

## Urban Design Forum approaches 100 – let's celebrate!

In 1986, a small group of urban design enthusiasts had lunch on a Melbourne footpath. They had failed to achieve an agreed meeting time, so decided to have lunch instead. The change of approach worked, and there has been a similar monthly lunch gathering for the past 25 years.

The original group's concern was that, despite much talking, there had been little progress in actually achieving better urban design in Australian cities - and the traditional professional institutes were not doing much about it. Ideas were stimulated by contact with the UK Urban Design Group and the US Making Cities Livable group. As they say, the rest is history. The first edition of the *Urban Design Forum* publication was published in 1987 and, progressively, urban design initiatives have spread across the whole country.

Achieving the 100 editions of *Urban Design Forum* milestone warrants a celebration, and you are invited to get involved. The proposal is to publish a limited edition book, using the UDF editions as a resource, to reflect on the progress made in urban design in Australia over the past 25 years (as we confront the challenges of the next 25 years). The intention is to gather contributions from a wide range of people interested in how our cities function and how they look in a compendium that can assist future action in our cities and towns.

The intention for the publication is to provide a very useful well designed, full colour reference book, rather than a super-glossy coffee table piece. We are looking for someone to design the book, as well as writers - and we are looking for some support to underwrite the preparation and printing costs, but expecting that it will be available for purchase.

Given that, over the past 25 years, urban design has gone mainstream, we are inviting

contributions from within the diversity of people who work in, research, observe, or are users of the results of urban design: consultants, all levels of government, teachers, students, developers and investors, and the general community. The representation can be wide across age, experience, gender, and location, including commentary from our international colleagues. There will be many issues, ideas, projects, programs, and people that could be considered relevant. This publication cannot cover the whole field, themes will evolve, and it will be coordinated and edited by John Byrne and Bill Chandler.

### Get involved now

Traditionally, books are notorious for taking time and running late. Given that this initiative is being undertaken on a voluntary basis, the arrangement and requirements will be specific and simple. The contributions will need to be: well written; 750 -1,500 words in length; and where appropriate, accompanied by high quality photographs or graphics. The timing is as follows:

- Initial expression of interest: email a specific approach and what you would like to write about to [wchandler@bigpond.com.au](mailto:wchandler@bigpond.com.au) ASAP, but no later than 10 July 2012
- Confirmation of contributions: 31 July 2012
- Final copy to be received: 10 September.
- Publication available: 30 November 2012 (a great Christmas present!).

Given that all good celebrations should include a get-together, perhaps we can have a pre-Christmas launch lunch. In the meantime, consider if you would like to be a contributor in what we trust will become a very useful and enjoyable read, and a celebration of what is more than a mere job for most of us.

## Scenic reflections

The Scenic Rim region is about an hour south of Brisbane, inland from the Gold Coast. It is characterised by farms and forests, small towns and townships, and is cradled by mountain ranges on three sides. Hence the name, Scenic Rim. Included is the famous Lamington National Park, part of a world heritage listed rainforest and on a chain of mountains forming the border with New South Wales. The main towns in the region are Boonah in the west, the administrative centre Beaudesert, and a tree change suburban community at Tambourine Mountain to the east. Scenic Rim Regional Council has administered this area since changes to local government boundaries in 2008.

The town of Beaudesert has been a service centre for more than a century. Despite its proximity to South East Queensland's three million people, it's still relatively tiny. The town has only 6,000 or so residents, out of about 40,000 in the 4,000km<sup>2</sup> region. But like the greater SEQ region around it, a good deal of planning is going on to manage expected growth in residents and jobs.

I spent much of the last six months working with the council's small planning team on their local and strategic planning program. So what does urban design mean for a near-metropolitan but still rural region with a small population?

I was fortunate to work on a local planning project for one of the region's townships. There's some way to go in the process so I won't be too specific about proposals, but it has been a real pleasure to work closely with a small and diverse community comprising old farming dynasties, business people, tree changers and suburban families. Together they are keeping this busy little place very much alive.

### Growth, but keeping special character

Like many local governments that I know of, the general brief seems to be: 'yes we need some growth but we want to keep our special character'. And like most Queensland towns and villages, there is a rich though often uncelebrated planning and design history in the Scenic Rim's towns. The older areas often boast fantastic leafy streets with Queensland cottages, constructed of 'tin and timber' and raised above the ground to deal with the slope, climate and termites. This must have been (or

maybe still is) a pious region because there's a host of beautiful wooden churches all around the streets. The principal streets through the villages are buzzing with local and tourist activity. The buildings and the public realm haven't seen a lot of attention over the years, and this is a likely area for design focus, but the setting and the mixed-use activity provides a great foundation. These are popular, well-loved places.

The newer areas that I visited - particularly residential areas - are less remarkable, in my view anyway. Brick and tile, slab on ground suburban housing dominates. The streets are so-so and, predictably, are designed for traffic first. There's not so many trees and greenery (yet). Unsurprisingly when you think about it, the new suburbs looks much like new suburbs all across Queensland, Australia probably.

