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Environment and Heritage Committee
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into Sustainable Cities 2025

The City of Playford, a Local Government Authority spanning 345 square kilometres of northern metropolitan Adelaide, commends the Environment and Heritage Committee on its Inquiry and offers the following submission. Before this submission makes a contribution to the questions raised in the provided discussion paper, Council believes it should identify 2 key issues that have not been addressed.

Firstly the social component of the urban environment requires greater emphasis. The creative potential of cities is not independent of urban policy and quality of life, and those that prosper within this environment, are a cities most significant and strategic asset. What needs to be placed first and foremost in the Committee's mind is that of society. Issues such as access to services, employment, transport and cultural facilities are all vital components to developing equitable and sustainable centres, communities and nodes of innovation. We must plan for a culture where innovation is actively pursued and encouraged through creative mixed use regional nodes.

Secondly, considering the year 2025 reference, Council urges the Committee to take into consideration the role technology will play in redefining the social and geographical interactions in cities of the future.

By 2025 information technology, biotechnology, smart materials and nanotechnology are all likely to be generic technologies. Automated roadways, agriculture and industry, personalised transit and highly networked smart services will redefine human behaviours and, in doing so, spatial patterns.

In a well wired society people will be accustomed to instantaneous responses from government, business, acquaintances and technological devices. Technology is changing our perceptions of the world and increasing individual and community capacity exponentially, failure to come to grips with this social and environmental potential would be a significant loss opportunity for Australian society.

It could be said that most environmental problems have occurred because economists know very little about ecology and ecologists know little about economics. Redesigning economics to reflect that development is a part of nature will be vital. A sustainable community is one that has achieved economic, ecological, social and cultural prosperity and thus we must grasp opportunities to develop partnerships between education, research, business and government to generate and act on ideas.

Key issues identified in the discussion paper that Council wishes to comment are:

Energy

Alternative ways of providing energy to urban development are currently being explored and will increasingly play a pivotal role in the development of our cities. Wind and solar energy, coupled by greater energy efficiency need to be pursued in conjunction.

Council supports good residential design that promotes energy efficiency and suggests that when buildings are assessed for approval that an energy indicator is used (based on appropriate calculations) as an elementary component of the assessment process.

Additionally design, financial incentives and proactive policies for best practice energy manufacture should be explored at the micro and macro scale. Buildings themselves can be producers of power which can then also be complemented by the provision of large scale producers such as wind farms.

Higher densities and appropriate micro and macro land use mixes can also facilitate minimisation of energy use through decreased daily transportation.

It is Council's opinion that the main impediments to implementing appropriate development is a lack of availability and support for alternative building materials and design, lack of financial and policy levers and limited understanding of the associated benefits. Large scale housing developers promulgate a business as usual mentality based on current financial successes.

Water

Access to, and use of, water has and will increasingly become a highest of priorities for governments and communities alike.

Council is currently exploring best practice policy for promoting and implementing water efficiency and again suggests that when buildings are assessed for approval that a water use indicator is also applied as an elementary component of the assessment process. How much water a building is likely to use should be assessed.

As with the use of energy, design, financial incentives and proactive policies for best practice should be explored at the micro and macro scale. Buildings can retain storm water and retain it for supplying a number of immediate uses such as landscape irrigation, toilet flushing, washing and drinking but as yet building practices are yet to implement these methodologies on large scale.

On a macro scale water is now retained in open space to for purification and amenity purposes. Financial support for storm water and riparian management on a local and regional scale is strongly advocated.

It is Council's opinion that the main impediments to implementing appropriate water management is a lack of support for alternative building design, lack of appropriate financial and policy levers and limited understanding of the associated benefits.

Waste

Council suggests that in the future there will almost be no such thing as waste, and that at all times during an item's life cycle it will be valued as a resource.

As with the use of energy and water, building design, financial incentives and proactive policies for best practice should be explored at the micro and macro scale. Buildings can process grey and black water on site or in the immediate vicinity with by-products a possible resource. Again building practices are yet to implement opportunities offered by best practice technologies on a large scale.

