

# Design review can cut red tape



Design WA was launched at The Pocket, designed by Cameron Chisholm Nicol. Picture: Greg Hocking

Design review benefits developers, designers, councils and communities.

## STREET WISE

■ Carmel Van Ruth

There is a growing call for consistency in the approach to design review panels. Each local government DRP has formed independently, so approaches vary.

Expertise of panellists varies, the process varies, with some feeding back to planning staff and others inviting developers and designers to take part in the discussion.

Ensuring that due regard is paid to DRP reporting in development assessment panel and State Administrative Tribunal hearings is critical to providing certainty for developers. Many local governments now include provisions in their schemes to improve consistency in evaluations of design quality between DRP, DAP and SAT decision making.

The consistency and quality of existing policy is a challenge for DRPs. The former City of Vincent mayor and now McGowan Government minister Alannah MacTieran observed some years ago that the State Government's Residential Design Codes and the Building Code of Australia allowed for "some very poor" outcomes.

Local council policies on multi-residential development vary.

In 2016, the WA Planning Commission and Department of Planning Land and Heritage released their Design WA suite of draft

policies — after extensive stakeholder engagement and collaboration between the DPLH and Office of the Government Architect.

The draft defines and confirms the importance of design quality in all new development projects.

It introduces skilled evaluation expertise through design review, as a key component of the proposed design quality mechanisms. The draft SPP7 also introduces 10 design principles to guide the delivery of places that work well for all users and make a positive contribution to their locality. The draft design review guide encourages consistency in design review.

Use of design review allows the draft apartment design policy to be performance-based and outcomes-focused, offering developers flexibility. For each local government, it alleviates the need for local policies to guide general design quality previously lacking in the Residential Design Codes.

For many developers, Design WA is just business-as-usual. Others may need to pay more attention to design outcomes. Improved consistency should cut red tape.

Evidence of the positive work of DRPs are emerging through better outcomes and the benefits are now widely appreciated. Design WA offers great support for DRPs while also setting a much-needed baseline standard for liveability.

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