

SUBMISSION TO THE WA PLANNING COMMISSION ON THE STATE PLANNING POLICY 2.5 'LAND USE PLANNING IN RURAL AREAS' AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROL POLICY 3.4 – 'SUBDIVISION OF RURAL LAND' ON BEHALF OF THE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TASKFORCE – JUNE 2011

Introduction

The Physical Activity Taskforce (Taskforce) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the following revised draft rural planning policies of the Western Australian Planning Commission (WAPC) currently being advertised for public comment:

- State Planning Policy 2.5 'Land Use Planning in Rural Areas' and
- Development Control (DC) Policy 3.4 'Subdivision of Rural Land'.

Background

The Taskforce was established in 2001 and coordinates a cross government approach for the development and implementation of a whole of community physical activity strategy for Western Australia (WA).

Bringing together the expertise of a number of State government departments, local government entities, leading academics and community representatives, the Taskforce mission is to provide a strategic direction to improve and increase opportunities for physical activity in Western Australia through increased policy coordination and collaboration.

The current Taskforce Strategic Plan outlines the social, environmental, economic and health benefits of improving the physical activity levels of WA's citizens as a whole by supporting, providing and promoting physical activity through a multi-sectoral approach by:

1. Promoting active public policy;
2. Raising public awareness, developing skills, knowledge and understanding for engagement in physical activity;
3. Providing environments and opportunities for physical activity across all populations and communities; and
4. Promoting partnerships.

A fundamental part of this role is to influence the built environment and ensure physical activity is an integral part of any current and future planning process, hence this submission. The Taskforce recognises that the planning system is undergoing fundamental changes. Changes that can make a direct contribution across a range of policy areas, as well as influence the development of environments that are accessible and conducive to physical activity and healthy lifestyles.

The Taskforce is already committed to supporting the strategic priorities for planning reform through the integration and development of land use policies with other policies and programs that have significant potential to impact on physical activity. The Taskforce sees this as an opportunity to achieve physical activity outcomes and contribute to the wider outcomes of partners across the sectors of health, transport, education, sport and recreation, environment and community safety through increased levels of health, reduced levels of crime, improved quality of the built and natural environment and increased opportunities for participation in sport and recreation.

In support of this, the Taskforce has established a Built Environment Advisory Committee (Committee) to help achieve these outcomes. The Committee provides strategic management and coordination for the implementation of the Physical Activity Taskforce Built Environment Strategy. The aim of the Committee is to influence the built environment to support physical activity and add value to the work of other agencies through an integrated approach.

Membership of the committee comprises representatives from a range of State, local and non-government agencies that influence the built environment. This includes senior officers across multiple disciplines representing local government, the Taskforce and Departments of Sport and Recreation, Transport, Planning, Health, and Education.

Key Issues

The World Health Organisation^[1] identified physical inactivity as the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality (6% of deaths globally). In its 2010 report on global recommendations for physical activity for health, it urges Member States to implement national guidelines on physical activity and encourages them to develop and put into practice policies and interventions that:

- Develop and implement national guidelines on physical activity for health;
- Introduce transport policies that promote active and safe methods of travelling to and from schools and workplaces, such as walking or cycling; and
- Ensure that physical environments support safe active commuting, and create space for recreational activity.

This is increasingly critical in regional and rural communities that do not have the same levels of infrastructure or services and programs as metropolitan areas, providing opportunities for increased levels of physical activity, particularly activities such as active transport requiring adequate footpaths and end of trip facilities.

In all communities, it is important to encourage development patterns that demonstrate development principles which encourage healthy lifestyles for residents.

Increasingly, research^[2] is showing us that the built environment impacts in some way on our health and wellbeing, in particular, active lifestyle choices. The planning and design of neighbourhoods - houses, shops, schools, parks, roads, recreational and community facilities - can positively influence the way we behave.

