

**Central Metropolitan Perth Sub-Regional Strategy  
Draft Report Public Submission  
December 2010**

**Name:** Bronwyn Kitching, Executive Officer

**Organisation:** Shelter WA

**Address:** 33 Moore Street, East Perth 6004

**Email:** [bronwyn@shelterwa.org.au](mailto:bronwyn@shelterwa.org.au)

**Phone:** 08) 9325 6660

**Fax:** 08) 9325 8113

**Website:** [www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au)

**Interest:** Non-government not-for-profit affordable housing consumer peak body



## **About Shelter WA**

Shelter WA is an independent community based peak body committed to the principle of accessible, affordable, appropriate and secure housing for every person. Shelter WA focuses on people who have low incomes or who are otherwise disadvantaged in the housing market. This includes people who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness.

Our role is to give an informed voice on housing policy issues based on sound research, close collaboration and consultation with housing consumers and community based organisations working with housing and related issues. We promote housing options for people on low incomes, including social housing (public housing and community housing), affordable housing provided through the private sector and affordable home ownership.

## Comments

Shelter WA endorses the aims of the Central Metropolitan Perth Sub-regional Strategy draft report, and welcomes the inclusion of section 7.4 *Planning for housing affordability and choice*. We recognise that planning plays a central role in the supply and availability of affordable housing. The draft report correctly asserts that there will be a growing need for new types of housing products to meet the demands of an ageing population, single households and those on low and moderate incomes.

Shelter WA supports the emphasis on in-fill in the Central Sub-region Draft Report. However, density does not necessarily equate to affordability. The number of 'luxury' apartment developments in WA and the fact that the median cost of new apartments are within  $\pm 10\%$  of the price of detached houses is evidence that apartments are not necessarily a cheaper market option in this State.

We need to find ways to ensure that the Central sub-region does not exclude large portions of the population, on low and moderate incomes who are most in need of being located close to amenities and transportation. Shelter WA asserts that such in-fill must be well-designed, have passive solar and environmental features built into construction and orientation, be able to support ageing and potential mobility restricted occupants to house the forecast demographic cohort and fit visually and aesthetically with existing neighbourhoods.

Clear planning mechanisms are needed to ensure that increased supply is affordable for low and moderate income households. Without specific provisions for additional dwellings to target these households, we run the risk of increasing density without increasing the social and economic mix needed for the health and vitality of our communities. It has been recognised that if the existing dwellings in Western Australia housed an equivalent number of occupants that dwellings accommodated in previous decades<sup>i</sup> (houses usually accommodated more people in the past) there would not be the extent of housing supply shortage WA is currently experiencing. (Craig James Chief Economist CommSec, 2009).

Many local government authorities recognise that a dwindling local population is negatively impacting on the viability of businesses, commercial activity and the sustained provision of public and community services including operational schools and police stations. In WA we are seeing police stations and primary schools in inner city and middle ring suburbs being closed and relocated (at high cost to taxpayers and public agencies) to fringe development areas where population growth, young families and new home buyers are increasing demand. However well located regions where these facilities are already established are underutilised due to the shifting population and the exclusion of new residents due to affordability barriers and changing local demographics. Many suburbs with an historical population profile of younger people and families are ageing and diminishing in vibrancy and diversity, with a significant proportion of homes that previously held entire families, now housing only a single older widow, widower or higher income sole person.

Long term residents, families and generations who remain stable in a location over a long period of time have many benefits for communities and local regions. Wellbeing qualities including the sense of pride, connection and inclusion, personal investment and 'ownership' in the region, willingness to contribute and participate in community activities and initiatives, volunteering and informal neighbourhood benevolence, acts of charity and kindness and personal satisfaction are all positively associated with housing security and geographical stability. Maintaining family and social network connections, by ensuring a region is furnished with diverse dwelling forms and sufficient affordable housing options across all tenures (home-ownership, private market and discounted social and community rental properties, short term hotel/motel/boarded house and crisis housing) are required to accommodate people for short or longer periods at different points in their lives or 'housing careers'.

As the population of the Perth increases, affordable housing will be needed for a range of household types and sizes. Key workers, including nurses, police officers and teachers, as well as tradespeople, shop assistants and hairdressers need affordable housing close to where they work. Households with complex housing needs such as a child with a disability or responsibility for in-home care provision to frail older relatives also require some place to live that is safe, well-located, in close proximity to health services and affordable. Aging parents caring for an adult child with disabilities or a mother with children seeking to rebuild their lives after a difficult marriage separation or escaping from domestic violence need accommodation that supports their wellbeing. These families are unlikely to be able to find appropriate accommodation in the private rental market and they should not be forced to live long distances from services and public transportation. These households particularly if they exist on fixed low-moderate incomes need discounted rents, public or community housing, or affordable house purchase models in the Central sub-region.

