

**Submission
No 15**

INQUIRY INTO APARTMENT DESIGN STANDARDS

Organisation: Victorian Planning Authority

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Ms. Sarah Connolly MP
Chair
Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Ms. Connolly,

Re: Parliamentary Inquiry into Apartment Design Standards

The Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Victorian Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee's *Inquiry into Apartment Design Standards in Victoria*.

The VPA is a State Government statutory authority reporting to the Minister for Planning. Our primary role is to undertake and support strategic land use planning within defined urban growth precincts across Melbourne and Victoria's regions. Our planning seeks to provide frameworks to guide development of high quality, affordable and liveable communities that support 20-minute neighbourhoods by promoting compact living. In undertaking this work, we work closely with local councils and communities, government agencies, landowners and the development industry.

The *VPA Strategic Plan 2021-2024* sets our purpose to promote prosperous, liveable and sustainable urban communities across a growing urban Victoria. The VPA aims to deliver a positive change in precincts through 'density done well'. The VPA also aims to deliver housing / population at densities that make transport, local services and facilities viable. This requires increased densities and well-designed and connected neighbourhoods.

As foreshadowed in the draft Land Use Framework Plans for Melbourne (DELWP, 2021), the VPA is considering options for a pipeline of renewal planning centred on areas of State and regional importance including priority precincts, activity centres and urban renewal areas.

In this context, the VPA is strongly supportive of the *Better Apartments Design Standards* that were implemented into the Victorian Planning Provisions through Clause 58 in 2017, and we welcome the 2021 updates. These Standards are a key plank in securing better design outcomes and building community confidence in the planning changes needed to support density, renewal and diversity in our established suburbs (a recent report by Infrastructure Victoria emphasises the importance of good design in meeting community aspirations <https://www.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Density-done-well-engagement-report-FINAL.pdf>).

In our role as planning authority, we focus primarily on the spatial allocation of land for various purposes and coordinating the infrastructure required to support these. The design and layout of specific buildings is dealt with in part by our plans, but also relies upon other controls including the VPPs and local planning controls. To simplify: the VPA's focus tends to be on shaping the public realm (what happens between the buildings) rather than on internal building design considerations.

In the VPA's experience, Clause 58 has been a useful reference point for our planning projects, forming the basis of built form modelling and testing assumptions for public realm impacts, including maximum floorplate depths, floor to floor heights, setback and separation distances and wind control measures. We also acknowledge the standards support local governments in the decision-making processes, providing a useful tool in assessing development applications.

Given our strong ability to shape the public realm through our plans, we particularly welcome the changes to the Clause 58 Objectives, introducing external design standards into the planning scheme for public realm considerations including green space, street interface, building materiality and wind control measures.

There is opportunity for future iterations of the *Better Apartments Design Standards* to further support guidelines for design of the public realm and contextual response of future developments.

This could involve guidance on acceptable height and density in various urban contexts, responding to local context and encouraging liveable high-density precincts that:

- advocate for designs that are responsive to the human scale at street level and activate the public realm
- take into consideration acceptable built form transition to sensitive interfaces
- limit adverse amenity impacts to the public realm
- improve local connection through a network of open spaces and pedestrian connections
- create a sense of place by encouraging community gathering, social interaction and inclusion.

There are a number of national and international examples where guidance on apartment design has extended to providing guidance on external relationships and the quality of public realm.

Toronto's building guidelines integrate family suitable design into planning of new vertical communities. The guidelines are structured into three scales – 'the neighbourhood', 'the building' and 'the unit' – based in the recognition that each positively contributes to how a family experiences living in vertical communities. <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2020/ph/bgrd/backgroundfile-148362.pdf>

The South Australian Form of Housing Design Guidelines (Section 1.3 Apartment Design) also provide guidance for apartment designs with greater focus on context and connecting with the surroundings and the wider community. https://www.housing.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/116292/1.3-Apartment-Design_Rev-2020.pdf

In New South Wales, the Parramatta Road Corridor Urban Transformation Planning and Design Guidelines <https://www.landcom.com.au/assets/Publications/Parramatta/5ae1d8536a/parramatta-road-implementation-tool-kit-planning-and-design-guidelines-november-2016.pdf> provide guidance on built form typologies for different development settings along the corridor, with particular focus on how building scale can be modulated to reflect differing contexts.

Finally, Active Design Guidelines prepared by the New York City Departments of Design and Construction and City Planning provide architects and urban designers with a manual for creating healthier buildings, streets, and urban spaces. <https://centerforactivedesign.org/dl/guidelines.pdf>

The VPA looks forward to the outcomes of this inquiry.

If you require any further information, please contact Rachel Dapiran, Executive Director Infrastructure, Strategy and Planning, on email [REDACTED] or m: [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely



Stuart Moseley
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER