

.Residential Flat Design Code

Tools for improving the design of residential flat buildings



Department of
Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources

To order an additional copy of the Residential Flat Design Code or to view an electronic version, visit the Planning NSW website:
www.planning.nsw.gov.au

For supporting case study examples of ideas and precedents to guide better design of residential flat development, visit the Residential Flat Pattern Book website:
www.patternbook.nsw.gov.au

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.Residential Flat Design Code

Tools for improving the design of residential flat buildings



.Premier's Foreword



In recent years Sydney has had its fair share of poorly designed, ugly apartment buildings. My own suburb of Maroubra has not been spared the crude, one profit-making storey stacked on top of the other.

But pointing out unattractive buildings is not hard. Doing something about it is the real challenge.

That is why I convened a residential flat forum in March 2000 to bring together 250 of our top planners, architects and developers to devise ways that the State government could help lift the quality of flat design.

Better design is about improving where we live, work and spend our time. It is a vital public issue. There is no reason why well-designed apartment buildings cannot help enhance our suburbs.

The statistics are interesting. Today there are 344,000 flats in Sydney. That is 24 percent of all dwellings. More than 650,000 people live in apartments: nearly two in every ten people living in Sydney. Over the past ten years about 80,000 new apartments have been built. That is equal to the number of detached houses.

More people want to live in apartments close to shops and transport. Young people are marrying and having children later in life. They prefer a balcony with a view in preference to a house with a garden to maintain.

By the way 62 percent of dwellings in Sydney are detached houses with front and back yards. In 15 years it will be 60 percent: only minimal change.

But with more people choosing to live in residential flats they will continue to be built. Over the past two years, what all the measures adopted by the State government have aimed to achieve are new ways to help designers, developers and planners achieve better quality more attractive and liveable flats.

After the March 2000 Forum the Urban Design Advisory Committee - ably chaired by Ken Maher from Hassell architects - called for public submissions and worked on the Forum conclusions.

In November 2000 the government responded to the recommendations from the Committee and announced the \$1.5M Design Quality Program. Key elements within the program were:

- a new State Environmental Planning Policy for residential flat development (SEPP 65) which means that only people with the right architectural design qualifications can design these buildings;
- the establishment of a number of design review panels to assist Councils improve the design quality of development proposals;
- a Residential Flat Design Pattern Book supported by a comprehensive website to help planners, developers and designers learn from some of the examples of better designed flat buildings in NSW.

Each of these is a clear and tangible way to help lift the quality of residential flat design. Now this document, the Residential Flat Design Code will arm Council planners, developers and architects with detailed guidance on how to improve those elements that go towards achieving better designed flat buildings.

The quality of new infrastructure in Sydney over recent years has been first class: new roads, train stations, parks and public squares which compare with the very best in the world. With the Olympic Games we showed - when given a challenge - just what this country can achieve. There is no reason why we cannot also rise to the challenge of creating residential flat buildings of which we can be proud and that enhance this great city.

This Code will help all those people whose job it is to rise to this challenge: our developers, planners, and architects. Better designed flats is a goal that must be achieved.



Bob Carr
Premier



.Preface

In July 2000, following a forum convened by the NSW Premier, the Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC) presented a report with a series of recommendations to improve the design quality of residential flat buildings in NSW. These recommendations subsequently formed the basis of PlanningNSW's Design Quality Program (DQP), which was launched by the Premier in November 2000 and received funding of \$1.5M over two years.

As its underlying approach, the Design Quality Program identifies three stages in the development process where design quality is critical:

- development proposal-the preparation and lodgement of residential flat development proposals
- development assessment-the principles and guidelines against which development proposals are assessed
- development consent-the process of decision making by elected representatives.

The DQP allows for the involvement of individuals with better design skills and experience at each of these stages. It has five key components: the new State Environmental Planning Policy 65 - Design Quality of Residential Flat Development (SEPP 65), Design Review Panels, Local Government Grants, the Residential Flat Design Pattern Book, and this Residential Flat Design Code.

The SEPP identifies ten design quality principles and explains how these principles will be applied in the preparation of instruments and plans and in determining development applications. It requires residential flat buildings to be designed by architects. Together with the establishment of design review panels, the SEPP addresses improved decision making. The Residential Flat Design Pattern Book supports good design by presenting a range of built and virtual examples of well designed residential flat buildings and by describing the positive contribution each makes to its urban context.

