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Feedback on the Draft Planning and Design Code – South Australia

I am commenting from my observations as an 'inner metropolitan' resident and a Landscape Architect with experience in developing master-planned communities and development assessment. From this perspective, I echo the concerns of many residents regarding the intrusion of poorly designed infill development where higher residential densities are sought by planning authorities and often don't meet minimum standards which are in themselves poor. While I support increasing density, it needs to be more nuanced and responsive to local character. Where developers are only required to meet minimum quantitative standards, there is little incentive towards better practice, let alone best practice.

There is an acute sense that a majority of medium density infill development is often an overdevelopment of a site which comes at a cost to the street's amenity. So much infill development is parasitic, feeding off the amenity provided by surrounding homes without adding any of its own. And as these developments proliferate, the reserve of local environmental amenity and services is rapidly eroded. For the new occupiers, there is poor orientation, a lack of outlook, low quality private open space, little to no meaningful allowance for viable landscaping, and insufficient garaging, visitor parking and space for other storage. Poor design and overdevelopment leads to sites which are dominated by immense impermeable driveways purely accommodating a series of turning circles and required two-way traffic. Mean strips of landscaping may be included (often in conflict with the vehicle reversing manoeuvre diagram) and when trees are ambitiously indicated – they are more often than not monotonous non-specified Flowering Pears. (It is diverting and a minor victory when Manchurian Pears are randomly specified without proper knowledge; and when no specification is given, I quietly hope Manchurians will be just as randomly purchased.) Six metre wide driveways reduce the on street parking provision where it is badly needed and the amputated verge length struggles (and often fails) to accommodate the line-up of many wheelie bins. These are just a few of the many impracticalities and compromises which accompany poor and overly ambitious infill development.

While I am encouraged by wording around the Code which acknowledges the shortfall of our current development planning guidelines and seeks to address these, I believe its ambition is too timid. At this time we need leadership in identifying 'higher' minimum standards, and setting a path which enables (and incentivises) developers to confidently improve environmental performance and deliver development which adds to the neighbourhood rather than undermining it. We should not accept development at any cost, be it social or environmental. It is currently too easy to clear vegetation and not replace it any meaningful way. Large established trees cleared to develop a lot cannot really be replaced, but failing to properly account for the loss of local identity, amenity and environmental services (cooling, habitat, biodiversity, soil health, drainage, carbon storage, contributing to mental wellbeing, etc) through the removal of regulated and significant trees, and strong stands of vegetation with traditional land division models, cookie cutter designs, and overly intensive development is incredibly short-sighted.