

Community facilities

Fact Sheet by Emma Partridge posted 25 May 2008

Sustainable development incorporates not just the environmental aspects of sustainability, but also important social dimensions. Community facilities are one element of the social infrastructure that new developments can provide, and as such they can play a key role in contributing to a socially sustainable community.

•Categorised under:

- Feasibility, Planning, Design, Completion,
- Place Making and Social Sustainability,
- Developer, State Government, Local Government,

Introduction

Sustainable development incorporates not just the environmental aspects of sustainability, but also important social dimensions. Community facilities are one element of the social infrastructure that new developments can provide, and as such they can play a key role in contributing to a socially sustainable community.

“Communal” or “community” facilities – public or private?

The term “community” is used to mean many different things, and for this reason, many different facilities are referred to by developers as “community facilities”. Further clarity about how these terms are used and what kinds of facilities they refer to is needed.

This factsheet deals with two distinct types of community facilities:

1. Public facilities that are open to all – whether residents of the surrounding development or not. These include:

- community centres of various kinds (discussed in detail below); and
- public amenities provided as part of public open and outdoor space design, such as barbeques, basketball courts and playgrounds. (These are covered in less detail here, as a separate factsheet addresses “public spaces”).

2. "semi-private" communal facilities that are shared by residents of a particular development, but that are not public – that is they are not open to the broader community. These are usually provided under strata or community title, and membership is restricted to residents of the development (examples include a community garden, swimming pool or "clubhouse").

In relation to the goal of achieving a socially sustainable society, it is the first category – publicly accessible facilities - that have the greatest potential. In particular, community centres are a critical part of the social infrastructure. They provide facilities, services and support programs for a wide range of people, with access not determined by where those people live.

The second category – communal or shared facilities for residents – can have positive social effects within a particular development itself – helping to build connections between neighbours, and give them a shared "sense of community" at that development scale. However, as these facilities are not usually open to non-residents to use, they are in a sense actually "private" facilities. By restricting access only to residents of the development, these facilities may contribute to the development of an 'enclave' mentality among those residents who cherish them precisely because they are for the "exclusive" use of themselves and their neighbours. Communal facilities of this kind need to be carefully managed to maximise their positive potential while avoiding these kinds of social risks.

Community centres

A community centre is usually a stand alone building. It is designed and built for public community use, and managed and run as a place where a range of organised community activities takes place. Landcom, the NSW Government master planner and land developer, has prepared guidelines for the development of new community centres. The guidelines relate to community centres defined as:

"publicly owned facilities that provide space for local organisations and community groups to meet, and for a range of social programs, services and activities which address the social needs of a community" (Landcom 2008:7). The actsheet makes a number of references to the Landcom guidelines, which include principles for successful community centres and how to apply these in relation to the planning, design and delivery, and operation of centres. For further information the document *Community Centre Guidelines* and case studies is available at www.landcom.com.au/community. There are numerous models of community centres. They range from small community halls and meeting rooms available for use by the community to large multipurpose centres that incorporate a wide range of services and facilities. Community centres are an important resource for communities. They provide a physical space for a diverse range of people to meet, gather and interact socially. This can help people to form links with their neighbours and members of the wider local community, including cross-cultural and inter-generational relationships. Community centres are also a focal point for a range of formal activities, from community development programs and support services to learning programs and a whole range of recreational and health and wellbeing activities. As such, community centres play an important role in enabling community integration and social inclusion. In assessing the contribution that a new development can make to social sustainability, the potential for incorporating a community centre should be a key consideration for developers. In some cases this may mean actually planning and building a new facility as an integrated part of the development, while in other cases it may be more appropriate to build relationships with operators of existing facilities. In either case, developers will need to build collaborative partnerships with local councils, other government agencies and community organisations in order to ensure that their contribution to the provision of community centres is an appropriate and valuable one. It is also important to explore whether it is possible to

develop facilities for shared use by different community groups – the establishment of collaborative partnerships will enable this kind of discussion.