Local governments can use specific planning mechanisms to facilitate the development of such accommodation.

## Local Responses to the Need for Affordable Housing

In October 2010, Shelter WA hosted a workshop for local government councillors and staff titled 'Local Responses to the Need for Affordable Housing'. Forty (40) mayors, councillors and planning staff participated in the workshop, representing 12 local governments in the Perth metropolitan area. Several themes emerged from the workshop, including the following:

- Participants recognised the need for affordable housing in their jurisdictions, particularly for existing members of the community who were experiencing housing stress (paying more than 30% of their income on housing costs).
- Some participants expressed challenges they face in balancing the need for affordable housing with resistance from ratepayers. Local community backlash against social housing (whatever the targeted or generic profile of potential tenants may be) is a regular phenomena and public misperception of the profile characteristics of a vast majority of social housing tenants causes sensational, divisive and heated exchanges. In particular, participants mentioned competing interests in changing zoning to provide for personal discretion (outside the legal jurisdiction of governments) in a home-owner's choice to allow the use of ancillary units for non-family members, and in the approvals process for building and development applications for multi-unit and multiple storey dwellings.
- Participants mentioned the need to educate the public about affordable housing and the need to de-stigmatise social and affordable housing, and the tenants that are housed in this system.
- Several participants expressed the need for clear guidelines from WAPC and the Department of Planning, especially for small localities without dedicated planning staff, to articulate affordable housing strategies, targets and planning mechanisms. Several councillors and planning staff said they needed specific tools to help guide them when working with developers.

Shelter WA encourages WAPC and the Department of Planning to provide detailed guidelines and where necessary mandatory targets for local governments to deliver affordable housing supply as part of their housing strategies and business plans.

Such regulations or guidelines could include initiatives like the following:

- fee discounts for affordable housing developments,
- planning bonuses such as relaxed boundary setbacks,
- lower requirements for car parking spaces,
- height increases for multi-storey units,
- mixed use zoning for buildings or sites where a combination of commercial /educational / community service facilities **and** residential dwellings can be co-located for developments containing affordable housing, and
- compulsory inclusionary zoning targets
- flexibility in plot ratios

## Planning mechanisms to promote affordable housing

Dr. Ian Winters, Executive Director of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), recently gave a presentation to the Local Government Urban Planning and Development Summit on 'Integrating affordable housing issues into urban planning processes'. He outlined several ways in which land use planning can promote the supply of affordable housing. These include:

- Increase housing supply
- Reduce barriers to affordable housing development
- Preserve and offset the loss of low-cost housing
- Encourage new affordable housing
- Seek a dedicated affordable housing supply in new developments

Winters provided examples of ways that local governments can encourage new affordable housing:

- Graduated planning standards relating to building use and context (e.g. boarding house near public transport require less parking)
- Planning bonuses/concessions on development standards for designated affordable housing contributions
- Fast track approvals for affordable housing meeting defined criteria
- Fee discounts for affordable housing meeting defined criteria

He further outlined that planning can help secure new affordable housing supply through the following:

- Inclusionary zoning to provide mandatory contributions by all
- Identified developments in a specified zone to contribute to an affordable housing fund
- Impact fees – mandatory contributions to offset the impacts of development on affordable housing needs

Several of these mechanisms may be applicable for WAPC and the Department of Planning in their work with local governments to develop housing targets that include a component of affordable dwellings.

Other responses that could be adopted by local authorities and state government include:

- Owners ability to undertake corner block subdivision *as of right*, where there are two or more road access ways to the site
- Relaxation of minimum dwelling sizes to promote a variety of dwelling forms more reflective of changing household characteristics and demographic shifts
- Active encouragement of diversity in housing type and form – whole suburbs and regions of homogenous four bedroom single detached houses are not ideal in a diverse population consisting of increasing numbers (and proportion) of single person households
- Introduction of maximum residential dwelling sizes (suitability of dwelling for purpose)
- Responsive approvals for owners to re-orientate and re-configure houses – large homes could be converted to multiple unit dwellings with internal renovation, addition of ablutions and kitchen fittings (maisonette style or into separate flats and apartments as was undertaken throughout Europe and the UK during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century on large palatial dwellings, of heritage value but no longer financially viable for their owners or sustainable as a single dwelling).

