DO VARIOUS LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT HAVE A ROLE IN TOWNSCAPE IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES? ARE THERE CONFLICTS WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE BURRA CHARTER?

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Synopsis
This paper will present a brief overview of the role of various Government agencies in Townscape Improvement Strategies. It will then look at what conflicts arise with principles of the Burra Charter, and examine case studies where such conflicts are evident. It will conclude that the greatest level of conflict can occur where the conservation of a significant historical place is strongly tied to economic rejuvenation, i.e., where physical changes to the townscape and physical streetscape enhancement are seen as a strategy to economically rejuvenate a place and establish a more attractive visitor destination. Conflict also occurs when architects and urban designers have no appreciation of the cultural significance of historic townscape and so expensive design solutions, yielding a potentially high design fee are proposed. Adherence to Burra Charter principles can only occur where Government, through its conservation agencies, has a large role in financial support and monitoring of a Townscape Improvement Strategy.

Introduction
It is obvious that government at all levels does have a strong role in Townscape Improvement Strategies. Comprehensive strategies cannot be the responsibility of individual property owners; in most cases they form part of the forward planning strategies prepared by government agencies for city and regional centres and country towns. In general, most of these strategies incorporate economic revitalisation as a key objective. It is rare that Townscape Improvement Strategies arise solely out of the need to carefully manage and enhance significant historic building stock and physical street character, although the heritage Advisory Programs in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia do arise from this basis.

Existing Townscape Improvement Programs
At a national level, the Australian Heritage Commission through National Estate Grant funding to local governments has been responsible for initiating numerous heritage studies which can form the basis of townscape awareness. In general these studies have provided inventories of significant heritage items and areas, but improvement strategies for these identified areas are not usually covered. The Design Board of the Australia Council from 1987-89 actively promoted a national level townscape improvement programs which aimed to employ designers on a variety of environmental and urban design projects. This program actively encouraged the reassessment of existing townscape yet it was left to the individual designer and the client body to ascertain any design parameters such as significant heritage streetscapes. The Australia Council currently runs a “Community Environment Act and Design Program” (CEAD) which offers assistance for Community, Artist and Designer Participation in Environmental Design. The recently established National Main Street Task Force with representation from all states, has established for the first time at a national level a working group to explore issues of funding, information exchange and training for Main Street programs. This group is to complete a final report for presentation to the 1992 Planning Ministers Conference.

At State Government level, Victoria was the leader in the careful management of historic towns through the establishment of Heritage Advisory Services in 1978. This service, based on the provision of specialist architectural advice and modelled on Conservation Officer positions for local Councils in Britain, has allowed for the careful enhancement of townscape through a conservation based management strategy. In all cases the appointment of a Heritage Adviser and establishment of such a program relied upon the existence of a detailed Heritage Conservation Survey which had established the significance of the area. This Heritage Advisory Service, with nine Heritage Advisers employed by the Victorian Department of Planning & Housing, concentrates more on the individual building stock and the careful conservation of these buildings, and less on the “improvements” of actual streets themselves.

Advisers service areas with strong historic character, and towns such as Maldon, Beechworth and Queenscliff are known nationally for the well managed, carefully conserved and restored street frontages of Victorian buildings. Any elaborate townscape improvement proposals would not be allowed under current planning provisions.

In parallel with Heritage Advisory Services, the Victorian Townscape program which operated...
between 1983-1989 concentrated on simple but effective townscape improvements in areas which were otherwise unattractive and lacking in amenity. An example is Dimboola, where improvements to street and footpath and the installation of street trees was a deliberate strategy in response to the bypassing of the Adelaide/Melbourne highway to stimulate rejuvenation of the town. The historic significance and character of Dimboola is not a similar quality to those serviced by the Heritage Advisory services, yet the upgrading and improving of the main street by the planting of simple avenues of trees and provision of some kerbing indentation to establish a simple landscape/streetscape character is an improvement to the amenity of this town.

