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Re: Feedback on the Tasmanian Housing Strategy Exposure Draft

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to the Tasmanian Housing Strategy Exposure Draft. This feedback is provided on behalf of a select group of architects with extensive combined experience in designing and delivering both private and public housing projects.

Firstly, we would like to applaud the government's initiative in addressing the critical housing challenges we face in our state. However, after carefully reviewing the draft, we believe there are certain aspects that warrant closer examination and refinement to effectively address the challenges of providing housing that caters to the well-being of all Tasmanians.

More Homes, Built Faster

While we appreciate the need to urgently deliver more homes, speed of delivery should never be at the expense of good quality outcomes. Unfortunately, there are many examples of poor individual and community results from housing which was delivered in haste and would have benefited from additional forward planning, community engagement and design thinking. Examples of poor outcomes from projects that fail to address the social, economic, and cultural aspects of a community include:

1. Social Disruption - when projects do not consider the existing social fabric of a community.

2. Disgruntled communities - caused through lack of meaningful community engagement resulting in residents feeling excluded, unheard, or powerless.
3. Social Stigma - poorly planned and/or design projects can disenfranchise communities by reinforcing existing social and economic disadvantages.
4. Cultural Erosion - projects that disregard the cultural heritage and identity of a community can lead to the erosion of cultural practices, traditions, and values and result in a loss of identity and community pride.
5. Poor Health - inadequately planned and designed homes (such as those with poor quality indoor environment, insufficient light and ventilation, lack of access to outdoor or social space, or reinforce social stigmas) have been linked to poor mental and physical health outcomes.
6. Inadequate Infrastructure and Services - projects that are not considered as part of a holistic strategy can lack essential infrastructure and services can leave communities underserved and lacking vital resources.

These examples highlight the crucial role of holistic community planning and good design in creating desirable community outcomes. Often forward planning, holistic thinking and good design take time and the involvement of many stakeholders, however by considering the unique characteristics and needs of a community, involving residents in the design process, and prioritising aspects such as community engagement, cultural preservation, quality environments and economic opportunities, projects can contribute to the creation of vibrant, inclusive, healthy, and thriving communities.

While it is not necessarily the document's intention to prioritise themes, the nomination of "More Homes, Built Faster" as Theme 01 places this at the forefront of the strategy. In contrast, we suggest that the theme of "People at the Centre" should be the first / highest priority theme and ultimately inform the other themes in the document.

Holistic Thinking

The draft strategy rightly focuses on the problem of housing (and in particular social housing) however we propose that there should be more recognition of housing as an integrated part of a holistic approach to the design of urban spaces and the overall development of cities. Key considerations include:

- strategic location of new housing with an emphasis on greater density rather than spread.
- promote development in locations with access to social, cultural and transport infrastructure.
- inclusion of mixed uses within housing developments to encourage interaction and community.
- encouragement of socio-economic diversity rather than monocultures
- Implementation of minimum standards to ensure high quality sustainability and environmental outcomes.

Furthermore, Tasmania's Housing Strategy should also consider the upgrade of existing properties. While the creation of new dwellings is of critical importance, there are many existing dwellings that do not meet current standards for indoor air quality - particularly in relation to heating and cooling and the prevalence of mould in Tasmanian homes. Opportunity

also exists for greater densification within existing dwellings through the creation of multi-generational homes with the addition of “granny” flats to, or within, existing properties.

While not within our area of expertise, we also suggest that the government consider legislation that supports longer residential rental periods. There are many examples from overseas where this works to create more community cohesion such as in Europe where people can rent for longer periods (5-10 years plus) which promotes wellbeing, security, and pride with residents given permission to make their rental dwelling a home (ie. putting paintings up, changing the kitchen, changing colours, etc)

Design

We agree with references to the need for good design and design guidelines in the draft Housing Strategy and propose that more acknowledgement is made of the role that Architects can play in this area.

There are a number of Tasmanian Architects who are experienced in designing good housing solutions that can play a vital role in Tasmania’s Housing Strategy not only in project oriented design roles but also in providing broader strategic design advice. Unfortunately, the draft strategy does not recognise, or promote, the role of Architects.

We propose that a key part of the strategy should be to engage with suitably qualified architects to:

- inform strategic planning and design guidelines.
- consider the qualities of existing communities that should be reinforced through new development.
- assist in the creation of targets and/or KPI required to determine the success of the strategy.
- create exemplar template / pattern projects that can assist with faster delivery.

Tasmanian towns and cities have unique qualities within the Australian context, which lends itself to European housing models (such as co-operatives, built to rent, rent to own, multi-generational, cohousing, integrated mixed-use) that are more liveable, accessible, diverse and healthy for occupants, but do not necessarily require greater height to achieve higher density.