Communal facilities for residents

Many developments have three kinds of space or 'facilities', namely 'private' (people's homes and their own outdoor spaces), 'public' (the surrounding streets, footpaths, parks and landscaping, or the lobby, stairs and lifts in the case of an apartment block) and 'commercial' (for example commercial tenants like cafés and shops that lease space in the ground floor of an apartment block).

However, there is a fourth category that developers should consider including in their projects, namely shared or communal 'semi-private' facilities within a particular development. These are 'semi-public' spaces and facilities that are shared by residents of the development. They are usually provided under strata or community title, and membership is restricted to residents of the development. While they are usually not open to the public, there are examples of such facilities being made more widely accessible. There are various examples of innovative development projects that have included these kinds of facilities, managed by residents and run on a not-for-profit basis.

Examples of these kinds of communal facilities include:

- Community gardens incorporated within a greenfield estate – such as that proposed at the Lochiel Park Green Village development in South Australia.
- Roof gardens on an apartment block roof
- Shared laundry facilities in an apartment basement
- Youth facilities such as 'clubhouses'
- Shared recreation facilities such as media rooms, sauna, fitness rooms, workshops, library, swimming pools
- Extended children's facilities such as indoor and outdoor playgrounds designed for different ages.

Case Study - M Central

Residents of M Central, an apartment block in Sydney's inner city suburb of Pyrmont enjoy access to an urban oasis in the shape of a substantial roofgarden. The former warehouse, now home to 400 residents, has a 2600m² parkland-style roof garden, with timber boardwalks, water features, barbeque facilities and plenty of spectacular greenery.

Case Study- Lochiel Park

Lochiel Park, a South Australian residential development, currently under development by the Land Management Corporation, includes plans for a community garden, to be run by residents. While still in the planning stages, land has been set aside for the garden, and a concept plan developed. Residents can express an interest in getting involved in the garden through Lochiel Park Online, the community's interactive website. Read more in the Lochiel Park casestudy or their website <http://www.lochielparkonline.com.au/>

1/2

1/2

Case Study - Autofreie Mustersiedlung (car free housing), Vienna

This car-free housing development used the money and space saved by not providing private garages within the apartment development to instead provide a range of common areas and nonprofit, community-run facilities for residents. These include car sharing facilities, roof gardens, a sauna, a bike repair shop, an internet café, a youth club and children's room, and a public laundry as well as additional green space.

Case Study - Sargfabrik projects, Vienna

„Sargfabrik“ is an urban renewal project by architects BKK-2, completed in 1996. The apartment development incorporates a mix of both communal and public facilities. These include an indoor swimming pool and sauna for residents' use that is also opened to the public several days a week. A restaurant and room facilities for concerts, theatre and seminars are all managed by a non-profit residents' interest group and available for the public.

The follow-up project „Miss Sargfabrik“, by the same architects (now called BKK-3) also incorporates a range of communal spaces, including a youth club room, common living room, communal kitchen, library/media/home office space and shared laundromat. These communal spaces are in the centre of the building and connected with each other to encourage residents to move between them.

Principles for successful community centres

Landcom's Community Centre Guidelines outline 12 principles for successful community centres, namely that they should:

- Address community needs and promote social outcomes
- Provide a range of community services, activities and programs (to enable and encourage access by diverse groups, and for diverse uses)
- Contribute to the public domain and sense of place
- Adopt sustainable funding, management and maintenance arrangements (to ensure financial viability, community responsiveness and support for management and staff)
- Ensure equitable access (to people of all ages, cultural backgrounds, abilities, income levels and interests, and for people with high social needs)
- Support community cohesion (by bringing a variety of people together and developing community networks)
- Develop a strong local profile
- Involve the community (in planning, design and delivery)
- Work collaboratively (with government, community groups and organisations and services)
- Promote physical integration with other uses and services (by locating near schools, shops, public transport and other community facilities)
- Ensure flexibility and adaptability (to changing community needs and expectations over time)
- Ensure integrated planning.

Importance of needs-based planning of community centres

Planning and design of community centres should be based on a comprehensive local needs analysis. In other words, it should respond to the identified needs and priorities of existing residents, and the likely needs of new residents. Analysis of local needs should consider existing social infrastructure gaps, and opportunities to cater to the needs and preferences of residents of all ages, and from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. This analysis may reveal a need for a generalist, multi-purpose facility, or it may suggest that a new facility should focus on a particular activity, or provide services that are targeted to a particular group of people.