Two similar programs exist in New South Wales. Viewing the success of the Heritage Advisory Program from over the border, the NSW Heritage Advisory Program was established in 1983 by the Department of Planning and aimed to provide local Councils with expertise on heritage matters. The information package now provided by the Department of Planning states the “the program has been successful in providing a positive attitude towards heritage conservation at the local level”. Once again, like the Victorian program, this concentrates on the management and careful monitoring of the condition and maintenance of significant important historic buildings and the promotion of heritage conservation within local government areas. The objective of the Heritage Advisory Program is to facilitate the maintenance, restoration and improvement of the existing historic built environment. Programs which have been in operation for several years, such as Broken Hill, have achieved remarkable success with improvements to the overall townscape. There are now 28 Heritage Advisors and the State Government contribution to the Program is $162,000 on a dollar for dollar basis with and additional $77,000 allocated for local restoration funds.

In New South Wales a Main Street Program was commenced in 1989. This program has been “designed to encourage community involvement in a comprehensive approach to the improvement and revitalisation of urban and rural commercial centres ... and ... to manage change in a co-ordinated and incremental manner ... to help communities help themselves.” Modelled on the Heritage Canada program, the thrust of the New South Wales Main Street Program has been on the economic rejuvenation of centres, and is dependent on the appointment of a co-ordinator to implement the program at the local level. Design and heritage conservation are two of the five elements of the approach but the emphasis has been more to fill vacant shops, increase retail turnover and to revitalise an area to become more lively; less emphasis has been placed on rigorous approach to assessment of building stock or the careful heritage based management of historic areas. However, the current linking of the Main Street program with funding provided through the Heritage Assistance Program has resulted in the greater degree of awareness of the significance of the physical heritage of streets as an asset to be considered in economic rejuvenation. Main Street Program briefs now reflect this emphasis and awareness.

In Queensland, despite the introduction of recent heritage legislation, no similar programs to the Heritage Advisory service have yet been established, and local government areas, aware that they possess significant historic townscape, have been left to their own resources. Following the National Main Street Conference in Sydney in March 1991, the Queensland Small Business Corporation has established a well funded Main Street Program, and released a Strategic Plan in late 1991. Five Main Street programs have been established, and financial assistance is available for the establishment of coordinator positions, conceptual townscape planning, marketing, economic assessment, facade design and loans for undertaking works.

In Western Australia, Townscape Programs were introduced in 1987 and the Department of Planning & Urban Development’s 1990 - 1993 Strategic Plan clearly establishes its commitment to townscape, urban design and heritage within its urban development program. This townscape program has been run with limited resources but over the past three years has successfully established community based programs in numerous local government areas. A carefully prepared Townscape Guide provides probably the clearest discussion on an Australia-wide basis of the design issues involved in townscape rejuvenation. Promotional and detailed technical videos have been prepared and the process involves the establishment of a townscape committee, the preparation of a character study, the formulation and subsequent implementation of a townscape plan.

In South Australia, Heritage Advisory Services were established in 1990 to service the six State Heritage Areas, and aimed to facilitate the careful management and control of development within these areas as prescribed by the State Heritage Area Regulations under the Heritage Act. A working group has recently been established by the Department of Environment & Planning to identify the best ways in which a Main Street Program can be implemented in South Australia, but coordination between Heritage and Main Street aims has not yet been fully addressed.

In Tasmania, the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation provides advice to local councils and facilitates community forums on the revitalisation of small towns based on the Main Street approach. At present there is no state funding and assistance, encouragement and information is all that is provided through government.

At Local Government level, there are many cases where local communities have no access to any of these programs yet develop strategies of their own to enhance
and revitalise town centres, based on strong community feeling for local character.

**Examples of Townscape Improvement Strategies**

With such obvious interest by government in Townscape Improvement Strategies which are strongly related to economic revitalisation of towns and cities, where do conflicts occur with the Burra Charter?

The Charter states (1.4)

“Conservation means all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance. It includes maintenance...preservation, restoration, reconstruction and adaptation.”

