

## ***Urban Design Charter for Victoria***

### **Good Urban Design**

**Structure:** organise places so their parts relate well to each other

**Accessibility:** provide ease, safety and choice of access for all people

**Legibility:** help people to understand how places work and to find their way around

**Animation:** stimulate activity and a sense of vitality in public places

**Fit and function:** support the intended uses of spaces while also allowing for their adaptability

**Complementary mixed uses:** integrate complementary activities to promote synergies between them

**Sense of place:** recognise and enhance the qualities that give places a valued identity

**Consistency and variety:** balance order and diversity in the interests of appreciating both

**Continuity and change:** maintain a sense of place and time by embracing change yet respecting heritage values

**Safety:** design spaces that minimise risks of personal harm and support safe behaviour

**Sensory pleasure:** create spaces that engage the senses and delight the mind

**Inclusiveness and interaction:** create places where all people are free to encounter each other as equals.

Urban design is most effective when all of these aims are addressed together. Good urban design results when projects address a spectrum of concerns from the start, even if only one of those is the major reason for undertaking the project.

# The Urban Design Charter for Victoria

## EXPLAINING THE 12 PRINCIPLES OF GOOD URBAN DESIGN

### **What is a “Good Public Environment” & Why is this Important?**

Urban design concerns the quality of cities, towns and smaller urban settlements in their entirety. While, as a process, it involves creating the right conditions to make places work, its focus is on the public environment – a crucial component of urban life comprising all those parts of a city or town that are open, available and inviting to free public use (regardless of ownership). A mix of public and private spaces supports our social needs, but the public environment plays a fundamental role in linking the disparate parts of an urban area. In a sense, the public environment provides the physical framework and the social territory that holds urban settlements together.

Good urban design – the making of a good public environment – supports the social, cultural, economic and environmental well-being of communities that live in, or are affected by urban areas.

In general terms, the public environment is important because it:

- Binds together social and physical circumstances within a city or town;
- Provides the potential for a comprehensive integrated view of public management responsibilities and initiatives;
- Accommodates the broadest cross-section of society. As such, it is a genuine meeting ground, where people from all walks of life can interact;
- Complements the private domains of the city. Public space provides a medium for personal encounters. For this reason, a healthy public domain is essential for private interests as well as the public good;
- Helps define character. The city is experienced as an array of streets, squares, parks, gardens, laneways and alleys. These public spaces give structure and coherence to what would otherwise appear to be a chaotic collection of unrelated incidents; and
- Performs an important symbolic role. It helps to record the origins and aspirations of a community, and it provides the primary venue for civic occasions.

A good public environment doesn't happen by chance. It requires care, skill and attention in its creation and management. It can always be improved.

**The following twelve qualities are essential for the effective functioning of good public environments everywhere. They all have a part to play in making places that are valued and significant for those who use them.**

# The 12 Principles of Good Public Environments

## Structure & Connections

### Organise places so their parts relate well to each other

'Structure' refers to the way an urban area is physically put together – its layout, shapes of land parcels, routes of movement, street patterns and networks of public spaces. A city is more than the sum of these parts; connections between the parts make a coherent, functioning whole. These connections are supported by interlinked waterways, railways and (especially) streets, which are accessible to everyone and so unite the entire city. The fact that they are commonplace, pervading a city, gives them a fundamental influence. The structure of streets and other spaces and their interaction with local topography affect almost all other qualities of an urban area.

A good urban structure provides a unifying setting for diverse activities and buildings and allows easy access between them. It can assist contact and engagement between people and this is important for a good public environment. More extensive and integrated street networks provide greater connectivity, increasing potential interaction, exchange and choice among cities' inhabitants. This usually varies with the intensity of development. Older inner-city areas often feature more coherent and finely-grained patterns of streets and lanes than newer suburban or rural areas.