So what about the 'unique and special character'? One of the best things we did was to get out the measuring wheels and spend a morning on a 'synoptic' (fancy word for 'general') survey of the new and the old areas of the township I was working in. Similar to the process used in researching the Next Generation Planning handbook (see UDF 94), my council colleagues and I measured the physical form of the neighbourhoods, streets, lots and buildings. No spectacular discoveries here, but when we're talking 'character' we're often talking about space between buildings, height, scale and bulk, trees. It's good to have some local evidence to hand when applying this 'character' thing to the planning and design rules that might just help deliver on the promise of 'good growth'.

I ended my contract one day before the Queensland local government elections. A new planning scheme is in the wind for the Scenic Rim - the first since the present council boundaries were established. Maybe the whole 'character' thing is pushing up the proverbial hill - don't built up areas look more of their time than of their place? But I'm sure the Scenic Rim will be thinking about its country and built heritage when it comes to shaping its towns, centres and suburbs of the future.

*Mike McKeown is an urban planner and designer based in Brisbane. He can be contacted at [michael@mckeownplandesign.com.au](mailto:michael@mckeownplandesign.com.au)*

# URBAN DESIGN FORUM

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▲ Engagement and fun in the Bendigo Mall

## Urban design in regional cities and towns

In April, 65 people attended an Urban Design Forum in Melbourne to explore the challenges of achieving good urban design in Australia's regional cities and towns - where 20+% of our population lives. The theme focussed on urban design in regional cities: how they function, not just how they look; roles of Local, State, and Federal Government, the private sector, institutions and communities; and urban design education and skill development for successful urban design in regional cities, looking at the work being

undertaken by private sector designers and developers in making sure regional cities are vital, successful, and part of our low carbon sustainable future.

The program included key propositions for delivering quality urban transformation, including going beyond design to the governance and operational challenges. This edition of *Urban Design Forum* includes a number of articles from both presenters and participants in the recent forum.

## The \$1b new town where nobody's home

The recent Age/AP headline was intriguing. The chance for planners and designers to get on with it without being bothered by real people! The following summarizes what led to the headline.

'A scientific ghost town in the heart of south-eastern New Mexico oil and gas country will hum with the latest next-generation technology - but no people. A \$US1 billion city without residents will be developed in Lea County near Hobbs, to help researchers test everything from intelligent traffic systems and next-generation wireless networks to automated washing machines and self-flushing toilets. The Hobbs Mayor, Sam Cobb, said the unique research facility that looks like an empty city will be a key for diversifying the economy of the nearby community, which after the oil bust of the 1980s saw bumper stickers asking the last person to leave to turn out the lights.' It brings so many great opportunities and puts us on a world stage.'

The town will be modelled after the real city of Rock Hill, South Carolina, complete with highways, houses and commercial buildings, old and new. No one will live there, although they could as houses will include all the necessities, like appliances and plumbing. The point of the town is to enable researchers

to test new technologies on existing infrastructure without interfering in everyday life. For instance, while some researchers will be testing smart technologies on old grids, others might be using the streets to test self-driving cars. "The only thing we won't be doing is destructive testing, blowing things up - I hope," said Bob Brumley, a senior manager on the project.

One big plus for the choice of the New Mexico site was its federal research facilities like White Sands Missile Range in southern New Mexico and Los Alamos and Sandia national labs. Apparently no tax breaks were given for the development, but guidance has been asked for. Development cost is estimated at \$US400 million, although overall investment in the project could top \$US1 billion. The project is expected to create 350 permanent jobs and about 3,500 indirect jobs in its design, development, construction and ongoing operational phases.

*For the full article see <http://www.theage.com.au/technology/sci-tech/the-1b-new-town-where-nobodys-home-20120510-1ydl8.html#ixzz1uQGSzmHj>*

## Malcolm's Ten Commandments for 21st Century Urban Design

- Universal
- People centric
- Commercially savvy
- Opportunistic
- Action oriented
- Enabling
- Place-based
- Environmentally conscious
- Politically astute
- Evangelical

*Malcolm Snow, General Manager Design and Place Making at Places Victoria, can be contacted at [Malcolm.Snow@places.vic.gov.au](mailto:Malcolm.Snow@places.vic.gov.au)*

## April Urban Design Forum in Melbourne

The recent Urban Design Forum in Melbourne focused on urban design in regional cities and towns. The first session was chaired by John Byrne, an urban designer based in Queensland, who said that there had been little dialogue on the nature of regional cities, but that this was changing. He said a key issue was the petro-driven nature of development in regional cities.

John Phillips, Acting Director Planning and Policy, Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development set the broad context for the forum with regional growth plans. Malcolm Snow General Manager of Design and Place Making at Places Victoria succinctly set out his ten commandments for 21st Century Urban Design.

Dan Cass, advisor and advocate for renewable energy and sustainability, and Director of community-based Hepburn Wind, set out a positive approach to the challenges of a low carbon future that included the tools of smart technologies and political patronage. He pointed out just how much progress has already been made in many countries, and the specific challenges facing Australia.