## **Remove Disconnects, Contradictions and Inconsistencies in Planning Regulations and Policies**

Whilst the public sector (Department of Housing, public housing development) has been the only sector able to retain affordability following land zoning conversion from rural (cheap land) to urban residential (expensive), the majority of affordable housing (rental and for-purchase housing) is located in the private sector (23.7% of all households in WA are private renters)<sup>ii</sup>.

The 'R Code' system in WA includes statements of principle such as references to 'diversity and affordability' that are noteworthy, but R Code regulation inherently lacks the mechanisms to deliver on these stated aspirations, and in practice effectively legislates against them.

The WA Planning Commission, the Department of Planning and also Western Australian Urban Planning tertiary education curriculums do not strongly incorporate skill sets around housing or affordable housing provision. This tripartite schism between 'housing', 'planning' and arguably extending to 'community infrastructure' acts to confound the necessary integration between these areas that are logically interrelated. The limited focus of Planning Authorities on the environmental, geological and sustainability issues has neglected the detail of housing *for people* and towns *for communities of people*. Ironically when rezoning is effected, many of the houses built are environmentally wasteful, poorly designed, constructed and oriented to take advantage of climatic conditions and placed together in lots in ways that further compromise their liveability<sup>iii</sup>.

Regional Development Commissions, whilst a positive vehicle for broader more holistic and responsive planning and environmental amelioration responses is ineffective to mandate the desired outcome for affordable housing supply, and hence even when opportunity presents such as the East Perth Redevelopment Authorities work, the provision of suitable housing supply is limited and negligible.

Judith Stubbs in her December 2010 draft paper *Achieving Affordable and Diverse Housing in Regeneration Areas in Western Australia*<sup>iv</sup>, prepared for the WAPC identifies a number of preliminary state-level, metropolitan-wide and local-level strategies that could be adopted. Key common aspects of these potential strategies include:

- strengthening legislation to include clear statements of purpose, objectives and targets for affordable housing provision
- the development and addition to the Planning and Development Act 2005 (WA) definitions and benchmarks related to affordable housing, in relevant schedules and State Planning Policies
- development and provision of Model Scheme Text
- including specific reference to affordable housing as a form of 'public infrastructure', 'amenity', 'service' or 'facility'

## Promote Housing Consumer Participation

Shelter WA encourages participation of low and moderate income housing consumers in all levels of policy development. When local governments are developing plans to implement their housing targets, it will be imperative to include the active participation of people in a wide range of housing types and tenures. This includes soliciting input from low income housing consumers in public housing and community housing, as well as the private rental market. Such households are often less visible and less vocal in local government planning. It would be worthwhile for WAPC and the Department of Planning to incorporate specific outreach strategies aimed at including those households that are often absent in the policy development process.

## Conclusion

In closing, Shelter WA commends WAPC and the Department of Planning for clearly laying out the projections of housing demand, encouraging responsible in-fill development, and recognising the need for housing affordability and choice. The health and vitality of the Central sub-region depends on people being able to secure housing that is affordable, appropriate and available. Indeed, the themes set out in Directions 2031 of Perth as a city that is liveable, prosperous, accessible, sustainable and responsible, depend on being able to adequately house our growing and changing population.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>i</sup> Since the first Census was conducted in 1911, the number of persons per dwelling has consistently fallen. In 1911 there was an average of 4.5 people in every home. But by 2006 this ratio had almost halved to around 2.4 people in every home. Not only have more homes been built over time but other factors like fewer children and divorces have resulted in smaller families.

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics cat. no. 4102.0, Australian Social Trends, Data Cube – Housing. Released at 11.30am (Canberra time) 14 December 2010 Table 2.5 Housing, WA Summary, 1998–2010

<sup>iii</sup> From: Dr Linley Luton (UWA) AIUS Seminar, Perth 18 November 2010, 'What happened to design and planning in these suburbs?' PowerPoint slides showed whole Perth suburbs impervious to rain due to excessive land coverage of the dwelling on the block, suburbs untouched by natural air movement due to the houses located in curving 'cul-de-sac' patterns that create permanent and impenetrable windbreaks.

<sup>iv</sup> Judith Stubbs, *Achieving Affordable and Diverse Housing in Regeneration Areas in Western Australia*. Executive Summary Stirling City Centre Redevelopment Area, December 2010