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A Local Housing Strategy in Inner City Perth

By

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This research describes a Perth inner city local government authority's attempts to instigate a housing strategy with particular focus on the provision of affordable housing. Although the study centred on the current and future needs of the Town's residents the research team also considered the broader context in terms of housing market dynamics, the impact of government policy and the operations of allied housing support agencies and community organisations.

We report on the experience of working directly with a local government authority to develop an affordable housing strategy. This experience highlights a range of practical responses. It also serves to detail the layers of inhibitors that were revealed during the process. These include the lack of housing knowledge and experience within the planning profession; the need to modify established work practices and policies; and council's reluctance to further overburden its budgets and staffing levels. These inhibitors all conspire to undermine the potential effectiveness of local housing strategies to deliver necessary housing reforms. The overall findings suggest that although local housing strategies can be effective vehicles for fostering housing reforms it is going to require a lot more concerted attention and cooperation between higher levels of government to enable and resource the process.

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Introduction

Although local government in Australia has traditionally had little to do with affordable housing, there are strong indications that this situation is changing rapidly as governments at every level begin to respond to what is increasingly understood to be a widespread and protracted crisis with housing affordability (Senate Select Committee on Housing Affordability in Australia, 2008). Policy and resourcing initiatives at all government levels are recognising this through increased funding and enablement policies (Housing, Local Government and Planning Ministers, 2005; Lawson and Milligan 2007; Disney, 2008).

Local housing strategies are currently being promoted in Australia as a way of achieving a comprehensive framework for local government housing activities including sustainability and affordability. In particular, the work of Nicole Gurran through the Australian Housing and Research Institute (AHURI) has consolidated a broad body of research on the prospects and limitations of local housing strategies as effective vehicles for delivering necessary housing reforms. The scope of this research includes a comprehensive assessment of the experience of local government involvement in local housing strategies in Australia (Gurran 2003), together with a comprehensive analysis of the international experience (Gurran, Milligan, Baker, Bugg, and Christensen, 2008).

Here we report on the experience of working directly with an inner city local government to develop an affordable housing strategy. An affordable housing strategy is a supplement to a local housing strategy that focuses on resourcing and directing actions including policy formulation that address a community's needs for affordable housing. This experience highlights a range of practical responses, including several detailed initiatives, as well as further prospects for affordable housing oriented reforms. It also serves to identify several key inhibitors and explains some of the challenges and that were revealed during the process.

The unfolding housing affordability crisis, and the longer term impacts of gentrification continue to undermine the social and economic diversity and many of the opportunities that define robust inner city communities (Berry, 2003, Atkinson, Dalton, Norman, and Wood. 2007). Some local authorities have been responding, but our research suggests that the lack of a strong, unified planning framework that Gurran et al (2008) have called for, continues to retard these efforts. We found evidence that the planning framework and legislation in general has worked against housing affordability and diversity. We also found important and widespread gaps in the knowledge base, and in the institutional capacity of key government agencies.

What is also urgently required are more working examples of local planning authorities taking a stronger role in coordinating locally appropriate housing reforms. Towards this ends, we report on the case of the Town of Vincent in inner city Perth, Western Australia, and how it has gone about preparing and implementing an Affordable Housing Strategy appropriate for the town's needs.

Local Housing Strategies

Local housing strategies have been described as generally including an analysis of local housing supply and demand, future oriented demographic and market trends, as well as policy statements and recommendations for planning processes, town planning schemes, and development controls. They provide a comprehensive framework for local government housing activities' including sustainability and affordability initiatives to be integrated with appropriate regulatory reforms, community resources and operational networks.

Communities are constantly under pressure due to market forces, population fluctuations, demand for infrastructure, urban amenity trends and increasing environmental awareness which inevitably create stresses and strains for planners and community leaders. A thorough understanding of the housing stock and an analysis of housing demand and supply is a fundamental feature of a local housing strategy.

Properly informed, a local housing strategy can be useful in guiding how a municipality will develop into the future, articulating densities, the housing mix and ensuring that particular housing needs or groups in a community can be accommodated. For example, quarantining development opportunities for special needs groups such as the disabled or the aged, or providing housing specifically to meet affordability guidelines.

A local housing strategy can also provide the structure within which to undertake such work and dovetail the housing strategy with other planning guidelines and bylaws. As identified by the New South Wales Department of Housing (2008), a local housing strategy will usually combine three key elements:

- Analysis of local or regional housing needs and conditions
- An aim (or aims) and a more detailed set of objectives
- Concrete measures to implement these objectives.