Liz Johnstone, from Municipal Association Victoria outlined research being done on financing for the infrastructure and services challenges facing local government in meeting community needs. The report addresses where and how we grow, settlement types, the capital costs and ongoing service costs, and helping Councillors understand what development types mean for rates.

Rob Moore from the City of Melbourne pointed out the importance of selling urban design, linking health and prosperity, putting a price on good design, and explained the Ghel research

indicating there was more prosperity in the city because of the level of intensification. He also emphasised the importance of being clearer about what we want and where we want it, and having a plan and sticking to it.

Kylie Legge, from Place Partners, emphasized the importance of touching the ground lightly, testing ideas, having shared responsibility for delivering places that are appropriate and achievable, with clear benefits. She also advocated for post-occupancy reviews of public spaces. Bill Kelly, artist emphasized the importance of recognising and responding to local culture, and developing and maintaining places that are distinctive, unique and culturally representative.

Hisham Elkad, Head of Department at Deakin University, joined the forum online from Geelong. He emphasised the importance of education-led re-generation, and the contribution of higher education to regional cities, and the importance of multidisciplinary education and practice.

Session Two was chaired by Peter Boyle Principal Urban Designer Urban Development Department of Planning and Community Development. Rod Duncan, Associate Professor of Urban Planning at Deakin University, spoke about Australian 'midi-cities' and proposed a theoretical framework as a way to understand the influences and drivers operating on the towns, and the networks and relationships needed to better integrate planning for people and place.

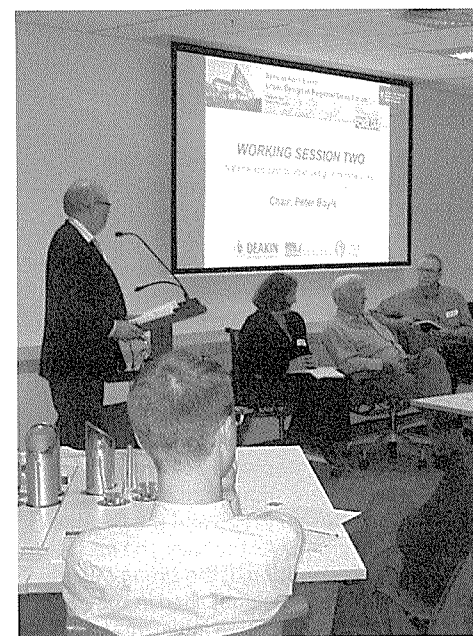
Phil DeAraugo, Place Manager with the City of Greater Bendigo, discussed how Bendigo has focused on being a 'strategy led' organisation. In consultation with their community they have actively pursued the development of plans

to guide growth and change in the physical, social and economic fabric of the city. Based on rigorous data collection and analysis, this approach has enabled Bendigo to provide certainty to the community, business and agencies while allowing council to better manage the delivery of services, infrastructure and investment. He provided examples of capital works improvements across the city that have contributed to increased activity and vitality.

George Wilkie, Executive Manager City Design at Hobart City Council, explained that Council engaged Gehl Architects to prepare Hobart 2010, Public Spaces Public Life, a high level analysis and strategy for improvement of the public realm in central Hobart. Recently, George has been translating the recommendations of this report into a series of recognizable actions able to be achieved across a range of locations within the city. This approach demonstrated particular application for regional cities where resources are limited and interventions need to be grasped as opportunities present themselves.

Emma Appleton, Director of the recently formed Victorian Design Review Panel, spoke about the design review process, with panel members drawn from across the design and planning professions, and from public and private sectors. Bruce Echberg brought over 30 years urban design experience, much of it in regional and rural locations. He particularly highlighted issues around procurement of regional projects and the burden that competitive tendering places on them.

Judita Mieldzys, coordinator of the DPCD PLANET program, outlined the extensive training courses run each year by the Victorian



▲ John Byrne addresses the recent Urban Design Forum in Melbourne

Department of Planning and Community Development. Jessica Paolini is studying post-graduate planning at Deakin University, and is also office manager at RobertsDay. She presented a case study of a 'charette' or enquiry by design process carried out by their office for an urban growth area in Bendigo, and emphasised the value and importance of the process for enabling active participation by all the players to achieve a more integrated, coordinated, effective and sustainable outcome.

Enthusiastic general discussions followed the presentations. More details of some of the presentations are in adjacent articles.

## A story of three redgum benches

William Kelly

At the recent Urban Design Forum, my short talk was about a big word – 'culture' – and thinking small in order to foster it. It is a story, as my title suggests, about three redgum benches.

We know we can have an emotional or deep seated cultural attachment to things in the public realm, to place, to art, to artefacts. Big places like Time Square in New York, The Left Bank in Paris or, in the scale of things, small elements like 'The Clocks' at Flinders Street Station in Melbourne.

Contemporary urban design practice is often what I call a dis-cultural phenomenon – it does not recognise local cultural values nor public artefacts, does not take the time to assess what it is that has made a place that is to be modified or re-designed, a unique place. Yes I know this is taught, but you only need to compare one or two hundred small 'town centre' designs to see this is often not put into practice. This, of course, is an issue in sub-urban capital cities, also in regional communities and, even more so in small rural communities such as mine.