The Residential Flat Design Code sets broad parameters within which good design of residential flat buildings can occur by illustrating the use of development controls and consistent guidelines. It will be an important resource for council planners responsible for creating new plans relating to residential flats and for assessing residential flat development under SEPP 65. With the SEPP, it provides the 'how to' of designing better built outcomes.

Together with the other Design Quality Program initiatives, the Residential Flat Design Code will provide comprehensive guidance to improving the design quality of residential flat buildings.



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.Introduction

This Residential Flat Design Code is a resource to improve the design of residential flat development. It is based on the principle that good quality buildings help improve the quality of life. It deals with the location, size and scale, appearance and amenity of the buildings in which many people live.

The design of new residential flat buildings is important at all scales - for our cities, towns, suburbs and neighbourhoods - to provide good quality and amenity to growing populations with changing needs. Quality design contributes to enjoyable places: buildings, streets, squares and parks. It is inextricably linked to site and locality.

The Design Code is a set of guidelines that provide benchmarks for better practice in the planning and design of residential flat buildings. The application of this code will help achieve:

- environmental sustainability benefits through design including improved energy efficiency (p.93) and narrow building depths for natural ventilation (p.86) and daylight (p.84)
- improved residential amenity such as greater ceiling heights (p. 73), better apartment layouts (p.67) and quality outdoor living spaces (pp. 46, 48)
- higher design quality to improve the presentation of the building to the street, for example by removing garage entries from main streets (p.65) and screening car parking behind other uses (p.62).

The Design Code encourages improvements to the development application process. It recommends more comprehensive site analysis and design documentation for the pre-development and development application stages. (see Site Analysis and Appendices 2 and 3)

This document supports the ten design quality principles identified in SEPP 65 (see Appendix 1) and gives greater detail in how to achieve these principles in development proposals.

Residential flat development

Residential flat development includes one or more residential flat buildings. It also includes communal and private open space and any shared facilities (such as laundry or car parking) and provisions (such as landscaping, open space).

This Design Code applies to residential flat development. It uses the definition of residential flat building in SEPP 65, that is a building comprising:

- (a) three or more storeys (not including levels below ground level provided for car parking or storage, or both, that do not protrude more than 1.2 metres above ground level)
- (b) four or more self-contained dwellings, but does not include a Class 1a building or a Class 1b building under the Building Code of Australia.

However many of its recommendations may be relevant to other types of residential development.

Relationship to SEPP 65

The State Environmental Planning Policy No 65 - Design Quality of Residential Flat Development is an environmental planning instrument under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, gazetted 26 July 2002.

SEPP 65 establishes a consistent policy direction for residential flat development in New South Wales and provides a uniform state-wide framework for more detailed planning. It has a statutory effect on development and, as a consequence, may modify or supplement the provisions of a regional environmental plan (REP), local environmental plan (LEP) or development control plan (DCP).

All new environmental planning instruments, development control plans and master plans that relate to residential flat development must comply with the provisions of SEPP 65.

This Design Code provides additional detail and guidance for applying the design quality principles outlined in SEPP 65 to a specific locality. (See Appendix 1: SEPP 65 Design Quality Principles)

Who is this document for?

This document is primarily for planners in local and state government. It can also be a resource for development applicants, including developers and their architects.

Councils

This document contributes to the development of place-based plans that are oriented specifically to local issues. It reinforces the need for local government to have a clear vision, which reflects the community's needs and wants for the future of their area.

The design code gives direction for defining local development controls, which support and facilitate good residential flat design. It provides design guidelines, which assist in establishing consistent minimum standards across local government areas. It will also assist planners in assessing the design merit of proposed development.

Developers

This document stresses the importance of the relationship between a building, its site and the surrounding context. It is a tool to develop appropriate and supportable design concepts for a development, which can add value both to individual residential developments and to their wider setting. It will help in preparing a development proposal.

A place-based planning approach

The Design Code supports a place-based planning approach, exemplified in PlanFirst, by providing guidance in defining appropriate building types and developing place-specific building envelopes, development controls and guidelines. Under PlanFirst the Residential Design Code can be incorporated into that part of a locality plan which deals with residential flat development. In the absence of place-based planning instruments this Design Code is an important resource for testing development controls and assessing residential flat development applications. It may be integrated with development control plans as they are currently formulated and enacted.