Activities, traffic and buildings come and go, but the organisation of streets and other public infrastructure is difficult to change. A good structure supports current activities and also provides the potential for changes in use and redevelopment. A good structure allows for change while the structure itself remains stable.

*Organise places so their parts relate well to each other.*

## Accessibility

### Provide ease, safety and choice of access for all people

Streets, railways and other routes interconnect urban areas, but the ease and flexibility of access along any given route can vary, and accessibility can be measured in various ways. If a public environment is valued, attractive and well-used, then people must be able to get to it and move around in it with ease. Physical access combined with the ability to see into and understand places that cannot be physically reached are crucial qualities of a public environment. Support for different modes of travel and communication is essential. Good access depends above all on walking, but routes for bikes, prams, wheelchairs, cars and public transport are also important, as are connections between them. A choice of routes is important, to support different modes of travel, to link different destinations, to provide different experiences, and to ensure the capacity to avoid lonely places at night or other temporary impediments.

Physical access needs to be supported by confident belief that a place can be reached. People do not go where they think they cannot go. Good public spaces invite freedom of access and avoid implicit limits, exclusivity or coercion. Visual access implies direct sightlines or unfolding views, signs or other visual cues, and being able to see other

people, all of which help us to negotiate a place. Without these invitations and reassurances, even the most comprehensive street system can remain uninviting.

*Provide ease, safety and choice of access for all people.*

## **Legibility**

### **Help people to understand how places work and to find their way around**

'Legibility' concerns people's ability to read the urban environment – to interpret what they see, to get useful information. Which streets lead through an area rather than running into a barrier? Where is the post office? Where is it dangerous to walk? Like mariners reading the waves or politicians reading a crowd, this does not rely on printed language or signs (although signs play an important role in providing specific information). Reading a city requires some skill, but most people learn the basics as children. In addition to readers' skills, reading is affected by legibility. As with prose, city spaces can be poorly organised or cluttered so that important information is hidden. Features with particular meanings may be used in confusing ways. A well-designed city, like good writing, needs to be intelligible to its audience, the public.

*Help people to understand how places work and to find their way around.*

## **Animation**

### **Stimulate activity and a sense of vitality in public places**

Cities and towns are intended for human use, and urban spaces are safer and more attractive when they are being used. Active, safe, well-used public spaces don't happen by chance. Good urban design introduces, maintains and intensifies human activity within the public realm. Active building frontages are created by orienting public aspects of private land uses toward streets and other spaces. Activities in and overlooking public spaces contribute to passive surveillance, providing eyes on the street that increase personal safety and help prevent crime. Activation also extends to people on the move; the simple presence of people walking through urban spaces is one of the principal – if often unacknowledged – engines of public life.

Animation involves more subtle processes. It too is concerned with the activity of a place and its evident social life, but intervenes in the management and use of spaces rather than only considering their built form. Comfortable and interesting spaces support public use and – sometimes – the life of a public space happens of its own accord when people simply move in and use it without waiting for an invitation. However, staged activities or other inducements are often necessary catalysts to prompt people to discover and use the public realm to its fullest potential. Careful attention to the processes of activation and animation creates opportunities for civic interaction and community development, and contributes to the visibility and sharing of culture.

*Stimulate activity and a sense of vitality in public places.*

## Fit & Function

### **Support the intended use of spaces while also allowing for their adaptability**

'Fit' describes the extent to which something serves its purpose. In cities, it indicates whether a place works for people and makes them comfortable. Is it useful? Is it habitable, safe and healthful? An urban space can help us to do what we want safely and efficiently. This requires an understanding of how people behave in public spaces; innate human behaviours common around the world, varied cultural conventions, responses to place and climate, and the needs of specific tasks interact with the way different spaces support different uses. However, the relationship between people and their environments is never exact, and a 'loose fit' is often most desirable. Most urban spaces need to accommodate varied events rather than one specialised activity. Different activities may involve the same or different people and sometimes other animals. They may occur together or they may succeed one another in daily or seasonal cycles. Good public places tolerate and promote this variety, responding to a range of viewpoints and contexts.