Big cities – Melbourne, Sydney or even New York are not so much one large 'city' as they are hundreds of villages. So, what I say can to some extent be applied whether in Nathalia, Victoria (my home town, population 1,450) or Brisbane or Paris alike.

About the three redgum benches. They are located along the banks of the lovely Broken Creek at Nathalia, on the Murray River flood plain. It is these floods that periodically soak the soil allowing these trees to grow and create the world's largest River Redgum forest. They became the sleepers for rail lines throughout the south-eastern states and gave birth to Nathalia as a timber milling town.

These benches were the last public space vestiges of the river redgum industry. The drop log cabins have all but collapsed, slab fences once common are now gone – even once common rough hewn red gum paling

fences are gone. Over the years the timber cutting disappeared, the mills and virtually all evidence of them have been removed. The only evidence of a direct connection in the public domain was these three rough hewn 'log and slab' benches.

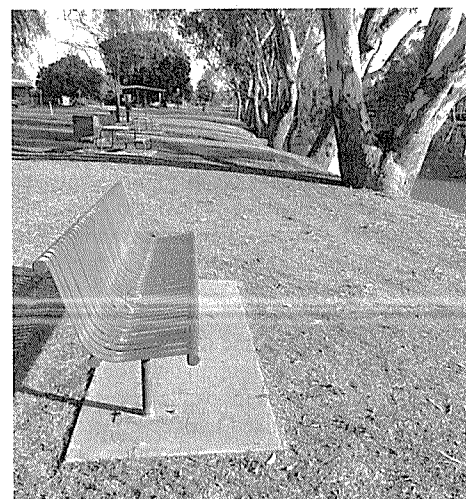
One day these absolutely unique, hand-made benches were removed by the shire – the shire office is about an hour's drive away – and replaced by three 'Picnic Bench/Green/Metal/584-PB-1275', or some such attribution from an urban furniture catalogue.

So what do we have? Our real history in wood is replaced by steel picnic benches – manufactured in the millions, and Bunnings powder-coated fences (in one of 4 styles – a Victorian look is favoured). Nathalia is, nonetheless, a lovely town, slowly, ever so slowly having its physical history erased and people here are bravely trying to keep this aspect of its history alive. They have established what I call a 'memory line' by having our signs say 'redgum country', our newspaper bears a similar name, a metal sculpture of a wood cutter is now located in our main street on a stone plinth, a visitor centre tells the story of our, once publicly evident, rich history.

Malcolm Snow in his presentation spoke of elements, sometimes seemingly simple, which are 'not decorative but at the core'. Simple but significant words. While professionals have slowly helped to dis-culturalise Nathalia, many in the community have continued to find ways to establish these 'memory lines.'

My final comment is to say to you, as professionals, ethically no job should be undertaken if you cannot or will not look closely at the community in which you are working, come to some understanding of its history and its stories – reflect on the design possibilities for each individual place which will help keep its landscape unique and its history alive.

William Kelly is an artist, has had longstanding involvement with urban projects, and can be contacted at [kelly@williamkelly.com.au](mailto:kelly@williamkelly.com.au)



▲ Nathalia identity – a 'modern' bench amongst the redgums (the redgum benches have gone)



▲ A regum loveseat (by Stan Lowe, in the Nathalia Grainstore Gallery)

## Regional growth plans

John Phillips

Regional Growth Plans provide the broad context for regional cities and towns. Eight Regional Strategic Plans were developed across Victoria in 2010 and, building on these plans, eight Regional Growth Plans are being prepared over the next 2 years. They will provide land use planning responses to each region's strategic aspirations and directions. The project focus will include:

- strategic land use and settlement framework through a map/diagram (readable at A3) that shows a broad outline of future direction and the nature of change.
- infrastructure analysis informed by current and future land use patterns (with graphic illustration) will inform regional level infrastructure considerations.
- high level growth area frameworks (diagrams) for key urban growth centres. The plan may include targeted locations or nodes for accelerated and future development and staging considerations.

- environmental, economic, social and cultural resources – identification and geographic location of key regional assets to be preserved, improved or created.
- land use planning direction for accommodating urban growth, including residential, commercial, industrial and community activity, as well as agriculture and other rural activities and regional or state scale infrastructure.
- land budgets - short, medium and long term (development 'pipelines') for residential and employment land (infill, consolidation and greenfield).

This work will be aligned with a number of other DPCD programs, and work by other government agencies.

