2009-2013
- Tourism Strategy 2011-2016
- City of Yarra Bicycle Strategy 2010-2015
- Strategic Transport Statement 2006
- Yarra's Encouraging and Increasing Walking Strategy, 2005
- Difference is More - Disability Action Plan 2010-2013
- Yarra's Open Space Strategy
- City of Yarra Housing Strategy 2010-2013
- City of Yarra Health Plan 2009-2013
- Arts and Cultural Strategy (2011-2015)

It also supports recommendations of other strategies of the Council.