Once the current housing needs and conditions have been assessed, the objectives can then be developed with specific implementation and monitoring plans to ensure the strategy is a cohesive framework. As well as articulating a framework to help guide council action, the Local Housing Strategy communicates councils' housing-related objectives and responsibilities to the community. It provides clarity and certainty about future residential development trends and policies for councillors, staff, the community and developers. In the case we review, Council's specified interest was to investigate the scope for responding to the housing affordability issues faced by its residents, currently and in the future.

Policy Context

Local governments in Australia are besieged by a combination of increasing expectations from the public, and the ongoing cost shifting devolution of Federal and State government responsibilities (Productivity Commission 2007). This situation has eroded the fiscal capacity of local governments to deliver upon their expanding portfolio of responsibilities, and together with the chronic shortfall in staffing levels,

it underscores the hesitancy of local governments to do any more with housing than they currently do (Dollery, Crase and Johnson 2006).

In 2009, it is apparent that local government in Australia is at a turning point with respect to responding to a developing national housing crisis. This crisis is experienced and expressed differently in communities faced with vastly different circumstances and challenges. For local governments generally this will drive a somewhat reluctant but compelling shift towards a stronger role in facilitating and enabling locally appropriate housing reforms.

Federal and State governments are also in the process of repositioning and significantly increasing their involvement and levels of resourcing, but the diversity of the housing crisis points to the need for local leadership and facilitation. The support for local governments taking on a more significant role in respect to affordable housing will also come from a significantly more active and resourced community sector (Disney 2008; 255). A draft document has been referred to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), thus ensuring top level government attention at a national level.

A significant challenge for such higher level policy initiatives such as this is that each State is largely responsible for administering the housing and planning policy within its jurisdiction and therefore, there are significant differences in supporting policy, legislation and operational structures. In most cases at the State level, the separation of housing from planning is evident in that housing policy and planning policy are generally formulated through technically and administratively differentiated bureaucratic networks operating under different Ministers.

In Western Australia, there has traditionally been little dialogue between the Department of Housing and Works (DHW) and the Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI). In practice, the social housing agenda adopted by the DHW, is pursued irrespective of the sustainability (resource efficiency) in the land release agenda pursued by the DPI and vice versa.

As a case in point, there would be few planners at the State or local level for example, who would be aware of the \$400 million that is being channelled into the community housing sector, or who would be in any position to think through the possible implications of how that might be leveraged with local resources to do much more. The community housing providers will do their best to identify and form partnerships with LGAs to develop projects, but it cannot be assumed that there are working institutional arrangements or even a knowledge base from which to begin such negotiations.

Local government planning and building guidelines are shaped by State government policy and legislation. The planning framework of each of the States varies considerably, and with significant differences in terms of enablement and constraints. In Western Australia, the DPI's Guidelines for the Preparation, Form and Content of Local Housing Strategies (1992) remain the most current guideline. These outline general directions for local planning departments to follow in terms of the type of data that can be used to inform the strategy, but outside of varying densities and promoting

diversity, there is little discussion or guidance as to how particular housing needs and issues can be addressed under planning scheme provisions.

In 2006, the Western Australian State government developed a Draft Housing Policy which suggested the broad development of local and regional housing strategies. The Draft Housing Policy has not been enacted but the concept of a local housing strategy has been investigated by a number of local government authorities in Perth including the City of Gosnells and the Town of Vincent.

Although there have been policy moves in Western Australia in relation to metropolitan level planning that suggest a stronger housing reform agenda may be pursued through the Network City framework, that initiative seems impacted by the recent change of State government. Preliminary work on this front did, however, yield several important insights in respect to the responsibilities and challenges that lay ahead. There are for example palpable tensions between metropolitan and local governments over housing densities, and newly defined activity corridors in inner city areas

Planning Practice

Collectively, the prior research suggests that, local level coordination of resources and institutional arrangements can deliver a host of housing benefits including those that address affordability and sustainability (Gurran 2004). The research also suggests that these instances are the exception in Australia, rather than the norm as is the case in the United Kingdom, North America, Western Europe, and elsewhere (Gurran, 2007).