*Support the intended uses of spaces while also allowing for their adaptability.*

## Complementary mixed uses

### **Integrate complementary activities to promote synergies between them**

Cities offer a broad range of experiences and opportunities. We value the opportunity to choose between types of education, employment, housing, business, shopping, food, entertainment, recreation, and many other activities. Activities (alike or different) can conflict with one another or be mutually supportive. Facilities located conveniently for their users are important for accessibility. Good urban design encourages complementary relationships between uses through their location in space and in time, and through the design of spaces that accommodate them.

We also value opportunities to immerse ourselves in urban culture at times, but at other times seek the relative isolation of natural or non-urban environments. Good urban design encourages the consolidation of lively urban centres, development of places with different qualities, limits on urban sprawl, and protection of important open spaces and rural lands.

*Integrate complementary activities to promote synergies between them.*

## Sense of Place

### **Recognise and enhance the qualities that give places a valued identity**

Places are valued because of the individual qualities that make them distinctive from other places – because of their character. The form and character of urban areas is an expression of our needs and aspirations. In addition to our own will, it can express our

respect for nature, heritage and other people. Sense of place or the identity of a city can be closely linked to our own sense of identity; both shape each other. Urban design should understand, protect, develop and celebrate local character.

*Recognise and enhance the qualities that give places a valued identity.*

## **Consistency & variety**

### **Balance order and diversity in the interests of appreciating both**

Variety in an urban environment is valued, for intellectual and aesthetic stimulation and as an expression of diversity in our society. But too much variety is chaotic. Rigid uniformity is rarely tolerated but neither is anarchy. Cities need a balance of individuality and community, of logic and feeling, of order and random incident. In many cases, a city's public realm provides coherence and order while countless private ventures introduce variety and interest. One condition benefits from the other. A simple grid of streets could seem dull and repetitive without the accents and originality of individual buildings and visual cues to the activity they contain; but a city could be hopelessly confusing without the unifying influence of a pattern of streets and public spaces. Natural patterns of the landscape also provide a unifying structure – with waterways and hills shaping entire urban regions – as well as introducing variety at a smaller scale into the repetitive patterns of roads and railways.

*Balance order and diversity in the interests of appreciating both.*

## **Continuity & change**

### **Maintain a sense of place and time by embracing change yet respecting heritage values**

Cities change. So do people, but while we grow and develop our identity is based on our past and our ambitions for the future. Urban design should be attentive to and maintain an awareness of past and future time. Some constants in the public environment – sites and artefacts, our public inheritance – should remain from generation to generation, reminding us of our origins, helping to define our cultural identity, and locating us in a continuum of time as well as in space. A rich cultural heritage can be seen in the layering of things from different periods. But heritage is more than the status quo. We have also inherited aspirations for a better future, and a tradition of cultural vitality. Good urban design adopts a critical stance toward the status quo, explores possible destinies, and imagines and fulfils visions. It supports interplay between continuity and change, giving greater meaning both to our past and our future.

*Maintain a sense of place and time by embracing change yet respecting heritage values.*

# Safety

## Design spaces that minimise risks of personal harm and support safe behaviour

Design for safety is no mere matter of installing handrails and warning signs. A more basic concern is to create places where people can use their own natural aptitudes to keep themselves and others safe from harm. This requires support for human abilities of perception – for example street lamps that emit white light help people to see nuances in the environment (or other people) better than coloured lights such as yellowish high pressure sodium lamps. It also requires acknowledgement that some people suffer from impaired eyesight or other abilities, and so they require other cues to help them understand their environment.