John Phillips is Acting Director, Planning Policy Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development, and can be contacted at [John.M.Phillips@dpcd.vic.gov.au](mailto:John.M.Phillips@dpcd.vic.gov.au)

## International Urban Design Awards

Now in its fifth year, this awards program is run by the UK Urban Design Group. The aim of the awards is to give recognition to the very best in urban design practice and ideas from around the world, and to raise the profile of urban designers globally. They are now seeking entries in the practice award

category and looking for projects from around the world. Australian urban design practices are encouraged to enter. Shortlisted entries are published in UDG's *Urban Design* and showcased at a prestigious awards event in London in February 2013. For more information see [www.udg.org.uk](http://www.udg.org.uk)

## The Journal of Urbanism: Call for papers

Special Issue: The future of single-family detached housing

What is the role of single-family detached housing in sustainable cities? Many are now predicting that single-family housing, especially at the periphery of major cities, is destined to become the future slum. This special issue will move the discussion beyond debates over the non-sustainability of single-

family detached housing toward a focus on innovative solutions. We are seeking an international perspective, and thus welcome scholarly research papers that focus on any global context. For more information see <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com:80/rjou> or email Prof. Emily Talen at [etalen@asu.edu](mailto:etalen@asu.edu)



# Working effectively in regional cities - an urban design consultant's perspective

Bruce Echberg

As one of the first generation of Australian urban designers, I have had the advantage of seeing many successes, and the odd failure, over 30 years of practice. This includes watching regional cities like Geelong, Bendigo and Shepparton develop over time. My professional work as an urban designer has mostly been as a private practitioner working for government and private clients, but especially for local government, over the last decade or so. I would like to raise three key issues:



▲ The coffee street culture in Bendigo

## Plans plans and more plans, but little action

The extent of adopted consultant studies and plans already on the shelf in Victoria that are not being funded, implemented or monitored is a real issue and waste of urban design effort. Over the last decade there have been many hundreds of consultant-prepared urban design studies for regional Victorian cities and towns.

Unlike planning strategies, they are not finished when they become part of the planning scheme. They need to be funded by public or private money and followed through to the management stage. It is my impression that as little as 5-10% of these urban design strategies get implemented before they are forgotten or considered out of date. There are lots of reasons for this, but it needs careful monitoring by the State Government. It is inefficient use of consultant effort and also discouraging for communities who are often involved with developing design proposals.

## Regional councils lack urban design literacy and consistent application over time

Urban design strategies are not getting implemented because regional councils lack long term involvement of urban design champions. Except for the three largest regional cities in Victoria, there is a lack of design-literate senior managers, CEOs or councillors and they change jobs regularly these days. Most of these people are efficient responsible managers but that does not bring much needed vision for significant change.

As a result, our regional cities generally mimic the least desirable, and least sustainable, aspects of major cities. Car-dominated public spaces and mediocre suburban and lower density lifestyle expansion are the norm. Crass suburban shopping centres and big box retail typically develop on the fringe, always with free surface car parks. They tend to suck the energy and commercial life out of traditional centres that often become more car-dominated



▲ Urban design in a regional town - the historic Shamrock Hotel in Bendigo

to compete. Changing such trends requires great urban design vision consistently applied over decades.

## Current local government procurement methods are a major limiting factor on the quality of professional consulting services.

The current all-prevailing local government tendering process is a major barrier to enabling experienced consultants to provide useful cost effective advice over time.

One possible partial solution could be to introduce urban design advice as a higher level ongoing consultant service in a similar manner to the role heritage architects have so effectively provided to local government over the last 20 years. The other solution I would suggest is the closing of local government contracts departments, or at least excluding them from any role in consultant procurement.

Delivery of consistent, cost effective consultant services over many years was possible, and

even common, before compulsory competitive tendering. The current system now wastes huge amounts of professional time, increasing costs for Councils and consultants, and making continuity of advice virtually impossible.

This is an elephant in the room that no one wants to confront, and it seems that the best that can be done is try to find ways around it. The use of consultant registers and expression of interest processes, before short-listing to say three tenderers, are possible strategies. They seem to be very rarely used and when they are they are used, they are rarely consistently applied over extended periods because of internal council staff change.

This is an issue that deserves independent evaluation by the Local Government Associations together with State Governments.

*Bruce Echberg is Director of Urban Initiatives Pty Ltd, Foundation Member and Honorary Treasurer of Urban Design Forum, and he can be contacted at [bruce@urbaninitiatives.com.au](mailto:bruce@urbaninitiatives.com.au)*

## The passion of the UDF

As this is my first article in UDF I will tread lightly, which is what I was reminded to do as a practicing UD professional at the recent Urban Design in Regional Cities Forum. Urban Design, as you all know, can occupy the high moral ground, once occupied by churches before the advent of big box shopping centres. Whenever urban designers (New Urbanists, UDF disciples, etc) gather, there is a sense of the evangelical, and the presentation of Malcolm Snow's '10 Commandments for 21st Century Urban Design' really nailed it (apologies to Jesus).

It was me who dropped the "B" word, and it was the Warrnambool Bunnings which became the case in point. I remember being at a Council presentation and pleading to the good burgers that 'the big tin shed doesn't have to look like crap'. I was then politely reminded that if we made it too hard, they would go somewhere else. Steven Carthew, who was a burger king (lord mayor) in his previous life, spoke at length about the legitimacy of large format stores where you get lost and cannot find someone in an apron to help.