One key stakeholder of the Taskforce, the Centre for the Built Environment and Health (CBEH) at the University of Western Australia has been involved in a number of studies that examines the impact of the built environment on health. The Centre also considers the positive relationship between increasing density and physical activity^[3], as well as the co-benefits for health through investing in issues such as active transportation that also have positive economic, social and environmental benefits. In this regard, residential subdivisions that do not provide or integrate with surrounding pedestrian and bike networks should be discouraged.

Accumulating evidence^[4] also suggests that regular physical activity is effective in preventing and managing depression as well as other chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease and diabetes, issues common in regional areas. However, a significant majority of Australians are not active enough for good health.

^[1] *Global health risks: mortality and burden of disease attributable to selected major risks*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2009. http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2010/9789241599979_eng.pdf

^[2] Giles-Corti B, Kelty S, Zubrick S and Villanueva K, *How important is the built environment?*, Centre for the Built Environment and Health, UWA, Centre for Developmental Health, Curtin University and Telethon Institute, 2009.

^[3] Giles-Corti B, *Increasing densities: Building communities not just buildings*, Centre for the Built Environment and Health, UWA, http://www.planning.wa.gov.au/2010_Increasing%20density_WAPC.ppt?id=2203

^[4] National Heart Foundation of Australia, *Physical Activity and Depression*, 2007. <http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/GP%20PA%20and%20Depression%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

In WA, over 40% of adults in 2006 were not active enough for good health. The findings from the *2009 WA Adult Physical Activity Survey*^[5] indicate concerning results:

- 9% decline in people walking for recreation since 1999;
- 10% decline in people walking for transport since 2006;
- Only half of physically-active adults walked more than 10 minutes for recreation; and
- One in five walked more than 10 minutes for transport in the previous week.

Compared with respondents from the Perth metropolitan area, those in the South West were 19% more likely, those in the Kimberley/Pilbara 34% more likely and those in the Midwest/Goldfields 35% more likely to be inactive.

Although high, people living in the Perth metropolitan area had a lower prevalence of overweight and obesity (53%) compared with respondents in other regions (South West 65%, Kimberley/Pilbara 62%, Midwest/Goldfields 63%).

Being active is good for our health. It also has real benefits for our communities and for us as individuals. Active communities are more connected, demonstrate increased community participation, are more productive and reduce the environmental impacts of car dependence. Active living also reduces the risk of diseases as previously stated as well as depression and falls. The direct costs attributable to physical inactivity of these conditions is more than \$1.5 billion nationally a year. Specifically, the benefits of taking part in physical activity are:

- Improves quality of life;
- Reduces the risk of chronic diseases;
- Manages weight;
- Improves sleep;
- Develops motor skills;
- Improves concentration and enhances memory learning; and
- Assists in the management of anxiety and depression.

It is important to note that the Taskforce, through its members and stakeholders, addresses the broad spectrum of physical activity, encompassing incidental physical activity, active transport, recreation and structured sport.

Physical activity is not just about 'health' nor is it just about 'sport and recreation'. It has a triple bottom line impact, with overall benefits for the community. Prioritising physical activity has multiple benefits for government – reduced crime and vandalism costs, increased community connections, safer places, local business, employment, cohesion and wellbeing.

In support of this, the Taskforce is currently developing a *Physical Activity Planning and Outcomes Framework* for WA. This lists the outcomes government is seeking to influence by increasing physical activity and improving the health and wellbeing of individuals. The Framework will assist agencies to focus their planning on key priorities; identify opportunities for sharing and coordination as well as show agencies how they are contributing to the achievement of these outcomes as well as their own. The measures to achieve planning outcomes are included in the Framework.

Key Areas for Consideration

The Taskforce supports the objectives of the overarching planning framework for rural land use planning within Western Australia and the principle changes being proposed within SPP 2.5. There are a number of comments for consideration by the WAPC in SPP 2.5 and the implementation policies contained in DC Policy 3.4 as follows.

