



Creating Vibrant Communities

Dean Landy, a Melbourne architect and urban designer, recently outlined new approaches to greenfield development at the 7th International Urban Design Conference in Adelaide. Landy, a Partner at Melbourne firm ClarkeHopkinsClarke, has captured national and international attention with his presentation outlining findings from his ongoing Creating Vibrant Communities research project (www.creatingvibrantcommunities.com.au).

I have built my career around the masterplanning and design of infill, greenfield and regional revitalisation projects across Australia. The relationships ClarkeHopkinsClarke has with local councils and retailers has led to work throughout Melbourne's growth suburbs with a range of developers both private and corporate.

In addition, I also operate a charity called One Heart – Kenya focused on providing housing and education for orphaned and abandoned children living in poverty in Kenya (www.oneheartchallenge.org). This project has given me the opportunity to be involved in creating a series of financially, environmentally and socially sustainable villages. Helping create a number of small family homes has also made me realise what a unique position designers are in to make a significant difference to people's quality of life. One Heart – Kenya has been a catalyst for me wanting to further explore how vibrant communities are created.

When we commenced the research project, we noticed that the discourse around urban development tends to focus on 'why' the development industry needs to do better and 'what' should be achieved. Most people in the industry know WHY we need good planning processes (ageing population, pressures around population growth and urbanisation); and WHAT good



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urban planning looks like and what we want to achieve (social inclusion, services, density balance, walkable communities etc). There just seemed to be very little information on 'how' to achieve it. So we set about focusing the research on developing good planning processes and approaches that would support positive outcomes and help create vibrant communities.

Based on our research, we defined a vibrant community as a place that:

- Provides people with opportunities to:
 - Become involved in their community and to make new social connections
 - Live a healthy lifestyle
 - Pursue education and self development
 - Conduct and grow their business activities or to access a range of job options
 - Mix with people of a variety of age groups, incomes and ethnicities
 - Live affordably
 - Feel safe and secure
- Rewards developers with strong commercial returns
- Contributes to achieving the strategic goals of local and state government
- Creates and allows an evolving sense of place and identity to develop
- Operates as a self sufficient village, providing locals with a range of services and opportunities that fulfill their lifestyle aspirations.

This is not a new idea, it is a triple bottom line (environmental, financial and social) approach to sustainability in urban planning.

At the core of our approach to achieving vibrant communities through our work is the 'Place Evolution Process'.



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Place Evolution Process



The stage when decisions about what will be built are made.

The stage when buildings are planned, designed and built.

The stage when people inhabit the new place that has been created.

Place Evolution Process

Architects and urban designers typically get involved during the Realisation stage, however, we believe there is an opportunity to play a broader role.

By behaving as a catalyst and facilitator of relationships between commercial, government and community stakeholders, greater value can be created for all parties throughout these stages.

Typically, relationships between developers, designers, local government and the community can be combative and strained during this process, however, taking an inclusive and collaborative approach can unlock unforeseen opportunities for innovative or simply, contextually-appropriate solutions.



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The Place Evolution Process provides a range of strategies throughout each of these phases, for example:

- Initiatives for architects and urban designers to provide valuable input into the visioning of the project, early consultation processes and contextual identification of broad stakeholder groups during the visualisation phase;
- Opportunities for the design consultants to engender cooperation among stakeholders to ensure that the project vision is upheld and all parties are engaged in the place-making process during realization phase;
- Ways the design team can be a catalyst for the weaving of a rich social fabric during the activation phase.

These strategies have been tested on active projects such as St Germain, a greenfield development in Clyde North, and Soho Village, an infill development in Point Cook; and have been achieving great results.

One of our research findings relating to the visualisation stage is that often development projects evolve on arbitrary drivers, such as the delivery of a shopping centre, that have very little connection to the need or latent opportunities in the area. Often no research or analysis is carried out to identify the real needs and opportunities inherent in the site and the wider location.

With St Germain, we have been privileged to work with private developer Gordon Gill. Gordon had noticed the great need for additional comprehensive primary healthcare services in the



St Germain – Residential

City of Casey and has worked with his consultants to develop a vision for a village anchored by a comprehensive medical clinic. Through responding to this need, the dual benefits of introducing much needed services to the area and providing an employment generator will be achieved.

The direction of the St Germain project has attracted the attention of the Metropolitan Planning Authority who have decided to work with Gordon, his consultant team and the City of Casey to make St Germain a Demonstration Project. Our situation analysis has identified a range of further opportunities to make St Germain a place that promotes health and wellbeing. The Demonstration Project process will give all involved the opportunity to engage in a collaborative process to explore and develop these possibilities. We also look forward to applying our activation phase research through this project.

With Soho Village, our situation analysis revealed the need to differentiate the development from the surrounding retail and residential offerings. Housing diversity presented an obvious opportunity. Point Cook is an area that is predominantly comprised of single dwellings so we set about creating a variety of options within the development including shop top apartments, townhouses and sohos that provide a street facing office at ground level with living quarters above. The housing has sold strongly off the plan revealing the demand for medium density housing in the area.

Less obvious was our approach to the retail component of Soho Village. The development is located near two established shopping precincts. Ensuring that we created an attractive retail offering was important for long term viability. Part of the solution involved strong integration of the retail and residential components, as well as a mix of services and community facilities, centred around a village square with shop top apartments above. This created a village atmosphere with ground floor activation complemented by passive surveillance from the residential component above. The internal road network and landscaping further supports the village atmosphere with a central parking area surrounded by retail tenancies capable of being converted to a weekend market area. We also worked closely with the supermarket tenant to rebrand their store as 'The Food Pantry'. Again, the retail tenancies are being snapped up by a variety of high quality café and restaurants, creating a truly cosmopolitan precinct in Point Cook, which we believe is the result of a strong visioning and place-making foundation.

This is really just the start for our Creating Vibrant Communities research project. We are keen to continue expanding our network of relationships and we invite you to register at www.creatingvibrantcommunities.com to join us in bringing about positive change in development practices. You can visit www.chc.com.au to learn more about how the Place Evolution Process has informed many of our projects such as St Germain, Soho Village and Polaris 3083. ●

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