In Australia, Gurran's (2004) research focused on the east coast, and it found pockets of local initiative and coordination that have yielded significant affordable housing and sustainability outcomes. The City of Port Philip Bay in Melbourne and Waverley City Council in Sydney have been identified as among the nation's most progressive local governments involved in both affordable and sustainable housing (Gurran, Milligan, Baker, and Bugg, 2007).

Currently in Western Australia there are no fully operational and comprehensive local housing strategies. The City of Gosnells does have a relatively active if not comprehensive housing strategy in that it is regularly referred to in Council's deliberations on development applications. Although it does integrate such aspects as energy efficiency and design-out crime principles, other important aspects such as housing diversity and affordability remain to be further developed and activated.

The City of Subiaco under Mayor Costa (1995-2005) was Western Australia's pioneering local government in respect to a planning led housing reform agenda. *The Sustainable House* initiative and the Affordable Housing components of their Housing Strategy at that time were examples of an active rather than passive approach. Regulations associated with ancillary housing (granny flats) were relaxed to encourage more housing diversity. Funds and resources were channelled and affordable and sustainable housing models were built and occupied during this period. However, Subiaco's housing reform agenda ended abruptly with the resignation of Mayor Costa, which underscores Gurran's (2004) finding that strong and stable

council leadership and support is paramount for the success of local housing strategies.

Looking more specifically at the activities of local planning departments, it is clear that they are primarily concerned with reviewing development applications and structure plans, against an increasing array of criteria aligned with housing densities, neighbourhood amenity, urban design, and environmental sustainability. Despite the Department of Planning and Infrastructure 1992 policy directive obliging all Western Australian local government jurisdictions to have a local housing strategy, a review of these (Osipowicz, 2003) suggest that these in the main are largely undeveloped documents with little in the way of concrete objectives or outcomes. It also reflects inadequacies of the current guidelines which do not address the pragmatics of implementation.

Some local government planning departments have outsourced the work to consultants at a cost of \$15,000-\$70,000 per housing strategy. Such an approach, however, is unlikely to result in any lasting capacity building within the LGAs, or in any sustained or comprehensive commitment towards local housing reform. Moreover, it appears that there are few consultancies either capable of responding to the required tasks, or willing to endure the often long and involved tendering process.

What is most apparent from a review of the local strategies that have been developed through this process, is that they rarely adequately link the diversity of un-met housing needs within a community with the concerns of local constituencies – ratepayers, voters, industry groups - and ultimately the councillors. Typically, the needs assessment dimension is presented as a series of comparative income versus housing costs, but without any sense of who these people are and what role they might play the local community and economy.

Among planners there also appears to be a limited understanding of the potential scope that these strategies may have in respect to coordinating a more proactive housing development or redevelopment agenda that could comprehensively respond to such needs, and yet generate cost neutral and positive benefits for councils. For example, how such strategies could be used to transform abandoned buildings and underutilised sites into community housing assets. Until such links and potentials are more widely understood, which is something that will entail some degree of education and capacity building, local housing strategies in Western Australia are unlikely to be more than the inert documents that they often are.

Gaps in Knowledge and Capacity

Among some planners, councillors and the broader community there appear to be a widespread lack of understanding of core housing concepts and relationships. This lack of housing knowledge among the Australian planners and institutions has been identified as a peculiar feature of the Australian planning profession (Paris 1993). By international standards, there are few Australian local authorities involved in housing, and the knowledge, experience and willingness to engage is comparatively thin (Gurran et al 2008).

At the local level, the influence of industry and community pressure groups and conservative interpretations of regulations have all been identified as regressive factors (Senate Select Committee on Housing Affordability in Australia. 2008). Local planning departments are a focal point for such tensions but not withstanding the examples cited earlier, they have rarely taken a leadership role in respect to housing issues beyond densities and neighbourhood amenity. It is also the case that the resources and capacity for a fuller housing response may lie somewhere between and outside of local government departments in terms of responsibility for land holdings and community development and so forth. As Gurran (2004) concluded, an integrated approach is critically important in the formulation of local housing strategies.

In working alongside planners, and participating in planning and development industry forums, and in our roles as educators, we have found among the pockets of knowledge, important and widespread gaps in the knowledge base which relate to the following:

- The generally poor understanding of both housing diversity and regional diversity and how they may inter-relate in practice.