It can be argued the Townscape Improvement Strategies mostly involve adaptation, yet article 20 states:

“Adaptation is acceptable where the conservation of a place cannot otherwise be achieved and where the adaptation does not substantially detract from its cultural significance.”

The physical changes needed to enhance town centres and make them more attractive for users by improving amenity and boosting economic viability is the greatest area of conflict with this Charter. Tree planting, changes in footpath material and design and the introduction of street furniture can be undertaken in many cases with little regard to the established significance of a place. In many cases the Burra Charter is ignored by professionals involved in townscape improvement and urban design and is considered to have little relevance to this process. An example of this is the initial design solutions proposed for Moseley Square and Jetty Road, Glenelg. This square, which actually resulted from land left over after Colonel Light’s original survey for Glenelg in 1839, was slowly eroded in character with the gradual degradation of perimeter buildings and the use of the square for carparking. However, it had always been an important public meeting place. In the 1960s a major upgrading of the square occurred, but it is now considered run down and unattractive. Despite the council brief to “create an image that incorporates the historic conservation of Moseley Square and reinforces the atmosphere of the historic city by the sea”, it was proposed to plant about 40 palm trees, erect a central pavilion restaurant, provide a large semi-circular colonnade, and rebuild a perfectly functional existing tram shelter. No recommendations were made for the conservation of any of the edge buildings which had been identified as significant in earlier studies.

A mall was proposed for the adjacent Jetty Road. These solutions were extremely expensive, and would positively erode the historic character of the square, yet these proposals were outlined by a prominent firm of architects. The redesign of public spaces and townscape improvement proposals in many cases can be influenced by the potential fee to be gained - the more major the works the greater the fee. It is fortunate that Glenelg Council has reassessed these recommendations and is embarking on a simpler proposal which embraces the restoration and adaptation of the significant edge buildings. This modified proposal is currently being implemented in stages and incorporates a planting of eight Canary Island Date Palms in a formal arrangement which focuses on the existing “Buffalo” Memorial, and complements the original buildings. Parking is being removed from the square. Yet even this proposal conflicts with the Burra Charter. There never were trees in this square, although palms were used along the foreshore. People now use this space differently from in the past however, and the Council requires an overall visible improvement to attract more visitors to this seaside destination.

Clear guidelines for the reconstruction of original verandahs to the shops and restaurants along the southern frontage have now been prepared and negotiations are underway with the various property owners of these buildings. Unless local government takes this action only piecemeal improvements will occur to buildings which, whilst of important local historic significance, have not been protected on the State Heritage Register.

On an individual building basis, a similar example of an expensive design solution which disregards cultural significance can be provided by the upgrading of a significant commercial building in Maryborough (Qld). Perfectly sound timber windows were removed and replaced with aluminium counterparts, lofty hoop pine lined ceilings were concealed with lowered ceilings and extremely expensive design solutions were proposed by the architectural firm commissioned with the upgrading of this building by a corporate client. Unnecessarily expensive works were undertaken, compromising the significance of this building and its contribution to the streetscape (yet yielding the architects a larger design fee).

Fremantle has been discussed by others. The objective here of streetscape improvements has been to improve pedestrian amenity and circulation. Many streets have been closed, trees planted contemporary paving materials and bollards installed. Little of this would appear to conform to the original character of Fremantle.

Similarly in the Port Adelaide State Heritage Area the planting of trees where there never were trees and the use of bollards to highlight certain buildings, such as the South Australian Maritime Museum, (the most important visitor destination), can be argued for on the basis of new uses for this existing precinct. These areas have been physically adapted to suit proposed compatible uses, yet reference to the Burra Charter states that “adaptation is acceptable only where the conservation of a place cannot otherwise be achieved and where adaptation does not substantially detract from its cultural significance.” Who determines whether such
improvements do detract from the cultural significance of the area? In many cases this question is not even asked - it is the physical revitalisation and increasing the attractiveness of a place which are considered the most important issues.