^[5] Saarloos D, Nathan A, Almeida O, Giles-Corti B (2008). The Baby Boomers and Beyond Report: *Physical Activity Levels of Older Western Australian 2006*. Perth, Western Australia: Western Australian Government.

- **General Comments**

The principle changes being proposed to reduce fragmentation of rural land and increase access to community services and infrastructure are supported. Whilst it is acknowledged that SPP 2.5 aims to provide a strategic approach to rural living, there appears to be no acknowledgement of the relationship between the urban environment and health and wellbeing outcomes. This is apparent in both SPP 2.5 and the DC Policy 3.4.

Under the New Public Health Act, there is a proposal to introduce public health assessments which are a form of Health Impact Assessments (HIA). This is supported by the Taskforce as planning decisions are instrumental in determining physical and social characteristics of neighbourhoods which impact on walkability, access to transport, social interaction and recreational facilities which impact on physical activity opportunities. HIA is advocated by the World Health Organisation as a means of providing decision makers with necessary information about how programs, policies, projects or proposals will impact on health and wellbeing matters.

- **SPP 2.5 Land Use Planning in Rural Areas - Objectives of this policy - Point 4 - P10**

The Taskforce supports the approach to evidenced based planning for future population growth and the proposed objectives of this policy as they seek to increase sustainability. However, the policies which implement these objectives contained in DC Policy 3.4 do not provide sufficient clarity in relation to expectations regarding utilities and infrastructure/services for lots which are created for rural living purposes. There needs to be consideration afforded to the provision and access to social infrastructure which includes opportunities for physical activity.

This will have specific implications for local governments as they will need some indication of expectations regarding requirements for infrastructure and their ongoing management and maintenance.

- **Other policy measures to support economic development in rural areas – Point 5.3.3 – P10**

The Taskforce is supportive of the proposed concept of rural enterprise zones which combine light industry and ancillary housing, provided they are carefully planned close to urban areas, are serviced and have suitable design features that address amenity issues. In order to support employment self sufficiency, where industrial land is located, it needs to be appropriately served from an accessibility perspective. If land is closely located to residential areas, this will reduce reliance on cars as long as there is adequate provision of public transport and opportunities to walk and cycle.

- **Rural living precincts – Point 5.4 – P10**

The Taskforce supports the approach to careful planning around rural living precincts and recognition of their unintended social, environmental, servicing or management impacts.

It should also be noted that the built environment and design of the urban form can play a key role in increasing levels of physical activity and improving outcomes for health. In applying the identified policy measures relating to WAPC decision-making for rural living, the following factors should be proposed in relation to urban design considerations for services, facilities and amenities:

- Mixed land use, including housing, retail, commercial, education, sport and recreation
- Connected street networks with opportunities to walk and cycle
- Access to recreational facilities and sporting infrastructure
- Attractive, safe and welcoming environments
- Well connected integrated public transport services

The Taskforce is currently working in partnership with the Heart Foundation and Departments of Planning and Transport to develop design guidance that promotes healthy environments and active communities. This project is known as Healthy Active by Design. It is proposed that once these guidelines are finalised, they are utilised as standard practice across planning frameworks.

Conclusion

In this submission, the Taskforce has provided a number of comments for consideration by the WAPC in relation to addressing the opportunities for physical activity within State Planning Policy 2.5 'Land Use Planning in Rural Areas' and Development Control Policy 3.4 'Subdivision of Rural Land'. Specifically, the submission identifies the need for greater clarification in relation to expectations relating to the provision of infrastructure, services and utilities.

The Taskforce has welcomed the opportunity to provide comment on the WAPC rural policies and looks forward to continued working on the implementation of these policies. In the meantime, if further clarification is required in relation to the key considerations outlined in this submission, please contact Jo Davies, Manager-Physical Activity Taskforce Secretariat on 9492 9632 or e-mail jo.davies@dsr.wa.gov.au.