Development Assessment

The Design Code supports, recommends and provides a resource for pre-development application discussions between potential applicants and the council. The emphasis of these meetings should be

on the local context in relation to the proposed development site, rather than on a proposed building design. The intent of the discussion is to agree to site and context issues that need to be addressed in the development application (DA) submission. The Pre-Development Application Recommendations in Appendix 2 provides a list of suggested documentation items required for a pre-DA discussion and explains the purpose of each item.

For the development application itself the Environmental Planning and Assessment Amendment Regulation 2002, which accompanies SEPP 65, lists additional submission recommendations for residential flat development applications. The Development Application Requirements in Appendix 3 elaborate on the SEPP documentation requirements and explain the purpose of each item.

Document structure and use

This document addresses residential flat development in relation to three different scales: the local context, the site, and the building. The information is presented in this document in three distinct sections.

Part 01 - Local context

This section outlines the importance of the local context in shaping residential flat design. Appendix 4: Local Context Analysis provides more detailed information on individual topics relating to local analysis and residential flat buildings.

This section also explains the concept of building types as a tool for testing development controls and illustrating the desired local character. It defines and demonstrates the application of primary development controls and shows how to coordinate these controls to deliver the desired outcomes.

Part 02 - Site Design

This section addresses the residential flat development site and its relationship to the adjacent context. It explains site analysis and illustrates the concept using a case study.

This section also provides design guidelines for improving site design, which focus on sustainable design, landscape design, residential amenity and the design response in relation to the adjacent context (immediately adjacent buildings, lots and streetscape).

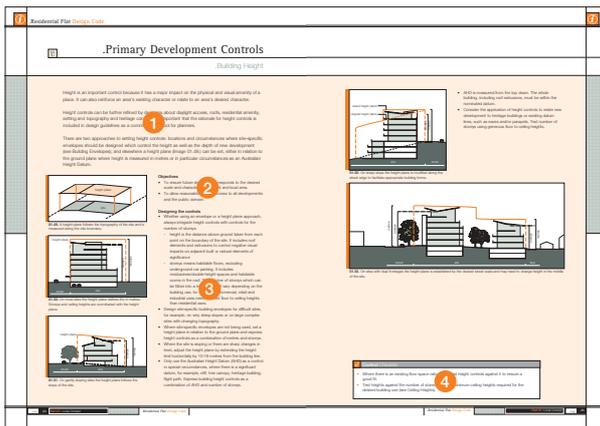
Part 03 - Building Design

This section addresses the residential flat development building. It provides design guidelines for improving building design. The guidelines focus on building performance/functionality, form, layout, sustainability and residential amenity.

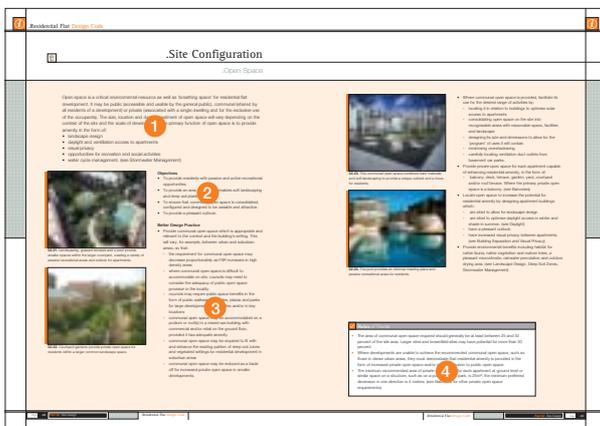
The Design Code includes best practice benchmarks for sustainable design in parts 2 and 3. Planning NSW will be releasing the Building Sustainability Index (BASIX) in late 2002, which will provide more detailed technical information on these topics.

Information Sheets

Within each section, information sheets outline specific topics and elaborate on how the topic improves the design quality of residential flat development.



1. **descriptive text** defines the topic and explains why it is important
2. **objectives** state what the resulting outcome should achieve
3. **directive text** explains how to **design the appropriate controls** for your area
4. **control checklist** outlines key tasks to ensure controls are tested.



1. **descriptive text** defines the topic and explains why it is important
2. **objectives** state what the resulting outcome should achieve
3. **directive text** outlines **better design practice guidelines** and provides some **possible design solutions** for achieving the guidelines. The guidelines also provide support in assessing variations of the recommended standards
4. **rules of thumb** recommend minimum standards as a guide for local decision making. Minimum standards may vary depending on local context issues and/or if development applicants are able to demonstrate that they have addressed the better design practice guidelines and achieved the stated objectives.