



Australian Institute of
Landscape Architects

Institute Response to Community Engagement Charter 2017 Discussion Draft

9 October 2017

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects – South Australian Chapter (AILA SA) is pleased to provide a response on the Community Engagement Charter 2017 Discussion Draft to the State Planning Commission. AILA SA has previously provided industry contribution towards the Planning Reform, Planning Development and Infrastructure (PDI) Bill, 30 Year Plan for Greater Adelaide Update and the Design Guidelines. AILA SA remains keen to engage collaboratively with the State Government and its agencies to build stronger communities and promote a more prosperous and sustainable future for South Australia.

Overview

AILA SA is part of AILA, the growing national advocacy body representing almost 3,000 active and engaged landscape architects. Committed to designing and creating a better Australia, landscape architects have the skills and expertise to solve macro issues with innovative, integrated solutions. Landscape architects contribute leadership, creativity and innovation as they strive to collaborate to achieve better health, environmental, social and economic outcomes. From citywide strategies to the redesign of local parks, landscape architects are building stronger communities through making places and spaces more sustainable and productive.

Community Engagement Charter 2017 Discussion Draft

AILA SA supports the establishment of the Community Engagement Charter to set the requirements for engaging with the community on preparation and amendments to the State Planning Policies, Regional Plans, Design Standards and Infrastructure Schemes, as well as Planning and Design Code Establishment and amendments.

The high-level state strategies or policies set many of the long term directions that affect the quality of life for local residents within communities across South Australia. Often the language and complexity of these documents leave communities ignorant to the potential change.

In addition, the historic impact of changes to planning policy have often only truly been understood when local development is occurring and it exceeds the local community's perception. At this point, any 'engagement' is a negative experience and prejudices future community engagement.

It is likely this historic context has informed a sense of 'stand and defend' in the tone of the current document. AILA SA would encourage the Commission to champion authentic engagement that enables the community to active contribute ideas towards greater outcomes in the development of the charter.



Community Engagement Principles

AILA SA supports the eight draft principles and the process undertaken to develop the 7 + 1. However, AILA SA encourages further revision in the wording to strengthen the links between engagement and better outcomes. Engagement should not be limited to a process, but rather a collaborative means to inform the outcome and improved decision making.

For example, the following amendments could reflect a more positive tone towards Engagement:

'Principle 1: Inclusion and participation is genuine and the feedback is considered in the final outcomes.'

'Principle 5: Engagement Process contributed to the outcomes and informed the decision making process.'

'Principle 8: People recognise the opportunity to input into the decision making process, without guaranteeing a certainty of outcomes.'

Implementation

Community engagement, if appropriately planned, funded and implemented, should be an open and transparent process that engages the community, design team and decision maker in advancing better outcomes. AILA SA supports the Charter as an appropriate instrument to establish realistic expectations on all parties to achieve meaningful engagement that suits the scale of change.

The IAP2 Spectrum is utilised by our members and the wider planning and design professions to set the expectations of engagement. The Commission is encouraged to work with the framework of IAP2 Spectrum.

AILA SA understands that the Commission may be subject to negative submissions that label the Engagement Charter as another layer of bureaucracy to slow project delivery and add financial cost to projects. However, AILA SA would support the Commission in undertaking further research to demonstrate the potential long-term efficiencies and cost saving from early engagement if it informs better design outcomes, positive community support, and avoids unnecessary delays and cost later to the project because of legal complications, negative media and increased project risks.

AILA SA values the acknowledgment of 'Tone' in the document. The Charter must promote engagement as a positive and valued process that is able to help shape better outcomes for all. Engagement must begin early in the formation of proposals and be ongoing as ideas are developed, tested and ultimately finalised. The Charter should encourage greater community participation, not from concern, but from the opportunity to contribute to positive change.

Measure Performance

AILA SA supports the Charter's aspiration to achieve better outcomes, decisions, projects and policies. The Engagement Charter will be applied to major strategy and policy that are intended to improve the quality of life for all within South Australia. The charter should capture the opportunity for positive change, to achieve higher order strategic aims through local directions and outcomes.



Importantly, the Commission is encouraged to view the process of engagement as the most genuine means to build transparency and accountability, rather than limit it to an evaluation (perceived to be after the fact). AILA SA believes that engagement should not be a “one-off” step in the life span of projects, but part of an ongoing and iterative process. The most successful measure of performance is not an assessment of if engagement was undertaken, or how many people attended particular events. The possible measures listed are understandably quantitative, but do not demonstrate ‘how’ engagement has influenced the decision-making process.

The day-to-day experience of our members reflects that more effective and meaningful engagement can achieve better planning decisions if the outcomes of the engagement process can be transparently and accountably demonstrated in informing the final outcomes.

Role of Design in the Engagement Process

Landscape Architects use design as an important tool in effective engagement. To quote the cliché, ‘A picture is worth a thousand words’ the ability to draw can give greater clarity, understanding and attention to the potential for change. It has the ability to expand understanding, often empowering the community and giving them greater confidence to contribute. This greater understanding is essential when working with the community, and in particular those most vulnerable.

Design is a very effective means to be able to test ideas, and demonstrate different scenarios for change, to better inform the final decision. Design can provide an important tool to achieve more meaningful engagement with the community when presenting higher strategy or complex policy. The act of design when used effectively can bring people central to the process of change, and as new technologies continue to emerge, the ability to engage the community in visual or virtual imagery, settings or scenarios that better represent, rather than rely only on text should be an important forward focus for the Commission and the Charter.

Next Steps and Ongoing Refinement

AILA SA is committed to working with the State Planning Commission to provide input and support in the further development of the Community Engagement Charter. AILA SA was not in the original groups convened to assist in the development of the draft paper; however, we are willing to commit experienced members to assist the Commission in further development and refinement of the Charter.

AILA SA supports the development of an Engagement Charter that places the community at the centre of decision-making. We support the recognition of engagement as a positive tool to build community understanding and enhance long-term outcomes, through an ongoing process of collaboration.

AILA SA provides these comments in support of the Charter and we look forward to working further with the State Planning Commission on future iterations and on planning reform more generally in the future.



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Please contact me if you have any questions or contact Sally Bolton – AILA SA State Manager by email - sally.bolton@aila.org.au if you require any additional information.

Yours Sincerely,

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