### Bringing the community with us

So the attention of the Forum turned to the need to bring the community with us, and share the same level of frustration, anxiety and general disgust at all decisions made by previous planners and architects in the first 200 years of colonisation of Australia. To do this we need to listen to Brian Haratsis (Macroplan), who points out that the amount of words written to 'refine' and 'streamline' planning controls in the world doubles every six minutes. The need for passion in the protection of the investment in UD was expounded by Bill Chandler, and we all agreed the protection of our jobs was a useful objective, after which we would be able to save the planet.

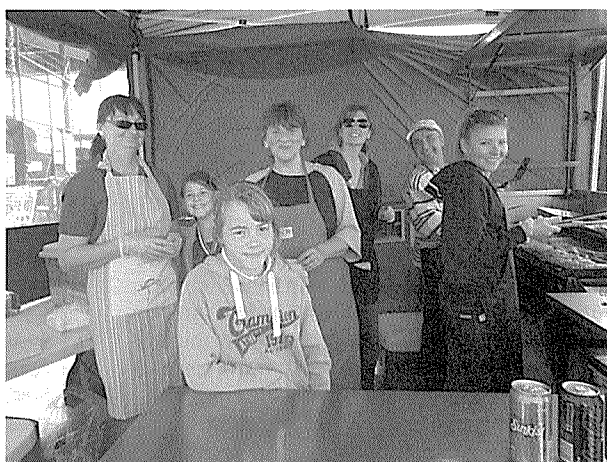
George Wilke spoke with humility about how you can dumb down a Jan Ghel manifesto which is still being paid for by Council, and allow it to be 'owned by the community', even though they still haven't yet paid it off. A couple of the designer

speakers, who were unaware that they would need to speak, did really well keeping to the simple facts, and will be remembered for their humble contributions. There I said it, designers and humble in the same sentence.

As someone who has recently experienced the joy of driving a 911 along the autobahns of Europe at speeds that these roads are designed for, I was impressed by the use of solar panels in Germany to cover just about anything that isn't moving. So when the presentation by Dan Cass, who pioneered the community wind power project at Hepburn, was made, I was struck by the idea of cladding the Warrnambool Bunnings with solar panels, which could even power the barbecue for the perpetual sausage sizzle. This would however require another condition in the planning scheme, and the need for more dead trees.

Bruce Echberg pleaded for some sanity in the now over-transparent tender process, and the sheer waste that results from 100 consulting firms bidding for a \$30K structure plan in far north Victoria, and which also requires a Development Contributions Plan and Amendment, for the same price. We all nodded furiously in agreement, and then went back to the office to check the tenders.

*Marc Bartsch can be contacted at [mbartsch@pb.com.au](mailto:mbartsch@pb.com.au)*



▲ Solar cooked sausages at Bunnings?

## Dollars and good sense

Leila Heggie

Urban design is complicated. It's a web of people, places, natural and built form, drawn together with a dash of social justice, environmental stewardship, and economic feasibility. That being said, the message that resonated with me at the recent Urban Design Forum was that good urban design outcomes are possible for rural and regional Australia if they are expressed clearly and developed using solid economic principles.

### Regional areas can deal with more people - as long as they get the infrastructure right.

In recent years there has been more population growth in regional Victoria than in Melbourne. Melbourne's geographical footprint is now more than 100km wide. Greenfield development bears significant costs and inefficiencies: there is often no public transport, low local job provision and services. Commuting by car is becoming unsustainable, for both families and the planet. In view of this situation, regional centres are well placed to accommodate larger populations.

The Municipal Association of Victoria is undertaking work to substantiate how different residential settlement patterns affect infrastructure and service delivery requirements for Council. Not surprisingly, the findings to date indicate that utilising existing infrastructure reduces the cost to Council, upfront and in the longer term. The upgrading and maintenance of infrastructure and provision of services for low density development greatly exceeds income from rates generated by these properties.

Regions must learn from the mistakes of the capital cities and consider infrastructure provision from the outset. The key lessons from the capitals are:

- Keep it tight - if people live closer together it is more efficient
- Do not allow employment to disperse. Establish high amenity, infrastructure-intense areas for retail and commercial activity around the centre.

### But how do the regions do this? Easy - they have a plan and stick to it!

Policy documents are plagued with futile ideas about generating income and jobs. Each idea has a catchy label, eco industrial land, artistic precincts. It may have colourful diagrams with arrows connecting words like sustainability, knowledge and imagination.

The City of Greater Bendigo - which has incrementally transformed the City Centre - has a clear and simple strategy. The placed-based plan sets out an integrated approach to delivery, clearly identifying the input of the city as well as private and public input. Key lessons from Bendigo's approach:

- a clear strategy means community understands and supports Council's vision
- the private sector have certainty about how and where development can occur
- new Council staff are more likely to pick up the vision and run with it.

The opportunity for regional Australia is now! Living conditions are improved where there is a concentration of good jobs in businesses which are thriving. It is an added advantage if employees travel to work without long commutes in crawling traffic.

