Submission to "Improving apartment design in NSW" – NSW Govt. Community Consultation
Author: Yanis Garrett
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Having looked through the Draft 'Apartment Design Guide', I offer the following ideas for consideration, comprising of the following:

1. Apartment design
2. High rise next to stations
3. Integrated planning of high rise with new rail networks
4. Architectural 'statements'
5. Balconies
6. Fire Escapes
7. Tree Height
8. Whole of suburb planning
9. Transparent planning and specifications.
10. Climate change and high winds
11. Architecture infrastructure levy
12. Central planning body to oversee all developments.
13. Affordability
14. Asbestos removal

1. Apartment design should be

- spacious with a minimum internal floor ratio that is consistent with a modern house design.
- have ratios that are set for bedroom sizes, eg 2br = 80m2; 3br = 110m2, etc, with 30m2 (or the equivalent of a large 6 x 5metre size bedroom or 5m x 5m + ensuite of 5m2) per bedroom thereafter. So a 5br apartment would have a minimum of 170m2, and with a 6th bedroom added, a second bathroom space allocation would need to be included. These figures do not include car spaces or storage areas external to the apartment, nor do they include external balconies.
- Private and noise proof to a high degree. Ideally, it should be possible to have a party or practice the drums without disturbing the neighbours.

2. High rise next to stations

a) should have a flexible upper height limit. Those buildings close to stations should be permitted to be of the tower variety, except where there is some other limiting factor, to make best use of the amenity. There is no point in taking up valuable land next to a station with a very low rise block. (I am thinking of St Leonard's here as a good example of optimal utilisation of limited space.)

b) should also include or even largely consist of apartments with no parking spaces. The assumption is that the owners have bought next to the station so that they can get to work directly by public transport. These non-parking space apartments can also be offered at a cheaper price.

3. Integrated planning of high rise with new rail networks

That where high rise is built in a location where there exists currently liittle infrastructure, that it be built alongside and simultaneous with the planning of new light rail / monorail / heavy rail (or any other form of mass transit system that acts independently of the road network) infrastructure.

4. Architectural statements

That there be allowed a wide variety of architectural design, and that council regulations not prohibit architecture to be able to make a statement. That architecture should be allowed to be both of a standard contemporary design (as indicated by the Draft Guide's illustrations), but also able to make an iconic or sculptural statement and "break the (aesthetic, not safety) rules" on occasion where this vision can be justified, and obeys Le Corbusier's principle that a residential building should be first and foremost functional - "a machine for living in". Both CLT (Cross Laminated Timber) apartments, and organically designed buildings constructed of carbon nanotubes are examples of this. In both cases architectural design should interact with the envirnoment, and should also partly reflect the environment. In all cases it should create a harmonious and commodious atmosphere in keeping with the nature of a home.

Such statements for towers might also be along the lines of those built recently in London (the Gherkin, the Cheesegrater (the Leadenhall building), the Heron Tower, Strata, the Shard, the Walkie-Talkie, amongst others) which although mostly not residential make an impressive statement on the skyline. But they should also be of a more modest height too.

5. Balconies

Notwithstanding point 4, I am unimpressed by architects who attempt to make a statement that is impractical, goes against the laws of physics, and in some cases is downright dangerous. The Hyatt Regency walkway collapse in Kansas city in 1981 provides one such example of this. In Queensland, Gold Coast transparent balconies, much beloved of architects, have provided the occasion for the deaths of too many young people over the last decade or so. I recommend therefore:

- That balconies are either fixed and supported vertically through piers integral to the structure, or they are cantilevered as an integral part of the building's internal structure, or both.

- That the balcony rail have a sufficent height, and have significant safety features built in by design.

6. Fire escape.

Buildings should have more than one fire escape. Towers should have the possibility of exiting the building in numerous ways in the event of catastrophic failure. For instance, while aesthetically out of place, poles built to the side of the two World Trade Centre buildings along with abseiling fixtures could have saved many lives in the 9/11 attacks. Human life comes before aesthetics.

7. Tree height

Where not in areas suitable for towers, high rise should be built to just above the height of a tall tree. The apartments of rows of houses that you find in the great European cities were built to tree height. This is a human scale that creates a warm and freindly environment. All designs should have trees allotted to the surrounds to cool the air, provide oxygen, help noiseproof the building, and add to the general amenity.

8. Whole of suburb planning

That high rise is built in areas, and is planned in terms of whole of suburb not just in terms of the individual lot.

High rise can be designed along a whole street, set of streets, neighbourhood or entire suburb, and that existing home owners are compensated and incentivised to sell with the following incentives:

- Paying a premium for their land (significantly above longitudinal market value)
- Compensation for the inconvenience and all costs paid
- Allowing them a reduced or at cost price for an apartment in the block that will replace their home, of an equivalent or larger internal floor space, to create local community continuity.

