

HAVE YOUR SAY – PLANNING AND DESIGN CODE – COMMENTS FROM GEOFF GOODE

This Planning and Design Code represents revolution not evolution as per most if not all current local government development plans. The implementation of the Code must be completely reassessed before it can ever be released for our State local governments to apply in the real world. And, the Planning Act has to be amended first, including the changes outlined below regarding Third Party Appeal Rights and the removal of a ridiculous time limit and onerous approval outcome imposed on the panel or commission approval process. Centralist approach, top down, that completely removes the “local” from the approach; one state wide plan – coded in layers with details missing is a common theme. Noted that “Desired Outcomes” is missing and supposedly covered by various layers.

I completely support the Adelaide City Council’s consultation position as far as it can be seen with the draft of 21/2/2020. Also I offer my support to the Community Alliances SA draft submission of 22/02/2020.

My submission therefore, is not a detailed, step by step comparison as the others referred to above, have dealt pretty diligently with the Code’s shortcomings item by item. Nor is my criticism meant to be a complete rejection, there are plenty of good features, not the least being the consistency of using overlay treatments to account for variations and a computer database approach to swiftly identifying determinates applying to a proposed development application on a particular site via a transparent process that can be updated easily in the future with across the board immediacy of effect. What’s missing is the problem.

And one thing that is missing is the Third Party Appeal Rights to the Environment, Resources and Development Court for residents to exercise against exceptional development proposals. The future loss of such third-party appeal rights to adjoining owners is a most serious omission in the new Code. What if a panel or commission errs in a future assessment ruling? This loss of appeal rights has its origins in the relatively recent Planning Development and Infrastructure Act 2016, a loss that many objected to at the time, but failed to block. State Government must be persuaded to amend it. There was no good reason to abandon this level of protection to neighbours and other objectors if badly determined assessments arise. This is wrong headed and not fail safe in the case of a mistake in judgement. The proposer can of course, return with an amended application. What opportunity do the residents who will be affected have? Developers usually do not develop properties for themselves and “live with the consequences” of what may be a bad deal for the adjoining residents or the general community.

The second issue is about the imposed time limit for planning assessments under this Act. If an assessment is not completed by a very tight deadline, the plan gets automatically approved. We say good practice requires rejection rather than approval of a proposal if a determination is forced. It’s an idiotic requirement. Sound civic planning process should be the state’s ultimate goal, not just the meeting of an arbitrary timing constraint of convenience to developers.

This is the pattern we object to, the word “local” seems to have been lost in a Marxist/Leninist - bureaucratic “top down” philosophy, with the developer on top! We can only hope the Code is perfect if it is ever enacted or brought in service by some means, as there is no room for mistakes from either panel or commission!

Conclusion, the Planning Act associated with this Code must be amended before the Code can be implemented, in our opinion.

I also object to the considerable jargon infestation it sees in the Code. Terms like “performance assessed” and “restricted” and other terms for excesses in form and scale of proposed developments outside of clearly stated guidelines. Rid the Code of as much jargon as possible. The use commonly understood terminology will help the general public understand what is being proposed. This ought to be a first step in improvement in planning and design processes. After all, who is best served by the current tack?

So what is wrong with this Code in general terms? Firstly, it is predicated on the twin concepts of assumed continual significant population growth in the city of Adelaide and its metropolitan area, over many years into the future and a desire to not extend the metropolitan boundaries to any significant extent. Note the use of the word “significant”. State Planning’s Michael Lennon was clear in his presentation to the North Adelaide Society meeting I chaired on September 25, last year, that the city would continue to grow and something had to be done if we were to avoid an expansion of the metro boundaries. Well what to do?

Demographics show an aging population living alone or as a couple in large homes that allegedly, no longer suit their needs. The solution shown in the Code: infill development and demolition of many now old and assumed unsuitable for future use, homes.

On reflection, I believe this to be a lazy and disruptive approach. Under the current “blinkered” thinking, the garden city of Adelaide, with its predominance of the quarter acre block, will be emasculated with a piece meal approach to demolition and/or the creation of hammer head allotments. Not very “green”! And not very nice with “pock marked” demolition outcomes – as demolition control measures have seemed to have gone missing in the proposed Code, as well as many other aspects currently covered in our current development plans. With the best plans in the world, Adelaide cannot be re-engineered into a Madrid or a Barcelona. It is too late to increase density in any gracious manner to retain a high level of amenity in what is an established layout of spacious allotments and homes.

Extensive infill and multiple storey built form will make adaptation to increasing variability in climate due its inevitable temperature increases for the remainder of this century. Multi storey changes beyond two storeys do not favour an increasing demographic “aging lump” in our community, the Baby Boomers. Add to this, the requirement of heat pump technology for taller buildings. The refrigerator for the whole building, again, not very green!

With man-made accelerated climate change a given for all but the equivalent to “flat earth” proponents in denial, one would think that the infill concept behind this Code may be a less than wise response to our slowly changing and increasingly challenging environment. The consequences of housing infill, with the likelihood of dwelling density increases through multi storey development for any given area, randomly spread across the City and its metro area, not only increases stress on the environment but also on the existing power infrastructure, water reticulation and sewer capacity. Is it assumed that we just ignore these added costs for capacity increases? They will surely materialise as taxes and rate increases over time. Or, is it thought to be “cost neutral” when compared with other alternatives for accommodating a population increase?

This brings the author’s mind to his under graduate years and a course called “Science of Modern Society”. A popular book out at the time was Paul Ehrlich’s “The Population

Bomb”. He predicted an ever increasing population growth would cause many resource and pollution related problems into the 21st century. Now we face what could be called a ”maladaptive” choice here with implementation of this Code as it stands. Population increases rarely come without considerable costs and so careful, competent planning is required.

One principle I have not seen anywhere in the myriad of pages and plans (in about 4,000 pages), is a suggestion to keep the open space per hectare constant, for any given plan covering existing residential development, regardless of whatever is proposed. If this appears awkward on a piece meal basis, then 30% must be maintained as the absolute minimum – performance assessed exceptions. At least this way we may keep most of our trees.

Our view is that many more palatable solutions exist but come at a considerable cost, however at lesser cost than what is currently proposed may be the ultimate cost for Adelaide and its residents.

Population increase, if we have to have it, can be catered for in several other ways without destroying many aspects of the amenity residents currently enjoy in our city of churches and its metro area.

Firstly, consider moving Adelaide Airport out of the metro area and build high rise towers on the site with plenty of open space, as per Madrid, Spain, and many other European and South American cities with climates similar to ours.

Another suggestion is to resurrect a “Monarto” approach of increasing the population in places like Murray Bridge, with a high speed rail service (and freight line) cut right through the Adelaide Hills to the Bremer River valley. Of course some Government services would be expected to be moved to a new “second” city.

Finally, what if the metropolitan area were to expand, after ruling out domestic allotment development in prime farming land, and suffer the cost consequences to residents as they await good efficient transport links. Who knows, with the advent of mass usage of electric cars, rail, etc, this might be the greenest solution of all.

Take off the blinkers, amend the Planning Act and get down to some real planning!

Final conclusion: stop the roll out of the Planning and Design Code – it is deeply flawed.

Amend the latest version of the Planning Development and Infrastructure Act, including along the lines mentioned above. If the Code is ever introduced in this some top down form, some considerable effort must be made to ensure it is lined up and maturely assessed against the Adelaide City Councils latest version of the Development (Adelaide) Plan. Further, all of North Adelaide should be covered as “Low intensity” for the foreseeable future to cover Council’s Desired Outcomes that have failed to be included in the current version of the Code.

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