Transport

Transport services have a long term history of evolving rapidly and this must be kept in mind when considering the issue.

Council supports land use mix and intensification around transport nodes, be it commercial, agricultural, industrial or residential development. In particular mixed use regional nodes and high speed accessible transit such as rail and express bus ways, with appropriate financial support, are advocated. In conjunction Council also suggest transportation diversity will also play a key role in energy use, accessibility, functionality and equity. Pedestrian orientated development, appropriate open space and infrastructure for walkways and bicycle movement and strategic high density development will all play a key role.

Open space

The appropriate provision of open space within urban environments plays a number of vital roles in balancing an effective and successful city. Recreation, amenity, biodiversity, transport and water management are all key elements. Good quality well designed open space can contribute to all of these goals and in turn contribute to the quality of life, and thus success, of the community.

Council is of the opinion that, with associated infrastructure and land use planning, these objectives can work in harmony with urban development and not lead to unnecessary sprawl or degradation of nature. Again issues such as water and energy sensitive design, building land uses, densities and footprints need to be carefully considered and lack of support for alternative building design, lack of financial and policy levers and limited understanding of the associated benefits are contributing to a lack of detailed high quality responses.

Council is currently placing a great importance on the open space network in the city. Support for networks and the discouragement of isolated open space will achieve a number of the benefits outlined above. South Australia has been successful in this practice by enforcing open space cash contributions for land division that is then invested in regional networks, be it land purchase, land management or appropriate infrastructure such as paths and interpretive facilities.

Education and Legislation

Both education and legislation should not be considered in isolation. Council urges the Committee to support far reaching educative tools for the community, development industry and decision makers in conjunction with more innovative development

assessment policies, financial incentives and small and large scale demonstration projects.

Policies that provide incentives in the development process for innovative sensitive urban design are needed to coerce the development industry into exploring new options just as emission targets are now influencing the car industry.

Additionally, in the future potential home buyers will be just as interested in the ongoing cost of a home as they are the asking price and main stream water and energy indexes should be promoted to educate and inform homeowners.

Urban Design

Urban design has been touched upon in much of the preceding submission. What Council wishes to advocate more generally is a need to make land use densities and mix far more dynamic.

Traditional zoning of our cities tends to allocate homogeneous land uses into an area, it is suggested it is time to literally think outside these boxes. Cities are increasingly becoming complex organisms and allotments, let alone localities, or regions can have a number of interwoven land uses that support sustainability objectives.

As such development policies need to be more flexible, easy to access and use and more concerned with the science associated with development, such as energy use, water consumption, resource inputs and outputs and associated ecological impacts and benefits.

The discussion paper suggests a number of future development models, from the compact city to the ultra city. Council suggests that no one of these models need be supported, but that based on local infrastructure, environments and population, a strategic mix of all is likely the most appropriate solution. Local solutions to local issues based on community values is likely to be the most effective and popular approach. Within this context Council does support strategic intensification of development within and nearby existing centres and along transport corridors with limited urban expansion at the metropolitan fringe.

Transformation of our cities will be incremental as enforcing compulsory change on existing development is almost impossible. As such the development planning system which oversees and implements new development on a metropolitan, regional, local and allotment scale is, and will increasingly be, a vital and strategic tool for implementing change.

In closing it is acknowledged that a single desired future vision is not possible due to the unpredictable path ahead. As such Council believes that the processes for pursuing a sustainable society are the most significant, with an integrated strategic vision expressing community goals into objectives through a supported development planning process.

Council supports an informed holistic national approach which empowers local communities for building sustainable cities and urges to the Committee to support a consultative multilayered, but connected process, rather than simply defining goals and objectives.

In particular Council believes a Commission for the Future is greatly needed to explore the possible, not only the probable, and provide direction beyond the political radar.

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City of Playford thanks the Committee for the opportunity to make a submission and looks forward to its findings.

Yours faithfully

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