There are many other examples of similar approaches such as Maryborough (Queensland) and Maling Road, Canterbury (Melbourne) and the East End (Adelaide) where streetscape improvement works incorporate street planting, furniture and general improvements to establish a more attractive pedestrian environment. These examples have as a key objective the need to revitalise the environment and make it more attractive to visitors. Maling Road, Canterbury, a run-down intact small 1920s shopping centre, originally proposed for drastic redevelopment, has been established as a unique village centre which provides specialty retail outlets such as antiques, craft shops and food. Trees have been planted and different paving materials and street furniture introduced where these were never part of the original character, yet these enhance the street.

![Renovated hotel, Fremantle](Photo: City of Fremantle)

The East End Market in Adelaide is a significant inner city precinct ravaged during the late 1980s for megalomaniac redevelopment proposals which have fortunately not been realised due to the recession and plight of the State Bank. However, demolition of original market sheds had already occurred to make way for this proposed development. Recent more modest works include upgrading to existing street frontages and the reinstatement of a small-scale market behind these facades in the location of the first market in Adelaide. Streetscape improvements include footpath widening for outdoor eating facilities, provisions of new shopfronts which allow for maximum accessibility to the footpath and the construction of retractable canvas awnings. It is arguably one of the most significant streetscapes in Adelaide yet individual buildings have been adapted and upgraded where restoration and reconstruction work would have been possible. An example of this is the adaptation of 286-288 Rundle Street (an early 1900s building which had been altered in the 60s) for restaurant purposes - reinstatement of the original shopfront was strongly argued for but the need to achieve maximum footpath accessibility made reconstruction of the original shopfront an unattractive proposition for the developer.

The above examples show that on a broader townscape level, adaptation of townscape and buildings as part of an economic revitalisation strategy is more generally achieved rather than conservation. It is only where individual buildings or precincts have achieved mechanisms for control under Heritage or Planning Regulations that a more rigorous approach to conservation can be achieved.

Successful redesigning and improvement of streetscapes in historically significant areas in other countries can be used as inspiration for details of materials and forms which are contextual and consequently attractive.

**Burra Charter vs Townscape Improvements**

Are there any examples where Townscape Improvement Strategies are conservation based and largely accord to the provisions of the Burra Charter?

Historic “museum” towns such as Maldon, Hill End, Beechworth and Yackandandah are to a large extent able to follow the rigours of the Burra Charter. All places are carefully controlled within town planning schemes which were in place before significant change was mooted, and such places provide good examples of rigorous conservation of significant areas.

In a capital city context it is only at The Rocks in Sydney that rigorous Burra Charter standards are currently being imposed and this is restricted only to certain areas of The Rocks.

**The Rocks - Sydney**

The Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority was established in 1970 as a self-financing authority to manage The Rocks, arguably one of the choicest pieces of real estate in Sydney. Previous redevelopment proposals arose initially from preoccupations with health, sanitation and over-crowding and then at the turn of the century, proposed schemes espoused current planning theories. In 1964 and Labour Government sponsored a competition which might “allow for the retention of one or more (...) historic (...) buildings as a feature of the area”. Redevelopment was to occur over fifteen years. The “Overall Scheme” of the mid 1960s recommended the retention of at least nine buildings and recommended the establishment of “historic character” via the erection of historic monuments and the creation of a magnificent square. The charter of the new authority was to sweep away the old and create a newly designed city precinct.
This redevelopment charter of the authority was thwarted by the Builders Labourers Federation Green Ban movement, which halted about $4 billion of construction in Sydney, including the earliest proposed stages of redevelopment of The Rocks. This, as is well known, changed the direction of the Authority to embrace conservation. However, by 1980 the Regent Hotel site was released and between 1985 and 1988 major redevelopment had occurred mostly at the southern end of The Rocks. Much of this large scale development has had a massive intrusion on the character of The Rocks and was undertaken with little respect for the cultural significance of individual sites. Even at a smaller scale, intact original shopfronts in the Globe Street development (George Street) were not considered “attractive” enough and were upgraded into “more pleasing historic shopfronts” and “facadism” was condoned. Yet it was this period of redevelopment which generated the financial resources which now allow heritage conservation and urban design improvements to be concentrated on - the Lilyvale Hotel development site alone cancelled the $100 million debt of the Authority.