For example, the Residential Design Codes (R Codes), which are the standard reference for Western Australian planners, do not adequately recognise either regional diversity or housing diversity. In inner city contexts, important qualitative aspects, such as the difference between lodging houses, hostels and backpackers, tend to be overlooked because the physical forms are similar, even when the resident profiles and the housing issues are not. Similarly, requirements for such group housing models to be advertised as part of any development application process, also tends to stigmatise the residents and the housing, generate unnecessary community concerns, and ultimately undermine the prospect for housing diversity.

- The generally poor understanding of the interrelationship between sustainability and affordability in respect to housing.

The findings by Holling, Haslam McKenzie and Affleck (2007) suggest that transit oriented development (TOD) is attracting the more affluent population cohorts and squeezing out people who depend on public transport and those who would most benefit from living close to TOD nodes. For example, plans for a reduction in parking provisions in affordable housing developments are often strongly opposed by local authorities despite the generally lower levels of car ownership and usage expected among the tenants.

- The social and economic relationships between people and housing tend to be overlooked compared to the focus on the largely spatial relationships between the house and the site, and the house and the street.

The displacement of long term residents from their communities through gentrification appears not to generate the same level of local community concern and regulatory protection as does the removal of street trees or the threat to heritage properties.

- The role and nuances of the housing market and its indicators are often poorly appreciated and rarely considered in the planning process.

For example, data relating to trends in home prices, rents and occupancy rates, are regularly collated and analysed by council's rates administrators, however such information is rarely utilised by practising local planners in their deliberations.

Addressing this lack of professional and intuitional knowledge is fundamental to enabling the process of local housing reform. Developing the professional and intuitional confidence and willingness to reconsider and change long established practices represents another set of challenges.

Town of Vincent Case Study – Process, Findings and Implementation

Process

In 2008, a new Local Planning Strategy by the Town of Vincent was being prepared as part of the Town Planning Scheme review. The role of the Local Planning Strategy is to provide direction for the Local Planning Scheme to be re-shaped and amended. For example, it has identified strategic development sites within the Town, which are considered appropriate for density increases with a view to encouraging a greater variety of housing typologies and include the provision of affordable housing.

As part of this process, the Town commissioned a report in late 2007 to provide a resource for the development of an Affordable Housing Strategy... 'to ensure an adequate provision and diversity of housing is provided for its residents' (Tender Brief, 2007). This in itself was a somewhat unusual move. It was indicative of Council's recognition of the housing affordability pressures within the town, and its resolve to investigate the potential to somehow respond. The initiative was championed by a councillor with a background in social housing, and it was also more broadly supported by other councillors including the Mayor.

The tender brief prepared by Council's planning staff was very comprehensive and had clearly been informed by the AHURI research agenda (Gurran *et al* 2004-2008). It was widely advertised but only one tender submission was ever received. This was due to several factors, including that the tender specifications were challenging while also time-intensive, that the pool of tender applicants with the required knowledge was small, and so too was the budget.

The requisite Affordable Housing Strategy was intended as a supplement to the Council's existing Local Housing Strategy, and it was to focus on resourcing and directing actions including policy reforms and development that address the Town's needs for affordable housing. Accordingly, a report was prepared to inform Council's internal discussions toward the development of an affordable housing strategy appropriate for the Town's current and future housing needs. In responding to the tender brief, the following tasks were required to be addressed by the report:

1. Define what is meant by Affordable Housing, Social Housing, Special Needs Housing;
2. Identify the role of local government and various key stakeholders and agencies;

3. Identify current provision of affordable, social and special needs housing within the Town and recommend appropriate responses;
4. Consider and incorporate sustainable principles and objectives;
5. Review existing Residential Development Policies and other relevant legislation and statutory documentation relevant to the Town;
6. Develop incentives through planning mechanisms to encourage Affordable Housing and Housing Diversity within the Town;
7. Identify and assess various affordable housing models including examples, and;
8. Prepare an Implementation Plan.

From the outset it was recognised that several of these tasks, particularly points five to eight, would probably require significant internal discussion and perhaps workshops and wider public discussion. Although it was not a consideration in the tender brief, it was clear that for the strategy to have the standing to inform Council's policy development and recommend procedural changes, it would need to be of sufficient quality and standing to have the support of Council and staff, stakeholders and the wider community.