The needs analysis should include research into existing local issues, facilities and services. It should involve liaison and consultation with local government, relevant state government agencies, non-government organisations and local community service providers and community members. If the proposed facility targets a particular group, such as young people or older residents, then special effort should be made to consult with this target group about the nature and design of the proposed facility.

Need to provide facilities that can be shared

Community facilities should provide a focus for community activities, and social interaction. Developers should seek to design a built environment that builds links and encourages a 'sharing of space and place' – both among new residents (in the case of communal facilities) and between existing and new residents and the broader community (in the case of community centres). Community facilities play an important role in achieving these social objectives.

Community centres are particularly valuable in this respect. They provide venues for local community groups, and places for people to take part in a wide range of organised recreational activities. They also create spaces for more informal interaction – where people can –run into each other–™, meet and chat, and generally interact with local community. Community facilities can also promote interaction between different groups in the community, for example older people and younger people. This is especially so if different facilities are clustered together or co-located. Finally, they can provide access to previously unavailable services, facilities and support for disadvantaged groups in the community.

Key Issues

Benefits

The provision of well planned and designed community centres brings multiple community benefits, both to residents of the new development itself, but also to those in surrounding areas. If well-designed and built, such facilities become well-used, shared spaces that enable the development of a common –sense of place–™ between various groups of residents. This can help build relationships, for example between people of different ages, across a range of cultural backgrounds and between new arrivals and those in surrounding (and sometimes long-established) residential areas. Well designed and managed community centres that are responsive to community

needs are generally highly valued by community members.

The incorporation of shared or communal facilities within a development can also have environmental benefits by enabling a more efficient use of resources. For example, a communal laundry within an apartment block can enable a large number of people to share laundry appliances, as opposed to each resident purchasing their own. Similarly, a community garden enables people to have access to (without necessarily "owning") enough land on which they can grow some of their own food. Depending on the size of the garden, this has the potential to save "food miles" (the energy associated with the production and transport of foodstuffs), thereby reducing residents' carbon footprint.

In general, developments that include community facilities of these kinds are likely to be highly attractive to buyers, and such inclusions can provide an effective selling point for developers. Including these facilities can also be a tangible demonstration of a developer's corporate social responsibility.

Risks

An obvious risk in providing both communal facilities and community centres is that they are not adequately used by the community. This underlines the importance of ensuring proper consultation, planning and design processes to make sure that the facilities provided are appropriate for, and attractive to, the community.

Savings

There is potential for savings to be made if developers and other service providers, including community and government agencies can work together in a partnership arrangement. A carefully planned business model may mean that while a community centre may not be "cost neutral" some costs will be able to be recovered.

Co-location of community centres with other facilities is another way of achieving savings, as it allows for a pooling of resources and a more efficient use of land.

Communal facilities can be cost effective for developers "building a shared facility can potentially add the value to the development by providing a "point of difference" and making dwellings more attractive to buyers. Communal facilities can also help residents make financial savings "for example, by sharing the costs of a laundry facility, library or pool with their neighbours. Communal gardens enable residents to save money by growing some of their own food.

Costs

Under the various state-based legislation, developers make contributions to local Councils for the provision of public services, amenities and facilities. These schemes are a common source of capital funding for community centres. However, these contributions may not always be sufficient for a suitable community centre and other sources of funding may be needed. Opportunities that developers can explore include:

- Government grants or Council funding
- Partnerships with other agencies or organisations that are building facilities in the area "such as schools or com

munity health centres and not-for-profit organisations

- Incorporation of income-generating space within the centre “ such as a café “ that can help to offset management and maintenance costs.

Developer or planning agreements can also be considered as an alternative to legislated developer contributions. This approach can provide increased flexibility and allow early delivery and funding for community development programs and/or workers.

