Multi-Age Precincts (MAPs) –
New solutions for the future of Australia's housing

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Introduction

A recent collaboration between two Perth not-for-profit groups with a mutual interest in planning and housing has revealed significant and unexpected synergies. *FuturePerth* is an incorporated community organisation of young planners and urban enthusiasts, passionate about Perth and committed to ensuring its development is vibrant, integrated, sustainable and reflecting the aspirations of its active citizens. *PerthALIVE* (*All Ages Living in Vibrant Environments*) is a group of Western Australian '*baby boomers*' promoting alternative, concentrated urban design that accommodates people of all ages from '*cradle to grave*'. Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) and Gen Y or '*Millennials*' (born 1982-2000) represent almost half (approximately 44%) of the Australian population (ABS 2013). The convergence of attitudes of our two demographics is therefore an important consideration for planners and policy makers.

Despite the not insignificant age difference between the two groups, our members have discovered much in common. We want to live in '*Multi-Age Precincts*' (MAPs) – vibrant, higher density, apartment-style developments close to established transport nodes, shops and facilities. To create the vibrancy we want, MAPs would be large, dense (but not necessarily traditional 'high-rise') and comprise several hundred dwellings.

Our vision for MAPs in Australian urban centres sees people of very different ages living literally side by side – a young single living next door to a retiree who is in turn living next door to a family. The design of our proposed precincts would promote a strong sense of community amongst the residents. The consequent sense of belonging would extend to the broader community through the provision of facilities accessible to all such as cafés, child care centres and community gardens.

MAPs will strive to achieve the goals advanced by the American Planning Association's 2011 policy on Multi-Generational Planning:
- to make cities and neighbourhoods accessible, safe and inclusive for children, youth, families, adults and the elderly;
- to allow people to age in place, be it in their homes or neighbourhoods;
- to promote civic participation by both the older and younger generations; and
- to tackle the common and specific concerns of each age group.

With changes to modern life, higher density and apartment living is increasingly attractive to people of all generations. Retirees are attracted to smaller '*lock 'n leave*' dwellings and younger people find apartment living central to work, cafes and nightlife. An increasing proportion of the population is now living alone and living in close proximity to others offers security and companionship.

What we are suggesting will supplement, not replace traditional residential housing patterns. MAPs can be achieved through the infill development of established urban nodes situated along railway lines and inner-

Figure 1: A Perth-based example of the build form of MAPs, render created by Brian Harris (FuturePerth) 2013

Figure 2: Bedock Court Condiminium, Block 1 typical floor plan (Bay, 2010, p.181) after plans courtesy of Design Link Architects

city redevelopment sites. These compact communities will have access to multiple transport networks with the majority of daily goods and service needs located within a five minute walk (Ewing & Bartholomew 2013)

Research from North America suggests that an increase in the '*Walkability Score*' (Speck 2012) of one point will increase the value of a property by up to $3,000 resulting in financial sustainability (Cortright 2009). This approach will accommodate the remarkably similar aspirations of Australia's younger and ageing populations, create a sense of community and represent solid returns for investors.

How are MAPs different to current developments?

Three key components differentiate MAPs from current housing options (please see table references for further details):

1. Design to suit all ages with flexibility to adapt to changes in individual life cycles (1.7, 1.13, 2.2, 2.3)
2. A focus on social sustainability and community connectedness (1.2, 1.4, 1.9, 1.1, 1.14, 1.16)
3. Availability of support services for residents of all ages that will allow ageing in place (1.3, 1.6)

1. A design to suit all ages

The design of individual MAPs must appeal to and support people of all ages. A MAP development should create spaces that can accommodate life changes. Apartments 'for life' can provide support for people who wish to age in place. For example, this might include 'turnkey' apartments with three bedrooms and two living areas for young families. As life circumstances change, this apartment could then be segregated and one or two bedrooms used as a stand-alone apartment for adult children and carers. Alternatively, as space within the apartment is no longer needed, it could be sold or rented to financially support a retirement. It is imperative that multi-age planning objectives are enunciated in advance of the design process and the concept marketed clearly during the sales process so that buyers fully understand the unique product they are purchasing.