Findings

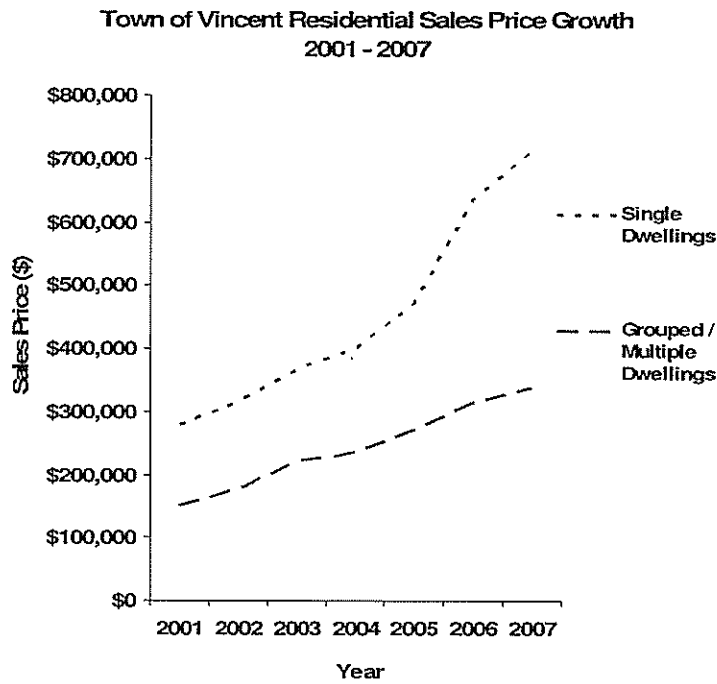
The research presented in Town of Vincent's Affordable Housing Strategy Discussion Report (2008) revealed; a) there are significant levels of housing stress being experienced by the Town's residents, and b) there is a strong case for local strategic intervention. Specifically;

- There is evidence that housing affordability is a widespread concern among the Town's existing residents. Specifically, at least half of the ABS census collector districts within the Town have between 15-35 per cent of households paying more than 30 per cent of their gross income on housing costs. Based on standard definitions, housing costs for these residents are unaffordable leading to housing stress.
- Within the Town, the gentrification associated with both long term and current development patterns continues to undermine housing affordability, diversity and access. This finding to some extent links the deteriorating level of housing affordability with the Town's development approval processes, and the impact of Council's plans, policies and decisions.
- The planning framework and legislation in general has worked against housing affordability and diversity, despite the fact that 'housing diversity' (if not affordability) is a stated objective within the Residential Design Codes.
- There is ample opportunity within the existing framework to adopt a proactive role with respect to encouraging and facilitating affordable housing diversity.

- The networks of community service providers and agencies that are located in or adjacent the Town have a high degree of capacity and experience, and also the willingness to support the Council's initiatives in respect to affordable housing.

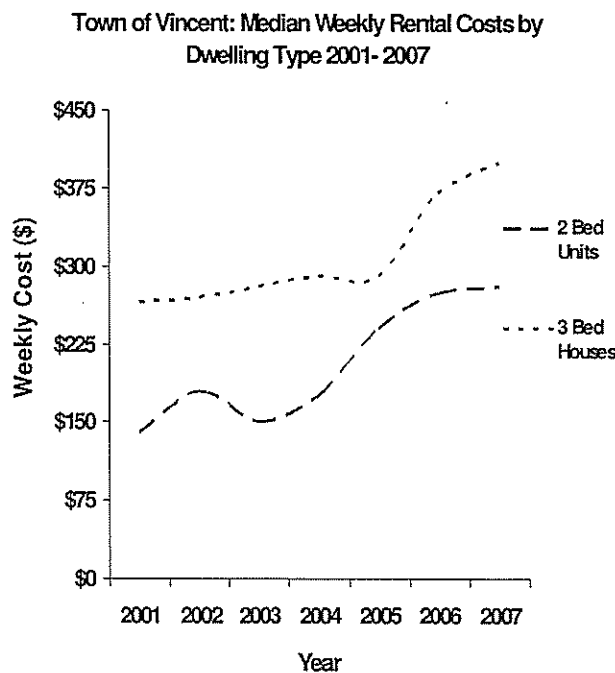
(Greive, Haslam McKenzie, and Brunner, 2008)

Figure One



Figures 1 and 2 both illustrate the rapid rise in housing costs within the Town. The very rapid rise in rents from 2005-2007 was influenced by the wave of new and relatively expensive apartments that were developed during this period. Such developments generally replace older cheaper rental housing and displace the existing tenants - a process termed 'gentrification'. It is also noteworthy that even basic housing data on such key indicators as rents are rarely monitored by most local government planning departments (Source: Greive, McKenzie and Brunner, 2008).

