

1.10 PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO APARTMENT DESIGN STANDARDS (NS)

Responsible Director: Peter Panagakos

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. *Notes the Inquiry into Apartment Design Standards.*
2. *Endorses the draft officer submission as detailed in the report.*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to brief Councillors on the recent announcement regarding the parliamentary enquiry into apartment design standards and to consider and endorse the officer submission set out in the report.

BACKGROUND

The Victorian Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee is undertaking an inquiry into apartment design standards. The purpose of the inquiry is to consider possible better design standards for apartments, including considerations of examples from other states and overseas.

Hundreds of thousands of Victorians live in apartments. Demand for these dwellings will grow as we emerge from the global pandemic, so it's imperative we have the most appropriate framework in place to ensure a high standard of liveability. The inquiry's terms of reference task the Committee with examining current apartment living standards in Victoria and how improvements could be made to apartment building developments, including communal areas.

The Committee has three terms of reference to guide their consideration, whilst not limited to, include:

- (a) Current apartment living standards in Victoria;
- (b) improvements that can be made to the liveability in apartments and apartment building developments, including communal areas; and
- (c) initiatives undertaken by other states or nations that have improved apartment design standards.

Council has a long history of submissions in relation to improving apartment living standards for matters of both external and internal amenity.

Submission are due by Sunday 31 October 2021. The Committee will table a report in Parliament at the end of the inquiry. The report is due by 30 June 2022.

DISCUSSION

It is noted in the context of this enquiry that Council Officers provided input into a further review of the Better Apartment Design Standards (BADs) in 2019. Consultation with stakeholders (including the City of Monash) occurred following. In May of 2021, the department released the draft guidelines which were expected to be formally gazetted later this year.

The key themes for the draft guidelines included the provision of private and communal open space, wind impacts, integration with the street and external materials.

More specifically, the government's proposed changes included:

- **Communal open space** - should be provided in common areas of buildings of 10 dwellings or more to improve residents' health and wellbeing and provide urban cooling. The current standard for communal open space applies to buildings of 40 dwellings or more.
- **Landscaping** - should not be an afterthought in building design and planning but incorporated from the beginning of the process. Developers will also be required to include more areas with deep soil to encourage canopy tree growth.
- **Building façades** - should be of a high quality, incorporating materials that are durable and make a positive contribution to the existing streetscape.
- **Publicly accessible outdoor space** - within an apartment development or on surrounding streets should not have unacceptable wind impacts, as they create unpleasant spaces to walk and congregate.
- **Street frontages** - should avoid blank walls or high fences. Car parking entrances and waste collection areas should not be visible from the street.
- **Balcony Requirements** – north and south facing balconies can excessively overshadow living rooms and bedrooms in apartments below. Balconies on tall apartment buildings can also have poor levels of amenity due to wind conditions. In these areas, there will be the option to reduce balcony overhangs to improve the energy performance of apartments.

The matters raised in our response to this process will also be provided through our submission to the parliamentary enquiry.

Submissions are proposed to be made in relation to the first two terms of reference only as follows:

Terms of Reference	Response
Current apartment living standards in Victoria.	Many improvements have been made to apartment designs as a result of the Better Apartment Design Standards (BADs). However,

	<p>more can be done with respect to improving current apartment living standards in Victoria.</p>
<p>Improvements that can be made to the liveability in apartments and apartment building developments, including communal areas.</p>	<p>The drafted requirements in the current planning controls are all discretionary and therefore the question arises as to whether any of the proposed standards should be mandatory requirements rather than performance based.</p> <p>Candidates for mandatory requirements would include –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum dwelling size - based on number of bedrooms • Internal ceiling heights • Accessibility provisions • Natural ventilation • Variety of apartment sizes within larger apartment developments to provide diversity and flexibility for future households. <p>Concern is raised with respect to the reduced balcony widths permitted, given the limited private open space already provided for residents of Apartments.</p> <p>The drafting of appropriate decision guidelines is critical to the achievement of the objectives and standards proposed.</p> <p>Whilst the drafted provisions in the government's recent review for communal open space would be an improvement (requiring communal open space for developments of 10 or more dwellings), it is likely that the wording of this provision will result in a number of rooftop open space areas proposed which requires rooftop structures for screening and will result in potential bulk impacts to surrounding properties. It is also recommended that the communal open space is provided in many varied forms throughout the development for various needs of the residents.</p>

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The inquiry is likely to result in policy implications in the future to Clause 55.07 and Clause 58 of the Monash Planning Scheme in addition to the State Planning Policy Framework.

CONSULTATION

Consultation as part of the enquiry is open until 31 October 2021.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This report will not result in any identified environmental, economic or social impacts. However it will have a long term benefit to the environment and the community through awareness and application of current policy and assessment tools.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

It is considered there will not be any human rights implications as a result of the review.

GENDER EQUITY ASSESSMENT

A gender equity impact was not required for this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate or direct financial impacts as a result of the inquiry.

CONCLUSION

Whilst the guidelines for apartment standards have improved in recent years, more consideration to the way that people use these internal spaces and the opportunities that communal spaces for these residents could significantly improve the way that people live in Victoria.