*Leila Heggie is an urban designer with Urban Initiatives. She grew up in Bendigo and has a particular interest in policy and design work in regional Victoria.*



▲ Part of the shared zone in Bendigo



# Victorian design review gets underway

Emma Appleton

The Office of the Victorian Government (OVGA) provides strategic advice to government on architecture and urban design. The OVGA works to support public sector clients from project inception, including assistance with writing the brief, defining the best procurement route, and selecting the right design team to match the brief. The OVGA also provides support throughout the design development process, offering design review.

Design review is offered by the OVGA in three ways; through the Victorian Design Review Panel (VDRP – the focus of this article), through Design Quality Teams (DQT) and through internal peer review, undertaken by the OVGA team.

## Victorian Design Review Panel

The VDRP has been established to provide independent and authoritative advice to government and statutory decision makers across Victoria to improve the design of significant development proposals. It is a pilot project and has been funded for three years.

The VDRP will offer design advice at key stages of the design process through formal peer review undertaken by a panel of highly experienced design and development professionals, a specialist technical panel and Government design specialists. The aim of the VDRP is to raise the design quality of proposals, achieve best value and ensure that

all opportunities are realised for all Victorians in public projects.

## How are projects selected for review?

The VDRP will review projects of significance - significant because of their size or the uses they contain; significant because of their site, or with an importance greater than their size, use or site would suggest. In its first year, the VDRP will review projects where there is investment from the State. In years 2 and 3, the VDRP will extend the service to Local Authorities and private sector projects.

## What is the form of review?

Design review by the VDRP will occur monthly with a morning and afternoon session. The VDRP will be chaired by the Victorian Government Architect or Associate Government Architect. Six panel members, including the Chair, will see up to three projects in a session. Prior to the VDRP session, the panel will be briefed by the OVGA VDRP team, who will have met with the client, the design team, and other stakeholders to fully understand the brief for the project. The OVGA VDRP team will also visit the site. The client and design team will present for up to twenty minutes, using drawings (maximum 12 x A1) to explain their project. The panel will then provide comment which will form the basis of the formal letter of advice from the OVGA.

The process of the VDRP will be active and engaged, with high level cross-disciplinary expertise brought to bear at key stages of



▲ A design review in progress (Photo courtesy of Katherine Brice, Photographer)

the design process. The model is based on the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment's (CABE) process of design review, which has run successfully since 1999. Throughout the pilot program, the OVGA will be testing this process and adapting it to respond to the Victorian context. The VDRP is seeking projects at the earliest possible stage in the design process with the intention of proposals returning for design review through their design development.

For more information, including the list of panel members, terms of reference and dates for

review, please see [www.ovga.vic.gov.au](http://www.ovga.vic.gov.au). If you have a project you would like to be reviewed which meets the criteria above, please contact Lauren Beattie, VDRP Coordinator via [vdrp@ovga.vic.gov.au](mailto:vdrp@ovga.vic.gov.au).

Emma Appleton is Director, Victorian Design Review Panel Office of the Victorian Government Architect, and can be contacted at [Emma.Appleton@ovga.vic.gov.au](mailto:Emma.Appleton@ovga.vic.gov.au)

[Ed disclosure: Bill Chandler is a Member of the Victorian Urban Design Panel]

# New urban design writing by Barrie Shelton

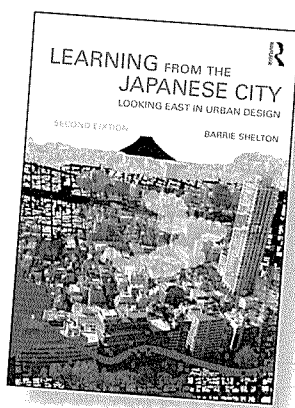
A new book, *Learning from the Japanese City: Looking East in Urban Design*, was launched recently at Melbourne University: the author is Barrie Shelton, Associate Professor in Urban Design, at the University's Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning.

The book spotlights Japanese urbanism and architecture, discussed against a sweep of ideas drawn from history, geography, science, cultural and design theory. It appeared in its first edition in 1999 with the subtitle of *West meets East in Urban Design*. That edition emphasized the relationship between culture and built form and drew attention to the uncanny correlation between established Japanese design practices and recent (essentially Western-generated) urban and design theory.

The new edition is in a more compact form but with a much-extended text and many more illustrations, and includes a detailed and practical case study of one district in Nagoya, a city known for its bold infrastructure planning. This Nagoya section shows how many of the forms and characteristics discussed more

theoretically in previous chapters are assembled in one city district: further, it argues that the urban configuration and characteristics of this district combine to make a sustainable and liveable urban model. Previously available only in hardback, the new edition is also available in soft-back and e-versions.

Barrie has been quite prolific in recent times. Last year, he co-authored *The Making of Hong Kong: from vertical to volumetric*<sup>2</sup>, which, although an historical account of the city's morphology and design, emphasizes that city's potential as a model. He also contributed a substantial section on a topic closer to home, the planning and shaping of Adelaide's 'Square Mile' in an edited book by Stephen Marshall. All three books are published by Routledge, London and New York.