The cost for developers to provide communal facilities for residents will vary. Some communal facilities may be able to be incorporated into the planning and design of a development with few cost implications. Others will require developers to dedicate areas of land or floor space that they might otherwise have developed for sale. This has cost implications as it potentially reduces the available profits that might be made from the sale of housing. On the other hand however, developments with superior communal facilities may achieve higher sale prices, thus potentially bringing the developer a good return on any investment in providing such facilities.

The ongoing management and maintenance of communal facilities will also need to be considered, and these costs will usually need to be built into residents’ strata fees.

Barriers

Planning, designing and delivering a community centre is a major undertaking. It will usually require the early engagement and cooperation of a large number of agencies, from the developer, to local and state government agencies, service providers and community groups. This kind of collaborative partnership can be time consuming and resource intensive, and the inherent challenges involved can be a barrier.

There can also be barriers to the inclusion of communal facilities. While this approach is common in other countries, for Australians the idea of sharing facilities with neighbours may be a new one, and there may be some resistance.

Development phase actions

Feasibility

At the feasibility, planning and design phases of a new development, consider opportunities for how the development can contribute to local social infrastructure by including, for example, a community centre. This means that some kind of assessment of local social infrastructure (community facilities, services and amenities) should be carried out, and local communities and/or relevant agencies consulted about their needs and preferences for new social infrastructure. Planning for the new development can then consider whether some of these existing needs can be addressed, as well as avoiding any duplication of existing facilities.

One approach to consider is that used by Landcom, which undertakes a “social sustainability due diligence study” feasibility stage. The purpose of this is to identify social risks and opportunities for a project, and any costs associated with risk avoidance or amelioration, and uptake of opportunities. This is then followed during the master planning stage by the development of a strategic social plan that identifies specific actions required to achieve the social sustainability objectives for the project. This could include the provision of community

facilities.

The feasibility stage should incorporate a careful process of research. Ideally it should also include consultation, however in many cases the proposed development may still be confidential at this stage and consultation may need to be limited – for example, with relevant government agencies rather than with the community.

At this stage, developers should develop an understanding of the kinds of community facilities that are already available in the area and whether they have the capacity to meet increased demand as well as any gaps in services and facilities. Much of this information can be obtained from Councils and human service agencies and local service providers. Developers can then consider the possibility for the proposed development to help address such identified local needs by providing facilities that can be accessed and shared by both new and existing residents in the wider community. How this is approached will depend on the scale of development and timing, but it is likely to require significant collaboration between the developer, local and state government agencies, service providers and community groups.

Planning

Successful community centres require rigorous and collaborative planning, and developers will usually need to form partnerships with local councils, other government agencies and community organisations to develop and deliver an effective model. The planning phase should respond to the issues that were identified in the feasibility stage, and should involve broad consultation, including with the likely users of the centre.

For more information, see “Planning a community centre”™ in Landcom (2008).

Design

The design of a community centre should focus on achieving the principles for a successful community centre that are outlined above (see Key Issues). For more information, see “Design and delivery”™ in Landcom (2008).

Construction

Wherever possible, community facilities should be constructed early in the development process, as they are an important resource for new communities. Where residents are all new and do not have existing connections, community facilities can play an important role in helping people to meet each other, thereby building connectedness and social cohesion.

Lot Creation

It is important to consider the timing of lot creation and construction of community facilities, in order that these facilities are completed in time to help facilitate the building of connections between new residents, as described above.

Completion

Planning for a community centre should go well beyond design and delivery, or "completion", as there are many issues to consider to give the centre the best possible chance of success over the long term. In most cases, developers are likely to be involved in planning and building such centres but not running them over the long-term. Ownership and management of most facilities will be transferred to local government, or a community or not-for-profit organisation. This means that from the outset, planning must include careful consideration of ownership, management and maintenance arrangements, plans for financial viability, staffing arrangements and plans to ensure the centre is, and remains responsive to, community needs and preferences.

For more information, see "Operating a community centre" in Landcom (2008).

Links

- [Landcom framework for developing community centres](#)
- [Information on \(public\) community gardens](#)
- [Aurora case study](#)

Link to Content

- <http://yourdevelopment.org/factsheet/view/id/25>