Safety is supported when people can see potential threats, judge risks, escape if a threat is perceived, seek assistance and give aid if needed. This is supported by views into and through spaces; by multiple access routes into and out of spaces; by mixed land uses that mean other people are around all the time; and by windows and activities in buildings located to overlook streets and other public spaces. Without denying the value of a charming surprise or vistas that unfold dramatically, logic and predictability in design are important to support our ability to interpret what we hear and see, and to reasonably anticipate what is around the corner. There is a place for everything, but to divert pedestrians' attention with intricate paving when they should be watching for oncoming trams may be misconceived.

*Design spaces that minimise risks of personal harm and support safe.*

## Inclusiveness & Interaction

### Create places where all people are free to encounter each other as civic equals

Provided they respect others, everyone has the right to use and enjoy public space, regardless of mobility, gender or socio-economic status. People meet there as fellow citizens. Interaction, even among strangers, exposes people to cultural diversity. People are entertained by other people. They learn from one another, increase their sophistication and tolerance, and explore shared values. They are confronted by differences, inequities and weaknesses in our society and, while this may seem threatening, it can lead to some greater understanding of their responsibilities towards fellow citizens. Meeting acquaintances gives opportunities for sharing information and other kinds of support, and it promotes community cohesion and social health. Good urban design supports this civic interaction. It ensures equity of access throughout the public environment for all people. It encourages the orientation of activities towards the public realm rather than into private enclaves. It treats citizens as the collective owners of public space, and encourages them to use it in comfort and without sanction.

*Create places where all people are free to encounter each other as equals.*

# Sensory Pleasure

## Create spaces that engage the senses and delight the mind

Sense involves more than appearance. We have sophisticated abilities with which to experience and interpret our surroundings – senses of hearing, taste, smell and touch, and awareness of our body's position and movement through space and across the topography. Often in the design of public spaces, little attention is given to senses other than sight, resulting at times in under-engagement of our sensory abilities and at other times in assaults with noise, smells and other aggravations.

Aesthetics in urban design are not a dispensable luxury when addressed at a level considering the human experience of a place and our physical, intellectual and emotional responses to it. Places that are confusing, disorienting or ugly drive people away and therefore undermine the very economic, social and cultural exchanges on which cities are founded. The interaction that supports a democratic, inclusive society is eroded by bland or oppressive environments that encourage people to tune out or retreat into their own cocoons – whether cars or stereo head-sets. Noise interferes with our ability to communicate, can mask hazards, and induce stress. Even machines break down in the heat.

Good urban design addresses visible and invisible dimensions of human experience. In doing so, the design of a place can trigger a positive emotional response, matching our mood or enhancing our sense of self-worth. A good city provides a satisfying environment from various perspectives, ranging from passengers in fast-moving trains to pedestrians walking past shopfront windows, and from visitors with a desire to come back again and again.

*Create spaces that engage the senses and delight the mind.*

# Implementation of the Charter

## Charter Objectives

The intention of the charter is to implement the following twelve public environment objectives to substantially improve the liveability of Victoria's urban settlements:

*Organise places so their parts relate well to each other (STRUCTURE).*

*Provide ease, safety and choice of access for all people (ACCESSIBILITY).*

*Help people to understand how places work and to find their way around (LEGIBILITY).*

*Stimulate activity and a sense of vitality in public places (ANIMATION).*

*Support the intended uses of spaces while also allowing for their adaptability (FIT & FUNCTION).*

*Integrate complementary activities to promote synergies between them (COMPLEMENTARY MIXED USES).*

*Recognise and enhance the qualities that give places a valued identity (SENSE OF PLACE).*

*Balance order and diversity in the interests of appreciating both (CONSISTENCY & VARIETY).*

*Maintain a sense of place and time by embracing change yet respecting heritage values (CONTINUITY & CHANGE).*

*Design spaces that minimise risks of personal harm and support safe (SAFETY).*

*Create places where all people are free to encounter each other as equals (INCLUSIVENESS & INTERACTION).*

*Create spaces that engage the senses and delight the mind (SENSORY PLEASURE).*