2. Social sustainability and community connectedness

We want the design and management of apartments and public open spaces within MAPs to allow for chance "social encounters" between residents and the broader communities in which they are situated. This design focus on both the public outdoor open spaces and in the apartments themselves is described by Dr Joo Hwa Bay (Bay 2010). Bay describes the work of Architect Cheng of Design Link Architects who created a community life in all levels of his building, Bedock Court Condominium in Singapore.

The floor plan (see figure 2 below) demonstrates the relationship between public veranda space at the entry to the apartment in addition to private balcony space. Bay wants residents to enter each apartment from a common

corridor which is a semi-open deck for social activities and communal gardens replacing traditional green public open space (Bay 2010).

Many Australian developments allow a focus on security to dictate key decisions about design and amenity. Enabling appropriate *'passive security'* features through design focused on community connectedness, we believe that MAPs will have lower crime rates than suburban development whilst incorporating desirable social sustainability.

We recognise that high quality public spaces evolve over time and MAPs would, therefore, need to retain an element of flexibility in design. Public space for residents and the broader community would be encouraged to grow and change – for example, a central village square could be utilised for a variety of different events including second-hand book fairs, outdoor cooking classes, multi-cultural fairs, open-air exercise classes and seasonal food events.

3. Support services for residents

MAPs will have a service provider to coordinate the wide variety of services required by residents of the development and the broader community. Our research indicates that aged care providers would be interested in maintaining an office or suite within a MAP to allow residents and other local community members to access the services they offer. Paid services would be attractive for residents of all ages and may include cleaning, laundry, child care, pet care and general maintenance. Additional support for residents needing specialised services as they age in place could be provided either through government support or on a user-pays basis for those who can afford it. Some residents may choose to fund these through revenue from renting or selling a portion of their dual-key or modular apartments (see table 1.13). MAPs could play a crucial role in providing community services including personal care, medication administration, nursing, respite, falls' prevention classes and escorts to medical appointments. Centralised relationships with government departments will ensure maximum financial and social support is achieved. The strategic location of MAPs within existing urban areas along transport nodes provides access to a wide range of additional non-essential amenities within walking distance.

MAPs - A Detailed Look

Table 1: The Features of MAPs Developments

Features of MAPs Development	Our Rationale
1.1- SCALE MAPs are developed in established urban areas and contain several hundred apartments, accommodating roughly twice this number of residents	• Enables people to remain close to established networks of family and friends • Promotes environmental, economic, and social sustainability • Creates vibrancy • Ensures there is a critical mass to support the provision and ongoing financial viability of goods and service provision in the area
1.2- WALKABILITY MAPs are located within walking distance of a transport hub (preferably heavy or light rail) and a major urban town centre	• Walkable neighbourhoods creating healthy communities reducing lifestyle related illness • Facilitates independent living • Reduces fossil fuel usage
1.3- LIFESTYLE MAPs are within walking distance of fitness facilities including a swimming pool and gym (if not available on-site)	• Associated primary health prevention benefits
1.4- ALL AGES & BACKGROUNDS MAPs maintain a strong sense of community by: • actively welcoming a diverse population of different ages, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds; and • meeting social housing/affordability targets	• Creates vibrancy • Reflects broader societal trends • Enables extended families to live in the same development, in different dwellings • Socially responsible
1.5- MIXED USE MAPs are mixed use developments which are primarily residential, but also contain retail (e.g. shops, cafes, a convenience store) commercial (e.g. office space, medical/health facilities) and services (e.g. hairdresser, post office)	• Supports local business initiatives • Allows people to live and work in close proximity
1.6- SERVICES MAPs have access to a service provider in, or adjacent to, the development to facilitate services for residents at different stages of life	• Supports intergenerational living • Allows for ageing in place
1.7- UNIVERSAL ACCESS MAPs feature universal access for people of all ages and abilities (e.g. use of ramps, rather than steps where possible)	• Meets the needs of many diverse groups – e.g. people with mobility issues and people with young children in prams etc.

