

**Urban Design For  
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Public Interest  
Knowledge Sharing  
Public Conversations  
Research & Advocacy  
Education  
Mentorship & Support  
Change



Urban Design Forum supports the introduction of a robust definition of Urban Design within the Design and Place SEPP, with emphasis on the strategic function of Urban Design in the making of frameworks for areas undergoing change.

We live, work and play on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging and extend this respect to all Indigenous Australians.



Attn:  
Rod Simpson  
Urban Design Group  
New South Wales

Re:  
Addendum to Urban  
Design Group New South  
Wales Submission to the  
Proposed Design and  
Place SEPP

Dated:  
March 24, 2022

Pages:  
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From:  
Urban Design Forum  
Australia  
Suite 1.2/2  
Collins St.  
Melbourne VIC 3000

Urban Design Forum Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this important initiative and commend the Department of Planning, Government Architects NSW and consultants for the significant research-led process that has underpinned the project. We support the initiative to consolidate matters relating to design and place into a single, more coherent planning instrument. This is a significant matter of interest for New South Wales, and by extension Australia.

This submission addendum is however focused only on one minor initiative within the broader body of work, which is of specific interest to the Urban Design Forum, namely defining 'Urban Designer' in the New South Wales context. This matter is of national interest and has the potential to set a significant precedent beyond the New South Wales context.

## **Summary of submission**

Urban Design Forum supports the introduction of a definition of Urban Design within the Design and Place SEPP, with emphasis on the strategic function of Urban Design in the making of frameworks for areas undergoing change.

However, we have concerns with the current approach to a professional accreditation checklist in the exhibited document and an inadequate length of required experience. If the public policy purpose of the definition is to secure a high standard of Urban Design professional operating in the public interest, then it is crucial that practitioners have the appropriate qualifications, experience and design expertise.

Given that there is no national body or process for the accreditation of urban designers in Australia, we support the idea and process of peer recognition being established. Being related to and spanning the practices of architecture, landscape and planning but being distinct from them, urban design is not and should not be narrowly defined.

It is for this reason peer recognition should not be seen simply as a short term measure, but as the most appropriate process for recognition of Urban Designers into the future.

We submit the following key recommendations for an amended approach to the verification of an Urban Design professional:

- The adoption of a method of peer review to ensure an adequate standard of professional experience including a process of sponsorship by esteemed practitioners, submission of portfolio documentation of experience and design expertise interview and independent evaluation.
- Clarity that a Recognised Practitioner must exhibit formal training and technical competency in spatial design
- Increase in the number of years of practice to a minimum of 10 years, noting that emerging urban designers can continue to support Recognised Practitioners in preparing design strategies or studies.

In the absence of an established Australian process, we support, a method drawing upon the Urban Design Group UK's process to determine Recognised Practitioners, with the inclusion of a charter that is more specific to the Australian context, namely capturing the critical importance of working on Aboriginal land.

For further information, refer to <https://www.udg.org.uk/join/recognisedpractitioner>. A number of Urban Design Forum members have already attained Recognised Practitioner Status in both NSW and Victoria, and we will continue to advocate to our members this opportunity for robust professional recognition.

## **About Urban Design Forum**

Urban Design Forum Australia is an independent non-profit industry organisation that supports public interest outcomes in cities. We were founded in 1986 and have recently undergone significant renewal and expansion under the directorship of our new leadership committee. We believe that well-designed and effectively governed cities are essential to solving the major challenges of our time. Our members come from private consultancy, state and local government, the development industry and academia.

Since relaunching in late 2021 we have a rapidly growing membership with 164 members as of March 2022, and 17 Partner organisations across universities, private consultancies and local government. While Victorian-based, we have members in New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland. As an industry organisation we draw upon our members immense individual and collective experience in the built environment. In May 2022 we will be working with a group of 30 NSW practitioners and members of the Designers in Government forum to explore the formal expansion of Urban Design Forum into the NSW context.

## **Defining Urban Design as a distinct profession**

Urban Design is a unique profession within the built environment for the specific emphasis on the translation of abstract policy into physical space, at all scales from the metropolitan area down to a small public realm project. As an 'integrative' profession (as distinct from exclusive) Urban Designers draw upon experience from across architecture, landscape architecture, industrial design, user experience, strategic design, engineering, planning, law, anthropology and public art.

It is common for an Urban Designer to have one or more qualifications in the built environment, in order to build multi-disciplinary competency beyond a base design qualification. It is exceptionally uncommon for Urban Designers to work in isolation, typically working in close collaboration with design and technical experts to realise either design strategies or physical projects.

The professional basis for Urban Design as a distinct discipline originates from the Harvard Graduate School of Design's 1956 Urban Design Conference, convened by European émigré Jose Luis Sert. The dedicated degree entitled 'Master of Architecture in Urban Design' spawned dozens of similar degrees across the United States, Continental Europe and the rest of the world, principally concerned with the physical structure and form of urban transformation projects.

While the degree had its origin in subjects within countless architectural teaching programs in Europe prior to this period, this specific focus of education marked a shift in the trajectory of the profession as one warranting distinct recognition. It is this origin as a skill in spatial design, as distinct from policy or legislation abstracted from space, that is important to highlight.

The practice of Urban Design however has historically suffered from questions as to its status, lack of professional representation in the form of a peak body, and from inadequate definitions. This has affected government procurement processes, the ability to attract and retain talented young people to the profession, along with exceptionally poor outcomes in the case of urban transformation or expansion projects without adequate urban design consideration. This is a particular area of focus for the Urban Design Forum's activities, in pursuing public interest outcomes in cities.

The establishment of a clear definition, supported by a suitable administrative body to provide peer recognition represents a significant opportunity to address a number of industry wide and specific professional challenges within Urban Design. We welcome the attempt of the Design and Place SEPP to address this problem and welcome further engagement in finding a robust solution that prioritises peer verification over checklist approach.

Should you have any queries regarding the information contained within this letter, please don't hesitate to contact Andy Fergus, Advocacy Lead on 0408 057 360 or via [hello@udf.org.au](mailto:hello@udf.org.au)

Kind regards,

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Joint President Urban Design Forum

Andy Fergus  
Advocacy Lead Urban Design Forum