# Melting the needs/wants dichotomy

Robert McLean

What mostly happens and what is truly important to people rarely cross paths. Talk privately with most urban designers, landscape architects, or any of their ilk, and it is interesting to watch their humanity emerge, subtly shifting their conversation from economic and political concerns, or the present "business as usual" paradigm, to thoughts about the creation of a place that is about beauty, the enrichment of people and of a built environment that has a human scale.

People instinctively seem to know what it is that their fellow humans need, but the economic and political wants, as opposed to those simple needs, have a deadly momentum that has corralled most of us, resulting in our towns and cities that, with rare exception, are about machines rather than people.

Mostly, however, this almost unrecognized public dichotomy seems to melt away if people are allowed to pursue design and structure of place in a way that makes their heart beat faster, rather than being trapped by, and working within, an ideologically driven, and frequently emotionally uncomfortable, paradigm. That crushing concept is about business as usual and, in a psychologically disjointed way, the designer has evolved as a critical part of a project that is assembled in such a way that it allows for the harvesting of every dollar, even if it means prostituting all that is important in the creation of a beautiful human-scale place, that is in balance with its surrounds.

## Managed democracy

American academic and author, Sheldon S. Wolin, alluded to such processes when writing in "Managed Democracy" arguing that his fellows long for much but find it nearly impossible to achieve it because of what he calls "inverted totalitarianism". Something similar is happening with the design and creation of our towns and cities – our urban designers, architects and others feel their chests throb with excitement, only to be overtaken by a common ache when the prevailing social mores, be they economic or political, begin to crowd their thoughts, and crush ideas.

Some have avoided the totalitarianism Wolin discusses, but frequently the most celebrated are those who fall in with the trilogy of money, money, money, although occasionally a rare soul, willing to risk all, creates something that is about the greater good. Simply living demands a certain courage, but living in a way that takes a person beyond the rude and brute values of the commercial world to create something that is beautiful, human and self-sufficient, exacts a discipline, and courage, of an order few can understand.

Our communities need bold, lateral and innovative thinkers emboldened with a rare courage enabling them to work for society's greater good.

Robert McLean is a journalist and is regularly involved in UDF activities. He can be contacted at [robed@sheppnews.com.au](mailto:robed@sheppnews.com.au)

# Conferences, etc

## Green6 International Conference Cambridge, UK, 3-6 July 2012

Papers are invited in a range of themes in the field of Sustainability Issues in the Built Environment and Construction Materials Technology. For more information see [www.anglia.ac.uk/GREEN6](http://www.anglia.ac.uk/GREEN6)

## World Urban Forum

1-7 September 2012, Naples, Italy

The Sixth Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF6) will take place in the ancient city of Naples with the theme The Urban Future, hosted by the UN-Habitat, Government of Italy, Campania Region and City of Naples. Bringing together a diverse range of people and organisations involved in city planning, design and management to share their vision for better, smarter cities of the future. For more information see [www.unhabitat.org/wuf](http://www.unhabitat.org/wuf)

## 5th International Urban Design Conference

10-12 September 2012, Melbourne

The theme of this year's conference, Opportunistic Urban Design, will consider innovative urban design solutions that respond to a specific context. For more information see [www.urbandesignaustralia.com.au](http://www.urbandesignaustralia.com.au)

## International Society of City and Regional Planners 48th ISOCARP Congress

10-13 September 2012, Perm, Russia

ISOCARP welcomes papers by city and regional planners or interested individuals from related disciplines from all over the world, on the theme: Fast Forward – Planning in a (hyper) dynamic urban context. For full information, visit [2012.isocarp.org](http://2012.isocarp.org) or contact Jim Colman, immediate past Vice President ISOCARP; member, Australian National Delegation ISOCARP at [james.colman@bigpond.com](mailto:james.colman@bigpond.com)

## Walking and Sustainable Cities 30 September- 4 October, 2012 Mexico City

With the title 'Step into the future', the Walk21 partnership is calling for papers and proposals for its next conference, for the first time in Latin America. Themes are: Inclusion; Trust; Well-being; and Community. For details see [www.walk21.com](http://www.walk21.com)

## 2012 UK National Urban Design Conference

18-20 October, Oxford

This year's conference will centre on the University of Oxford Brookes; the 300 seat Nelson Mandela lecture theatre at the Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, and

for the annual dinner, the medieval Pembroke College Oxford.

The programme is being developed by Louise Thomas, co-editor of Urban Design, and Professor Georgia Butina-Watson, at Oxford Brookes. For more details see [www.udg.org.uk](http://www.udg.org.uk)

## International Seminar on Urban Form (ISUF)

16-19 October 2012, Delft, The Netherlands.

The conference will be co-hosted by the European Association for Architectural Education and the Delft School for Design. The theme of the conference is New Urban Configurations. Sub-themes on which proposals are particularly invited include: innovation in building typology; infrastructure and architecture; complex urban projects; green spaces and the city; and water management and urbanization. Further information, including registration procedure, is available at <http://www.newurbanconfigurations.nl>

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Send to: Bill Chandler Email: [wchandler@bigpond.com](mailto:wchandler@bigpond.com)

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