1.8- SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY MAPs promote 'ground floor' living in the sky (e.g. courtyard gardens in front of/between apartments on multiple levels not just the ground floor)	· Facilitates daily incidental encounters · Creates the community feel of walking on an inner city residential street
1.9- COMMUNITY FUNCTIONS MAPs contain community facilities to cater for a diverse population including multi-use spaces. The activation of these spaces may include diverse community events such as book fairs, markets, exercise classes and neighbourhood concerts	· Builds and maintains sense of community through functions such as youth services, child care centres, playgrounds, function rooms, men's sheds · Allows for changing patterns of recreation · Meets a variety of residents'/community needs
1.10- VILLAGE SQUARE MAPs contain a 'village square' with many facilities accessible to the broader community	· Promotes community connectedness · Ensures business viability
1.11- GREEN SPACE MAPs contain plenty of green space. Individual elements can include green walls, green roofs, BBQ areas, vegetable patches shared gardens	· Delivers on environmental targets · Promotes community connectedness
1.12- INCIDENTAL ENCOUNTERS MAPs are designed to encourage incidental encounters, co-locating related activities to maximise community interaction	· Promotes community connectedness · Improves mental health of residents · Integrates residential and commercial functions · Builds social capital
1.13- FLEXIBILE FLOOR PLANS MAPs contain some dual key or modular units to allow people to buy two adjacent units and sell/rent one at a later stage of life	· Creates flexibility and adaptability of individuals MAPs · Allows people to 'up-size' or 'down-size' according to their stage of life, without having to re-locate (e.g. a family might buy a pair of dual-key apartments when their children are young, then sell or rent one later as children leave home) · Provides an opportunity for older people requiring a carer to house a carer in an adjacent unit
1.14- TRANSPORT MAPs have resident and visitor parking allocations appropriate for developments adjacent to a major public transport node. They also include secure storage for bicycles. MAPs can become key 'rapid-charging' stations for electric vehicles and bicycle/car share depots	· Encourages maximum use of public transport · Encourages low emission transport such as bicycles/scooters · Supports emerging shared car rental businesses · Ensures future compatibility with advances in private vehicle technology
1.15- SECURITY MAPs focus on passive security measures instead of gated security	· Research indicates that passive security is more effective than active security · Increasing visual amenity can be used to 'design out' crime · Builds trust between residents · Fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility
1.16- PETS MAPs have a flexible pet policy as guided by local community meetings	· Pets are valued by a wide range of people, in particular single people and families with children · Pet ownership has social and health benefits

In addition to the above features for MAPs developments, *FuturePerth* and *PerthALIVE* want individual apartments with the following features:

Table 2: Features of Apartments within MAPs

Features of Apartments within MAPs	Purpose
2.1- Environmentally sustainable features (e.g. maximum insulation, wind tunnel modelling, grey water recycling and integration of wind/solar power generation technology)	• Reduces residents' carbon footprint • Anticipates and meet future building regulations • Contributes to reduced living costs
2.2- Universal access design features in a large percentage of apartments	• Universal design principles cater for people with disability and people with mobility issues
2.3- A range of apartments with 1-3 bedrooms at or above industry standards. Open plan living areas with partitions allowing for the segregation of spaces for young families. Ground floor dwellings include a number of multiple bedroom options	• A diversity of apartment types is essential to cater for different generational needs • Families with young children require space that can be partitioned
2.4- Above industry standard noise controls and safety features such as smoke detectors and emergency access	• Caters for medical emergencies with an ageing population • Ensures safety of young children living in apartments elevated above ground floor • Promotes privacy • Strengthens community relationships
2.5- Corridors , colonnades or spaces such as porches that have light and air as well as private balcony spaces	• Supports quality family relationships • Allows for community connectedness • Allows residents to personalise their space
2.6- A focus on quality internal and external apartment design	• Aids in place-making aspects of MAPs • Improves value of property • Encourages residents to spend time in their community