Over the past year, 1991, $15 million has been spent on capital works, building restoration, road works and specialist consultants fees. In addition the operating budget of the authority allows for a high level of specialist staffing and the ability to undertake careful assessment works. The Manager, Architecture & Heritage, together with a support team of five professionals, are committed to the implementation of conservation based on the principles of the Burra Charter.

Conservation Plans are now prepared for all buildings which are subject to any development proposals. A comprehensive Heritage Survey is being undertaken of The Rocks (which follow the completion of the Archaeological Zoning Plan) which will draw together all existing information and cover previously undocumented buildings. George Street Streetscape Works are the result of a Conservation Study which specifically addressed original street finishes and furniture. Wood blocks and cobblestones have been retained in situ with small sections exposed for public viewing and the new street lights introduced with original lights placed in original locations and similar contemporary lights in other positions to provide the minimum acceptable requirement for street lighting.

The Authority is its own client - a unique situation allowing development to accord to its own standards and now those of the Burra Charter. Uneven flooring is tolerated and found to be an asset for specialist galleries; archaeological discoveries can be incorporated into revised building alterations, and the only facade upgrading now allowed is carefully considered restoration under the direction of skilful conservation architects.

The existing management approach in The Rocks represents the closest physical manifestation of an ideal Burra Charter - directed townscape improvement strategy. This is being achieved by the healthy financial resources of the Authority provided by funding from previous development which unfortunately drastically eroded the character of the southern section of The Rocks. How long this new rigorous approach to conservation in The Rocks will be allowed to continue is another question - if the State Government is able to justify reallocation of the Authority’s substantial funds in these tough economic times, politics and reduced finances may result in an unavoidable watering down of these high standards.

Conclusion

In conclusion, townscape improvement strategies which are not financially and administratively supported by conservation agencies within government will inevitably conflict with the principles of the Burra Charter. The defining of the cultural significance of the townscape is an essential first step, but this is often overlooked by many architects and designers of physical improvement strategies. Most strategies are strongly tied to economic reassessment of towns and commercial centres and physical improvement proposals for streets and buildings are more concerned with improved pedestrian amenity, beautification and comfort, than with carefully considered management and conservation of culturally significant townscape.

Reference to the Burra Charter and adherence to its principles present the ideal approach for culturally significant areas, such as in historic country towns and The Rocks, where the cultural significance is undisputed. It should form a guide and be a useful tool in arguing for a more rigorous assessment of townscape. However the main objective of Townscape Improvement is to boost the economic viability and attractiveness of an area and adherence to the rigorous principles of the Burra Charter is in many cases inevitably overlooked by those wanting instant effects from physical improvements.

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End Notes

1. Refer Appendix.


3. Undertaken in conjunction with the Department of Environment & Planning.
APPENDIX:

SUMMARY OF COMMONWEALTH AND STATE GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN TOWNSCAPE IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

1. Commonwealth Government

1.1 Australian Heritage Commission - National Estate Grants for Heritage and Precinct Surveys

1.2 Design Board of the Australia Council - Townscape Program 1987-89.

Australia Council - Community Art and Design Program - 1989 - current - facilitates Artist and Designer Involvement in environmental Design. Program’s objective is to assist communities to be creatively involved in process of planning, designing managing and shaping their environment.

1.3 Main Street National Task Force - National Committee to coordinate Main Street Programs at National Level.

1.4 Business Advice for rural Areas (BARA) - provides grants of up to $50,000 towards cost of business facilitator program Budget $1.8 million per year over 3 years - funding for 36 community groups.

