



Australian  
Institute of  
Architects

# Design excellence in Parramatta

**Submission to Parramatta  
City Council**

**23 March 2016**

## **SUBMISSION BY**

Australian Institute of Architects – NSW Chapter  
ABN 72 000 023 012  
Tusculum, 3 Manning Street  
POTTS POINT NSW 2011  
Telephone: 02 9246 4055  
Facsimile: 02 9246 4030  
email: nsw@architecture.com.au

## **PURPOSE**

This submission is made by the NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) to Parramatta City Council in response to the Design Excellence in Parramatta Discussion Paper.

At the time of the submission the office bearers of the NSW Chapter are:

Shaun Carter (President), Joe Agius (Immediate Past-President), Sarah Aldridge, Melonie Bayl-Smith, Callantha Brigham, Jacqui Connor, Steven Donaghey, Ashley Dunn, Monica Edwards, Chris Jenkins, Peter Kemp, Alex Kibble, Kathlyn Loseby, Andrew Nimmo, Howard Smith, Peter Smith.

The Office Manager of the NSW Chapter is Audrey Braun. This paper was prepared by Murray Brown (Policy Advisor), Paul Walter (Chair, NSW Chapter Built Environment Committee) and David Chesterman (member, Built Environment Committee) for Chapter Council.

## **INFORMATION**

### ***Who is making this submission?***

- The Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) is an independent voluntary subscription-based member organization with approximately 11,553 members who are bound by a Code of Conduct and disciplinary procedures.
- The Institute, incorporated in 1929, is one of the 96 member associations of the International Union of Architects (UIA) and is represented on the International Practice Commission.
- The Institute's New South Wales Chapter has 3,348 members, of which 1,951 are registrable architect members – representing 43% of all registered architects in NSW.

### ***Where does the Institute rank as a professional association?***

- At 11,553 members, the RIAA represents the largest group of non-engineer design professionals in Australia.
- Other related organisations by membership size include: The Design Institute of Australia (DIA) - 1,500 members; the Building Designers Association of Australia (BDAA) - 2,200 members; the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) - 1,435 members; and the Australian Academy of Design (AAD) - 150 members.



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The Institute is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this draft document.

The discussion paper is a very positive step forward and in keeping with Parramatta's status as the second Sydney CBD.

The projected appointment of a City Architect is also a very important step to encourage positive attitudes towards urban design, architecture and public domain design in the City.

We make the following comments (with borders) on the discussion paper:

1. We note the intention to appoint three or four design review panels, each of which will include a landscape architect and will be chaired by the City Architect.

The Institute notes that to be truly independent each panel should have one of its members as chair. This would give the Council a much stronger position if its decisions are contested in the Land & Environment Court.

Five is a good number for a panel. The City Architect and the application's processing officer should be present at meetings. There should be at least one alternate appointed.

We question whether there needs to be the proposed number of panels. Is it based on the level of construction activity in the last five years? Single panels in the Greater Sydney area handle up to 120 applications a year.

The work of preparing panel reports can be shared amongst its members by email. This maintains the panel's independence and can be carried out while the application is on exhibition, thus preventing an increase in processing time.

In view of the national significance of Parramatta's heritage legacy – and the increasing impact of new construction on historically significant views – we also consider a heritage architect should be mandatory for each panel.

2. The Design Excellence Review Panel has the acronym DEAP.

This is a nit-picking point, but the acronym should be DERP. Was the panel previously known as the Design Excellence Advisory Panel?

3. The first meeting in the DERP process is an optional meeting with the City Architect.

In our view, the pre-DERP meeting should be held as required at the City Architect's discretion. This would serve the same purpose as a pre-DA meeting and should deal primarily with analyses of and response to context.

4. The thresholds for design excellence competitions are 55m+ in height (14+ storeys), site area of 1,000sqm+, capital value of \$100M+.

It is not the height so much as the potential impact of new developments that can be critical for the overall urban design of the City. The City Architect should have the discretion to require design excellence competitions for developments lower than this threshold. This would be consistent with the laudable proposal of requiring competitions for key sites outside the CBD.

The position and appropriateness of greater FSR depends very much on location, e.g. solar access to significant public space or significant view corridors might reduce some of the potential bonus yield. Therefore, it is important that objectives and constraints for the whole CBD need to be well-articulated, so the provision needs to be more nuanced.

5. The City is offering a bonus of 15 – 25% for developments that comply with the design competition process.

This generosity could lead to a city of much higher and bulkier buildings than the design excellence provisions would lead you to expect. We note that the City of Sydney offers 10%.

6. There will be a template brief for competitions and the mandatory provision of specialist reports for competitors to respond to.

This is a very positive move – although it could get too complex.

7. The discussion paper refers to the Department of Planning & Environment's Design Excellence Guideline.

The Institute's recently revised Architectural Competitions Policy is not mentioned. We commend this policy to the City, particularly the recommendation for the professional adviser position, which has been successfully adopted by the City of Sydney.

8. 'Key sites' outside the CBD will also fall within the ambit of the competition process.

This is another positive move.

9. Retention of the original architect will be a condition of development consent.

This is an excellent requirement.

10. Council is proposing to develop a guide on how to design residential flat buildings for the Parramatta LGA.

The Institute strongly endorses the Department of Planning & Environment's *Apartment Design Guide*, which applies to all local government areas in NSW. There is no need for a guide that is specific to Parramatta.

11. Council proposes an amendment to the EP&A Act to prevent private certifiers from amending building materials.

The Institute congratulates the City on its intention, but considers that the problem needs to be addressed in a different way, as legislative amendments can take years to implement. For example, the panel could require that the applicant receives a conditional DA subject to final approval of detailed specifications of façade construction and materials on the advice of the panel. This is also much fairer to the applicant, as façade design requires considerable work and expense. The 4th meeting of the DERP would then be held following conditional approval and could focus primarily on façade construction and materials.

12. Council proposes a design excellence DCP and awards program.

The Institute also recommends much greater transparency throughout the development process, so that the public can view plans and models and attend talks by competition-winning architects.

The illustrations in the paper seem to have little to do with Parramatta as a real place with its own history and character. This suggests that design criteria specific to Parramatta should be based on an urban design study that attempts to describe its desired future character based on recognition of its unique place in the Australian story.