Current Barriers to MAPs

The early discussions our groups have held with Perth-based planners and developers suggest that many are keen to adopt these different approaches, but that there are multiple barriers to doing so. Despite significant new apartment dwellings under construction in Perth, the overwhelming majority of new homes are still located in the outer suburbs. Such barriers are fed largely by:

- Stereotypes of what different generations want;
- Concern surrounding market support for change; and
- A preference to continue to supply what has sold in the past.

These issues are well summarised by land-use strategist Leinberger, who identifies that changing the status quo can lead to considerable resistance, *"walkable urban development calls for dramatically different approaches to urban design and planning, regulation, financing and construction"* (**Leinberger 2012).**

There may also be financial and legislative barriers to the implementation of MAPs developments in Australia. Some relate to current local government planning frameworks, others to broader economic challenges and bank lending practices. Within the West Australian context, a process of local government amalgamation and recognition of the importance of future housing supply may help mitigate some of these obstacles.

Attitudinal and cultural barriers also exist to the creation of MAPs; many people subscribe to a view that gated communities are better to address the security concerns of residents than developments which have features of the MAPs model. We do not believe this is the case as many Asian and European cities have both low crime rates and higher density multi-age living. Mainstream Australians are only now discovering the benefits of higher density living. The *FuturePerth* and *PerthALIVE* collaboration demonstrates that a cultural shift is occurring and it is potentially leaving developers out-of-touch with the current market reality.

A Way Forward?

Our discussions with Government agencies have been encouraging, with strong support for a MAPs approach but difficulties in finding the best way forward. A range of public policy shifts may be required for developers to embrace change. One possibility is to introduce a 'multi-age score' applying an ageing-in-place strategy as part of the social sustainability of development applications. Education and awareness campaigns for

local governments and planners may foster advocacy for MAPs. There is also a need for greater public recognition that there are other ways to meet safety and security concerns through designing vibrant spaces while improving passive surveillance processes.

Perhaps most importantly, we believe there is an urgent need to construct and showcase a MAPs development to demonstrate the workability of the model. Developers and the public alike need to actually experience a different approach in action in order to embrace it as a positive way to address their housing aspirations. A model development, achieved through collaboration between public, private and community sectors, could help Australians better understand how to develop and create great places for all generations.

Conclusion

The collaboration between *PerthALIVE* and *FuturePerth* has revealed that the housing needs of diverse demographics are not mutually exclusive. There are significant similarities in the desires of the different generations of Australians. Infill mixed use development can transform established nodal urban centres to MAPs thus accommodating the shared aspirations of many younger and ageing Australians. A MAPs approach

will create compact, walkable urban environments and intergenerational communities with shared personal and community benefits.

MAPs will be designed to promote ageing-in-place, allowing people of all ages to live together. They will acknowledge that social sustainability comes from quality design of the private and public space, encouraging incidental encounters between residents and the wider community in which they live.

We acknowledge that, like any housing product, our proposal will not suit everyone. Many 'baby boomers' will want to age-in-place in their own homes or move to a retirement village and many young families will prefer a detached house and conventional backyard. As society changes, we are confident that a significant proportion of Australians will aspire to something not currently offered by the Australian property market and that MAPs developments are a viable alternative for these people. Reconsideration of the predominant development models and assumptions underpinning planning, design and marketing decisions is required to ensure that future residential accommodation meets the needs of a changing Australian urban landscape. All sectors – public, private and community – have a role to play in ensuring there is greater diversity in housing stock than is currently provided.

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