



HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENTS

Let's make healthy built environments the heart of the District!

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Since early this year, the planning community has been immersed in strategic planning activities – responding to proposed updates for the planning legislation from the Department of Planning¹ and Environment, and commenting on the Greater Sydney Commission's (GSC) draft District Plans². Healthy planning advocates have also been busy writing submissions on these important reforms.

Drawing much of this effort together is the NSW Healthy Planning Expert Working Group (HPEWG) – a coalition of government, industry and NGO stakeholders passionate about the critical role that the built environment plays in supporting health and wellbeing. The HPEWG was first formally identified in the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy³ after it successfully advocated to include a health objective in the Planning Bill 2013. This, as many of you know, was never enacted⁴. When the updates to the Planning Legislation were put on exhibition earlier this year, to the surprise and dismay of the HPEWG, the health objective had disappeared! Given that its inclusion in the 2013 Bill was never questioned, the Group has been working hard to see it back there. The proposition is simple – health and wellbeing should be explicitly identified as a specific objective of the updated planning legislation. The HPEWG has also argued to embed health considerations in local strategic planning statements and to develop evidence based indicators. The City

Wellbeing Program at UNSW has developed a comprehensive set of indicators which will assist in this endeavour⁵.

In addition, the HPEWG has been engaged in responding to the draft District Plans issued by the GSC. The central argument is that District Plans must ensure that the places where we live, work and play, as well as how we travel to and from them, are supportive of healthy behaviours – those actions that reduce key risk factors for chronic disease, while also helping to mitigate the worsening effects of climate change.

Affirming this position, an advisory paper was published by the Social Panel for the GSC⁶. As well as recommendations about housing and transport, education and employment, equity and inclusion, arts and culture, this paper articulates a strong set of principles for healthy living and urban design. Open space provision is central to the list – quality, equitable accessibility, and adequacy in a densifying urban environment. The Panel also recommends that appropriate tools (such as

health impacts assessment) be mandatory in planning determinations to ensure that developments impact positively on the health and wellbeing of communities.

The HPEWG submission on the Draft District Plans has embraced the Social Panel's recommendations, asserting that planning for a productive, liveable and sustainable city must have health as a key outcome. It is also argued that the development of guidelines for safe and healthy built environments, together with the need for planners to closely collaborate with health agencies and adopt a broad range of indicators for monitoring the development of healthy built environments are essential.

Case study

In our previous column we committed to providing examples of good healthy planning practice throughout the year. Sharing space that is currently part of school grounds is an increasingly urgent strategic planning matter as our urban areas densify and the availability of green open space for children's physical activity shrinks, along with the disappearance of back yards for veggie gardens and composting. This topic was explored in the previous 'New Planner' by Lattouf and Kelly who cogently argued that school facilities can be used much more broadly by the communities around them if facilitated by a coordinated strategic planning process. We certainly agree and are keen to hear from readers about examples of where this is happening, especially in relation to sporting fields, playground areas and food produce gardens ■

Endnotes

- ¹ See: www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Policy-and-Legislation/Legislative-Updates/How-to-Get-Involved
- ² See: www.greater.sydney/district-plans
- ³ See: www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Plans-for-Your-Area/Sydney/A-Plan-for-Growing-Sydney
- ⁴ Thompson, SM and McCue, P 2016 'Healthy Planning: An Evolving Collaborative Partnership, Urban Policy and Research. V34; N1: pp: 73-89.
- ⁵ Paine, G. and Thompson, S. 2016, Healthy Built Environment Indicators. City Wellbeing Program, City Futures Research Centre, UNSW: See: cityfutures.be.unsw.edu.au/research/city-wellbeing/city-wellbeing-resources/healthy-built-environment-indicators/
- ⁶ See: www.ncoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/resources/301116%20GSC%20social%20panel%20advisory%20paper.pdf



Large fences and locked gates surround many school grounds. The result? Facilities that can support children being active sit idle outside of school hours. Meanwhile, open space and playgrounds are crowded and suffering from over-use. We have to start sharing!