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The impact of planning, the development industry and the building industry on the way Australians live

The impact of mandating a minimum floor area

Two bedroom one bathroom 'starter homes' are no longer built as standalone dwellings in the residential zone because developers insist on minimum floor areas to suit the four bedroom two bathroom format. This is better for resale because it enables people to sublet a portion of the house that assists in paying off the mortgage.

Pricing power of big builders in the building trade

In WA, the top five builder groups, accounted for 45% of the starts in 2020. By 2024-25 the top five accounted for 65-75% of starts. These builders seek pricing parity with existing homes. The cost of construction is irrelevant. In 2025 building costs in Perth increased by 14%. In less overheated markets the rate was 3%. The difference is windfall profit due to rapid appreciation of house prices.

Government at state and local level should provide blocks that can be used to construct starter homes. They should outlaw the practice of mandating minimum floor areas. If a government wants to avoid a ballooning budget for social services it should provide loans for starter homes at an interest rate that is pitched at the thirty year bond rate rather than higher commercial rates charged by banks.

Town planning mayhem

We now have one hundred and fifty kilometres of continuous urban sprawl from Two Rocks to Mandurah. Perth expanded by 2.4 per cent over the past year, double the 1.2 per cent recorded across regional WA.

As the extent of the settlement increases living standards fall

- Block sizes shrink.
- Green space is no longer available on the block.
- More income is devoted to simply getting from place to place.
- Traffic density on the roads enters the realm of the absurd.
- Summer air temperature increases by up to 10C.
- Money must be spent on air conditioning and shielding glass from the direct rays of the sun.

Prior to the advent of the internal combustion engine a 'town' was a compact affair where it was possible to walk or ride a bicycle to where you needed to get. People knew each other and the word 'community' meant something. Now this form of settlement can only be found outside the 'Greater Perth Area'.

It's monotonously easy for developers to add to 'urban sprawl'. The provision of distant shopping centres is managed by big investors who provide what Coles and Woolworths need, including a massive car park.

In the residential areas half of the area is devoted to roads, footpaths and car parking. These roads are a no-go area for pedestrians and children. Look left, look right, don't fall over as you

cross the road. There is nothing to be seen around the corner but more houses so why would you leave the house on foot.

You put yourself at risk when you sit behind the wheel of a car and pay a small fortune to keep it on the road. As the transit time increases from your home to the shopping centre, your work, schools, recreation your aging parents, or a hospital, more of your budget is wasted in just getting from A to B,C, D, E and F. This is a treadmill.

Urban sprawl suits businesses that get to serve a larger captive market. This is the antithesis of convenience, competition and neighbourliness. We are swept along in the whirlwind that is generated by the powers that be.

Intelligent 'planning'. What a joke!

Mixed Use enhances convenience, reduces cost, and builds neighbourhood cohesion

A tight relatively self-sufficient walkable neighbourhoods is the opposite of current planning practices and developer's preferences. Despite thirty years of advocacy by the Western Australian Planning Commission its not happening. Local planning authorities continue to enable houses to be added at the outer margin in the singularly stupid exercise of mandating 'single use'.

A 240 square meter block is one quarter of the size of the quarter acre block that your Mum and Dad grew up on. Town planning serves the auto and the oil industry and the incumbent monopolies. The person who aspires to raise a family amongst supportive neighbours under the shelter of a tree with a café, a bakery, and a grocery store within walking distance ends up behind the steering wheel of a car and is deluded to thinking that his wheels represent freedom. The reverse is the case.

Can this be re-jigged after the fact?

Relief valve no 1. The ancillary dwelling

From April 2024 an ancillary dwelling (granny flat) became a 'permitted use' in any location where a primary dwelling already exists. This was seen as a means to boost supply. However, today's blocks are mostly too small to allow for the addition of another dwelling.

Relief valve No2: The infill option

Redevelopment under a code that allows more dwellings per hectare can occur if a developer can buy up streets of houses and demolish them to enable a fresh start. The result will be vertically stacked apartments or two and three story townhouses, hopefully with a commercial ground floor. However, stacked housing is not seen as 'family friendly'. Two or more floors, reduces children's access to the street, interferes with neighbour's views, their sunshine and their privacy. Residents will fight with tooth and nail to prevent this happening if they think that property values will collapse. This is not happening to the extent necessary, and realistically, it never will, because its just too hard to aggregate existing properties.

Relief valve no 3. Extra dwellings in rural areas

Living in a rural area is the preferred option for many people, especially as blocks shrink in the residential zone.

The addition of 'ancillary dwellings' in a rural area is seen by planning authorities to be the thin edge of a wedge that will disrupt their preferred 'urban sprawl' of single family, single use standalone dwellings. Local authorities in rural areas tend to insist that a secondary dwelling is limited to immediate family use, located within a few meters of the primary dwelling and might even insist on a shared kitchen or laundry.

Rural residential on two to three hectares is incredibly wasteful of land and out of favour with the WAPC.

Planning consultants develop town plans to suit developers preferences. Consultants are aware that it is easy to get the rubber stamp from local authorities who are under the pump if you

know their rules and stick to them. It's very expensive and time consuming to break the mould of the existing town plan.

The rules for urban sprawl are developed in Perth. Anachronistically a country town that developed organically a hundred years ago will now have bits of outer Perth tacked onto it. Visit Harvey, Busselton and more so Dunsborough and you will see what I mean. Small blocks, lots of roads, little or no green space.

Many planners leave the government service and go into private practice inside the space of twenty years that it takes for the population to double. Their task will then be to assist developers to get what they want. They will not want to rock the local authority boat because their livelihood depends on maintaining a smooth path to approval. So, there is a lot of built in inertia to overcome.

This state of affairs leads directly towards endless sprawl and an underclass engaged in house sharing, couch surfing, or sleeping in a car in the wide outdoors, none of which is a suitable for raising children.

Woe is me. Woe is you.

There is a generalized lack of imagination.

Below is an entirely different format. It's just one way of going about it. Another way would be to deliberately create more space between settlements by arranging up to five circles to constitute a self-supporting, self-governing entity of perhaps 20,000 people, no more. It's more like semi-rural or semi-urban. the best of both worlds and in that its mixed use the need to travel is dramatically reduced.



Figure 2: Clustering of neighbourhoods

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