Figure Two



The importance of the tension between local diversity (demographic, housing, physical), and the interplay between State and local planning framework was revealed when the analysis drilled down into the context and policy details.

The general objectives of the R Codes state;

1.3 (a) To provide for a full range of housing types and densities that meet the needs of all people.

1.3.2 (a) To provide local government with the full range of choices for housing type and design, to meet the needs of their communities.

From a closer examination of the how these objectives play-out in practice, it is clear that both the R Codes and the local policies made under its provisions act to 'exclude' the prospects for housing diversity appropriate to servicing the needs of the Town's residents. For example, the Town's local policies were found to exclude multiple dwelling developments, single bedroom dwellings, and group housing from much of the Town including areas where they could be appropriately sited based on Network City principles, service the resident's needs for housing diversity, and remain in keeping with neighbourhood amenity. In practice, this means that in parts of the Town, if developers wanted to redevelop a block of dilapidated one bedroom apartments, they would not be permitted to develop to the same density, or to include any one bedroom apartments at all on the site.

In another pertinent example, the R Codes specifically exclude the possibility of ancillary housing (granny flats) being used as affordable rental housing for low-moderate income singles, where Ancillary Housing is defined as;

Self-contained living accommodation on the same lot as a single house that may be attached or detached from the single house occupied by members of the same family as the occupiers of the main dwelling.

In other words, affordable housing opportunities that may already exist within the housing stock, such as 'granny flats', cannot be rented to non family members, such as a student nurse, or even a family friend. There are also requirements for an extra parking bay in the case of new developments. The Town had created its own policies to enforce these requirements, and it is these local policies that are now being considered for reform by the Council.

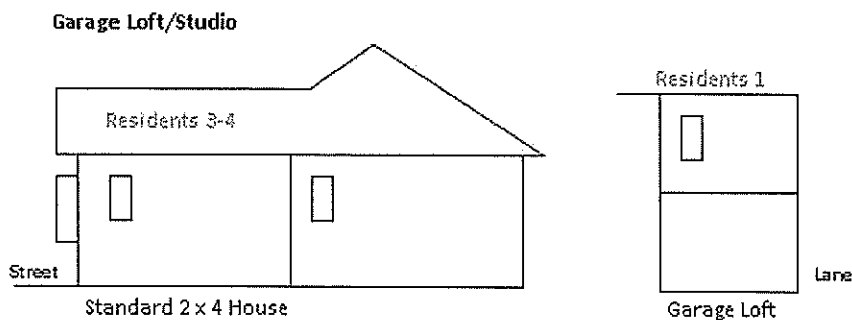


Figure Three: Ancillary Housing Models for example ‘granny flats’ are ideal for student living but currently it would be considered illegal occupation if it was rented to a non family member (Source; S. Greive and M. Benson 2009). Also see Andrews (2005) for a discussion of these housing models.

Demographic analysis identified that an extraordinary 22 per cent of the Town’s population aged 15 and over are either full or part time students, many of whom would no doubt appreciate the low cost benefits of a granny flat.

It is also the case that many of the houses and streets within the Town are chronically under occupied by some 30-50 per cent compared to when they were originally designed. Within the Town, over 60 per cent of all single detached houses are occupied by 1-2 person households, and 25 per cent of all single detached housing being sole person households.

Such statistics also highlight the important distinction between *housing density* and *population density* and the need for planners to consider how such relationships may play out in practice and in different contexts. To be clear, increased housing density does not necessarily translate into higher population density, and nor does the house or lot size necessarily relate to household size. The implications of such relationships are fundamental in respect to both affordability and sustainability concerns in planning both new and existing communities.

Implementation

The feedback in regard to the Town of Vincent’s Affordable Housing Strategy Discussion Report (2008) suggested that a more focused Affordable Housing Policy was needed to give further clarity and direction for planning staff and ultimately to inform council’s decisions. The policy would articulate Council’s intentions, and specify how the strategy would integrate with the regulatory framework and in particular the administration of the local planning scheme.