A way of reducing the cost of the temporary housing of temporarily displaced residents, would be to house them in an empty apartment block that is built first (say, a tower development by a station). They would live there rent-free until their street is redeveloped, at which point they can move back in, if they have decided to remain in their neighbourhood, or elsewhere, or even remain in the tower block. Once these temporarily displaced residents move out of the apartment tower (should they choose to), this would then be cleaned and sold off in the normal way.

9. Transparent planning and specifications.

That all buildings be open source, and have their specifications available, so that public can comment, and that once built, buyers can make an informed choice when choosing to buy into an apartment building, and inspectors can verify that the planned building has actually been built, or where there has been a variation, the reason for it.

10. Climate change and high winds

It is proposed that Tower design high rise have rounded and not sharp edges in the event of unforeseen climatic events.

The wind shear created when a high wind attempts to circumnavigate a sharp angle of a building can be greatly reduced by allowing wind to flow round a smooth corner. Although the face of the building will still be buffetted, rounded edges prevents gusts from “catching” the building. Towers should be able to withstand catastrophic winds.

11. Architecture infrastructure levy

It is proposed that increased height concessions could in some instances be given to developers in exchange for an infrastructure levy to go into the construction of a new rail line. For instance, high rise along King Georges’ Road would attract a levy to allow for a Hurstville-Strathfield elevated monorail to be built.

This makes sense, since such a rail line would add value to the development, and therefore would be sold at a higher price, plus the developer would be able to maximise profits from the site by building more storeys, and therefore selling more apartments. The greater density would in turn benefit the patronage of the new rail line.

12. Central planning body to oversee all developments.

While councils would and should have input into the process, the redevelopment of Sydney needs to be guided by a visionary, transparent and continuously accountable body with overarching planning powers, and composed of an expert panel of architects, engineers, urban planners and experienced builders, with both local and overseas experience. Public submissions and access to this body should be able to be made at all stages of any development.

13. Affordability

Following the basic laws of supply and demand, the increased supply of apartments should bring prices down to more affordable levels. However, I think we have a long way to go before we see the 3x the average wage prices for apartments be established, as was the case in the 1970s, before the current multi-decadal booms. Given that the average wage is now $75,000, this would mean a 2-3br apartment would need to be priced at $225,000. This would be a boon to those in the government service sector jobs on or below the average wage, such as nurses, teachers and policeman, and other service industries, and allow them to live closer to where they work, and enjoy a proper urban lifestyle that citizens of other cities currently enjoy. This would also take a lot of strain off transport.

- However, for this level of affordablilty to be acheived, we would need to bring a lot more than for instance the 56,000 apartments planned for the length of Parramatta Road per year, which to my mind is too low for this site, and should be 100,000+ apartments, given the length of the road, its proximity to the Inner West and Western Line stations, and its current under-utilisation. 56,000 apartments represents one single year's population growth in Sydney. It would be gone in a year.
- Overall we would really need to be building 75,000 – 150,000 apartments per year across Sydney over several years to catch up with the backlog and to house the rate of new arrivals, which is currently approximately 50,000 per year.
- While overseas investors not living in Sydney should not be prevented from buying these new apartments, in general there needs to be a sizeable majority of apartments allocated to those living and working in Sydney. I would suggest that the proportion be around 80:20 – 90:10 in favour of local Sydneysiders.

14. Heritage

Buildings of significant heritage value, as adjudged by a panel of experts and the Historic Houses trust, should be retained, and utilised as part of the tourist capital of Sydney in the same way that the Rocks is. Those buildings of frivolous heritage value (eg. the fibro house in Bankstown that was heritage listed) should not be retained. Those heritage sites in a dilapidated state should be judged on their merits by the panel as to whether retaining and repairing, partial retainment, integtration into a new structure, or destruction would be the best option.

15. Asbestos removal and disposal

Relevant to the redevelopment of Sydney is the curse of asbestos. Sydney is permeated with asbestos. Almost every undeveloped property has pieces used for all manner of things. Some is undisturbed and needs to be carefully removed prior to development, while there are many instances of asbestos dumped in the ground, under houses in the form of broken tiles, or stored in a variety of decaying

forms. While looking at properties I have found broken tiles in almost every location on the site, often leaching fibres into the soil.

Currently, because of the prohibitive cost, there is a strong disincentive of disposing of this hazardous material safely. Disposing of asbestos needs to be funded, and free for any amount from 10 grammes up to 10 tonnes, after which a small, nominal fee could be charged. Processing locations where you can take your carefully wrapped pieces should be clearly advertised. I would gladly pay an extra $10 or $20 tax a year to know that the environment is gradually being rid of this toxic substance.