2. New South Wales

2.1 Heritage Advisory Program - first established in Hawkesbury Shire in 1983 (based on program run in Victoria - see below). Current program allows for 28 Heritage Advisory positions. Decentralised with dollar for dollar funding provided through Department of Planning to Councils who retain consultants to visit their area. The program is aimed at providing local Councils with expertise on heritage matters and has been successful in providing a positive attitude towards heritage conservation at the local level.

Funding 1991-92:
• $162,000 spent on 28 Heritage Advisory positions - dollar for dollar Government/Council funding.
• Local Heritage Restoration funds - 6 local funds - $77,000 dollar for dollar funding.
• Precinct studies - 13 studies - $102,000 dollar for dollar funding.

2.2 Main Street program established end of 1988. Program was evaluated in April 1991 and establishes program’s appropriateness and effectiveness. Main focus of the program is on country towns and regional centres. Major framework for program consists of a Steering Committee and an Advisory Committee, within the Department of Planning.

Funding:
• $40,000 for current financial year and one full time administrative staff member.
• Funding for Main Street studies through the Heritage Assistance Program for year 1991-92 - 18 main street studies were undertaken on dollar for dollar grant basis. Total government allocation $137,000.

2.3 “Creative Village” Program, Arts Council of New South Wales - six towns have been selected for assessment and formulation of recommendations by a team comprised of architects, landscape architects and an artist. Focus is on small towns which have established a need for program and where community support is evident.

Funding:
• $25,000 NSW Ministry of the Arts
• 38,000 Australia Council
• 10,000 Arts Council of NSW $63,000

3. Victoria

3.1 Formerly had Townscape Advisory Program in operation (1983-89) but this had been discontinued.

3.2 Heritage Advisory Services - The Department of Planning and Housing currently coordinates 9 Heritage Advisory Services with the employment of 9 Heritage Advisors. A restoration funding which provides low interest loans.

Funding 1991-92:
• $142,000 for 9 Heritage Advisors
• $410,000 Restoration Fund (revolving fund which provides low interest loans)

3.3 Other municipalities and local authorities also employ Heritage Advisors from own resources (eg. Melbourne City Council, Fitzroy, St Kilda, Camberwell and country areas such as Echuca, Dunolly, Geelong West and Geelong Services Inc.)

3.4 Separate heritage Restoration Funds also exist such as at Melbourne City, Central Gold Fields funds and six other municipal based restoration funds.

3.5 Other programs exist in Victoria through the Housing Area Improvement Programs and Rural Enterprise Victoria Program
4. Queensland

4.1 The Queensland Small Business Corporation has established the Main Street Program (commenced late 1991). Program consists of a management committee which is responsible for the administration of the Program. A strategic plan has been prepared.

Funding:
$230,000 for current program. Cities of Maryborough, Redcliffe, Ipswich, Coolangatta and Goondawindi have established programs and receive dollar for dollar funding to a maximum of $40,000.

5. South Australia

5.1 The Department of Environment & Planning has established in late 1990 the Heritage Advisory Program and there are currently seven Heritage Advisors appointed to service five State Heritage Areas and two local Councils. Local restoration funds have not been established.

Funding:
- Total funding $110,000 ($50,000 from State Heritage Fund, $60,000 from National Estate Grants).

5.2 Department of Environment & Planning has established a Main Street Program working group to identify the best ways in which a Main Street Program can be implemented in S.A.

6. Western Australia

6.1 The Department of Planning & Urban Development established the Townscape Program in 1987. Success of program is reliant on community revitalisation and communities find resources themselves for their own program. The Townscape Program has become part of the planning mechanism of the state, and is now accepted as part of a review of the Town Planning scheme.

This Program allows resource poor remote communities (such as the Pilbara area) to become actively involved in townscape issues with some input from State Government.

Funding:
1987 - $5,000 per annum
1991 - $40,000 per annum; 1.25 staff members

7. Tasmania

7.1 No formal Main Street Program established

7.2 Department of Tourism, Sport & Recreation provides advice on request to Councils and facilitate community forums and revitalisation of small towns.
Fremantle - West End (Photo: City of Fremantle)
Demonstrators outside Swan Brewery Site