We also suggest that the Government consider subsidising architectural fees for housing of greater density than single dwellings (particularly medium and high density) to increase quality outcomes / subsidised in the same way that other services that benefit the community.

More Homes

Generally, we appreciate the need for more homes in Tasmania not only as a basic human right (to house our current population) but also because a lack of suitable housing will hinder the future economic development of the state. Due to the high demand for housing in the state, collaborative efforts between the government and the private sector are essential to address housing challenges effectively and provide safe, affordable, and sustainable housing for all.

Our experience, from recent developments, is that it is difficult to get housing projects to stack up financially given the recent inflation and interest rate rises. A number of factors such as

suitable site availability, land costs and yield limitations all add to the challenge of private development.

A number of incentives for private developers could be considered as part of the housing strategy:

- reduced headwork charges (or longer payback over the lifetime of the project)
- relaxation / reduction in car parking requirements - such as visitor car parking
- relaxed height restrictions for housing developments with mixed use and/or mixed demographic
- greater density allowance if the development can demonstrate good design outcomes.
- smaller apartment size requirements

Further incentives might be provided to encourage private developers to include social housing within the development:

- fast tracked or priority planning approval
- relaxed planning restrictions - such as boundary setbacks, height limits, private outdoor spaces
- relaxed requirement to meet local neighbourhood characteristics.
- higher density allowance

Additionally, the government should consider financial disincentives for landowners that “land bank” property or for property that does not have uses that are in-line with strategic planning and/or the best and highest use for the site. Currently the development of many parts of Tasmanian cities are being stifled by property owners who are neither developing their own sites or selling to commercial developers. This same thinking could be used to unlock underutilised existing buildings within the city.

Lastly, we support the Property Council of Australia’s suggestion that the government provide (or subsidise) case study housing designs which are compliant with the NCC and generally ready for use. Drawings from examples from interstate (such as the Victorian Future Homes Pilot - <https://engage.vic.gov.au/future-homes-pilot>), we propose that the following guidelines should be considered in the implementation of this strategy:

- exemplar projects should be designed by Architects with quality affordable housing experience.
- designers of exemplar projects should have objectives such as:
 - Responsive to need: family friendly and greater housing diversity.
 - Liveable: high-amenity, accessible homes, and social spaces
 - Good neighbours: responsive siting, better density, and greener neighbourhoods
 - Affordable designs: cost-effective designs available to more people at a competitive price
 - Enduring: high-quality, resilient, and adaptable to change, zero-carbon ready
 - Sustainable: high performance and long-term liveability
 - Viable: land efficient designs with market buildability considered
 - Adaptable: replicable and scalable on typical suburban lots.

Environmental Sustainability

The building industry generally recognises the need to raise the environmental performance of all buildings with a greater degree of emphasis given within the profession to raising targets for environmental performance. While environmental considerations are broadly covered in the draft Housing Strategy, it is our view that Environmental Sustainability should be given much higher priority as it is of critical importance to the overall sustainability of our society.

Despite the aspirations, generally within the community and within the building industry, construction costs often result in environmental standards being first to be compromised as developers resort to minimum standards. Consequently, it is important that government strategy and guidelines mandate (where possible) or encourage higher environmental targets for our housing stock.

Additional items that the strategy should consider include:

- a government commissioned cost analysis which examines the lifetime cost benefit of high energy efficiency homes and includes overall community benefits, savings to the homeowner, and effects on resale value. This analysis (updated regularly) would be made available to all government departments and to the private sector to encourage upfront capital investment environmental strategies.
- government subsidy of specialist consultant advice (such as environmental consultants, service engineers, architects) specifically tailored to providing better environmental outcomes.
- government subsidies and/or loans to assist with upfront capital investment which could be paid back over the lifespan of the building.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the Tasmanian Housing Strategy Exposure Draft. We believe that while the government's initiative to address housing challenges is commendable, there are certain aspects of the draft that require closer examination and refinement.

It is crucial to prioritise the well-being of all Tasmanians and ensure that speed of delivery does not compromise the quality of outcomes. Holistic community planning, good design, and the involvement of stakeholders are essential in creating vibrant, inclusive, and thriving communities. We also propose greater recognition of housing as part of a holistic approach to urban design. The role of architects in providing strategic design advice and creating exemplar projects should be acknowledged and promoted. Incentives for private developers and landowners, as well as a focus on environmental sustainability, should be included in the strategy.

Ultimately, collaborative efforts between the government and the private sector are crucial in addressing housing challenges and providing safe, affordable, and sustainable housing for all Tasmanians.