It was at this point in the process that the procedural reforms actually began to alter standardised modes of institutional behaviour. A briefing package accompanied the Affordable Housing Policy to provide more detailed justification and explanation of how each of the main initiatives proposed under the strategy could be practically implemented. These briefs included;

1. Affordable Housing Policy, which clarifies Council’s intentions in respect to affordable housing, discusses the statutory authority behind the development of the local affordable policy, and then sets out its basic content.
2. Inclusionary Zoning - defines and explains the purpose and functioning of these kinds of developer contribution schemes, and outlines how they can link in with the existing planning framework to be developed collaboratively into mechanisms appropriate for the Town of Vincent development context.
3. Partnerships - explains why, and identifies how partnership arrangements could be fostered with among the local service provider network, to deliver locally

appropriate affordable housing outcomes. The implications of partnerships with community housing providers in respect to the effective development and implementation of inclusionary zoning initiatives was also explained.

4. Ancillary Housing – justifies and explains the basis of the easiest and most versatile example of the how specified local planning policies could be adapted to facilitate and encourage greater housing diversity.

The briefs followed a common format and came with a set of recommendations to advance the next steps towards implementation, including specific reference to the relevant planning regulations and policies. This added level of detail, provided Council and staff with the confidence to accept the proposed changes to established practices. In hindsight, the briefs were a reflection of an incremental and collaborative approach, adopted from the outset to assist with the strategy's implementation. It is anticipated that a following round of briefs could include initiatives related to; abandoned buildings, seniors housing, and lodging house retention.

As we go to press in October 2009, the Town of Vincent's Affordable Housing Strategy has fed into the review of the Local Planning Strategy. Staff are actively implementing the strategy's directions in their amendments to the Town's planning scheme, in the reforms to the supporting local planning policies, and in their consideration of development applications. Such reforms have included changes to the Council's policies on ancillary housing, single bedroom units, group housing and multiple dwellings, changes that will enable greater housing diversity and better affordability outcomes.

The possibility of an inclusionary zoning initiative being developed by the Council is outlined within the scope of the Town's Affordable Housing Policy. Under the current economic conditions, however, it is unlikely that Council would pursue some sort of standardised policy tied to development applications. This position was a recommendation within the policy brief, as was the intention to keep this prospect enabled if not activated, primed for a more favourable time or for a specific development context.

In respect to the proposed partnerships initiative with community housing providers, service agencies and community support groups, the Council was hesitant to pursue this avenue actively. The door for such arrangements was 'left open' within the Affordable Housing Policy, but currently there is not the commitment on Council or the administration to take on what are perceived as a potentially significant level of additional responsibility. This may not be a permanent stance, but it is significant because it points to the challenges ahead in respect to both Federal and State level initiatives that envisage a much greater role for the community sector. If it is too difficult in this particular context, where there is a very ready, able and willing network of community housing and service providers, then the prospects do not look bright for other jurisdictions.

Concluding Reflections

For a local government to come to the conclusion that it should and could do more to facilitate affordable housing remains a significant step, and one that few councils have made. One of the advancements that the Town of Vincent has made in this position is to both acknowledge and start to act on the understanding that a range of its existing policies and procedures have unwittingly conspired to undermine the prospect of affordable housing by unnecessarily limiting housing diversity.

In Western Australia, the Town of Vincent is a leader in developing and implementing an affordable housing strategy. The process has benefited from the ongoing research generated by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), but in most other respects the Council has been going it alone.

The policy context and the regulatory framework at Federal and State levels are not yet conducive to engendering the kind comprehensive housing reforms that they are trying to promote. Although there are explicit policy initiatives, as well as significant resources being channelled towards this purpose, these have yet to foster the kind of comprehensive and integrated environment that is necessary to both prompt and enable local authorities to fully respond to the challenges.

One of the challenges involves reforming the State level planning framework to enable and also practically assist local governments with the necessary planning reforms at the local level. In some important ways the existing framework does make it difficult for local authorities to make the changes they need and want to make. More challenging initiatives such as those associated with inclusionary zoning, abandoned buildings, and community housing partnerships really do require the support and enablement of higher levels of government.

Another challenge involves bridging the apparent divide between planning and housing agendas. Local Housing Strategies cannot be expected to adequately perform this role at the local level, unless the agencies at the State level can work together to provide a coordinated and supportive framework. The greater capacity lies somewhere between the existing intuitional arrangements and before this can be developed more dialogue and collaboration between the differentiated bureaucracies is needed.

The overall findings suggest that local housing strategies can be effective vehicles for fostering housing reforms but it is going to require a lot more concerted attention and cooperation between different levels of government to enable and resource this prospect. The gaps in the knowledge, and limited experience and institutional capacity in relation to housing issues, and in particular housing diversity and affordability concerns, remain a major stumbling block.

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