

SUBMISSION ON THE STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY CONSULTATION PAPER

City of Swan

April 2002

SUMMARY OF SUBMISSION

Introduction

The City of Swan is a diverse area; arguably the most diverse metropolitan Council. There are a range of social, economic and environmental issues in the region, and with a rapidly increasing population (increasing from approximately 71 000 in 1996 to 150 000 in 2016), implementing and working within a sustainability framework is vitally important.

Swan's commitment to sustainability – The Strategic Community Planning Project

The Strategic Community Planning Project is the City of Swan's approach to community planning, utilising a sustainability framework. There are three phases to this project: Position Planning, Strategy Planning and Place Planning. Attached to this submission is the "Foundations for the Future" document, which is an overview of the Position Planning phase of this project. There are strategies being developed in the areas of Natural Environment, Economic and Employment, Culture, Cohesive Communities, Personal Wellbeing, Health, Liveable Communities and Productive Places. The Strategy Planning phase is nearing completion, with place planning to follow in the second half of 2002.

Vision – What Western Australia will look like in the future

Developing a vision of what Western Australia, as well as individual places, look like in the future is very important. Swan's involvement in leading the development of a long term community strategy has led to some important lessons – including the importance of visioning and definition of long term outcomes in government-led sustainability policies and programs.

Impact measurement and assessment

"Impacts" refer to the long term effects of decisions or courses of action, essentially, how activities and behaviour have contributed (in a positive or negative way) to the achievement of the specified outcomes.

Measuring progress towards outcomes, through the development and measurement of performance indicators, is essential part of the State Sustainability Strategy. A particular area of focus needs to be social indicators and impact assessment.

Community behaviour and obligations

In planning for community facilities and infrastructure, often there is conflict between the public good and individual attitudes. Governments have a responsibility, and recognised role in involving the community in decision making processes. Government may also have a role in educating the community and encouraging the application of sustainability principles to decision making (building the community's capacity and understanding), therefore assisting the community to provide maximum input to debate and consultation.

Maintaining commitment to sustainability

Maintaining the commitment to sustainability is of obvious importance, and exploring legislative and structural options should be undertaken to ensure that sustainability is the driving factor in decision making processes. Commitment also requires resources to be provided equitably – to regions, communities and individuals – in order to maintain the balance both across the community and between generations.

Local Government

Local government's close relationship with its community, and mix of planning and implementation activities, make it an integral part of the sustainability picture. Local governments deliver a growing range of services to the community and undertake activities on the community's behalf. Therefore, strategies for sustainability must consider the current resource capacity of local government, and give some emphasis to the need for continued structural change in government administration, relations and funding mechanisms.

Planning

Utilising a sustainability framework in planning for the local community is crucial in aligning the delivery of services to long term outcomes and goals. There are important roles in planning for state and local government, as well as regional bodies such as the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council (EMRC). Given that local government identifies most strongly with their "place", the City of Swan sees this as the appropriate level at which to undertake detailed visioning and consultation processes. This is the aim of the place planning process – translating sustainability to the local level.

Implementation and Partnerships and Opportunities

Local government has two main roles that are important when considering sustainability: as a planner and service provider, and as an advocate or facilitator, representing the community on local issues.

Partnerships are likely to become increasingly important in implementation, as resources and knowledge are shared, and synergies between organisations are taken advantage of. The City of Swan recognises this, and is keen to further develop partnership arrangements into the future.

Introduction

The City of Swan is within the Eastern Metropolitan Region, and the City acknowledges and supports the comments made on behalf of the region by the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council. This submission is intended to complement the regional submission and provide comments and make points specific to Swan. Whilst the City acknowledges that sustainability is a process that requires involvement and action across the whole community, this submission largely discusses sustainability issues in relation to state and local government.

The City of Swan region is arguably one of the most diverse metropolitan regions in terms of demography, land use, economic activity and environmental assets. The following points broadly illustrate this diversity and highlight the issues for the region:

- The City of Swan is the largest local government in the metropolitan area representing 20% of the total area (with an area of approximately 1000 km²);
- The projected population increase is large (increasing from approx. 71 000 in 1996 to 150 000 in 2016 and continuing to grow strongly for a further ten years. Satisfying the needs of this population in a sustainable way will require innovative approaches;
- There are a number of valuable natural assets and features, including regionally significant bushland and national parks, the Swan-Avon River system, the Darling Scarp, Coastal Plain and Darling Plateau;
- Competition between differing land uses greatly constrains future developments and land use changes; agricultural land uses, Gnangara Water Mound, Darling Scarp and the Swan Avon catchment forces development within a very constrained corridor;
- Planned suburban developments have severe access constraints under current arrangements (one road to Ellenbrook to service the projected 30 000 population);
- A diverse economy with heavy investment in “older style” economic activity. Comparatively low levels of post-industrial economic activity, with relatively low levels of appropriate skills. No major tertiary education facility located in or nearby the region.

The City has made concrete steps in undertaking planning in a holistic sense, moving away from a single sector or discipline planning approach, and recognising the importance of long term strategic community planning (twenty to thirty year time horizon) and measurement of long term impacts in accordance with sustainability principles. The Quality of Life Framework, (page 2 of the attached Foundations for the Future document), was developed to assist the City to represent what sustainability means for the region, and articulate the community goals and objectives that will drive sustainable decision making, and ultimately lead to a sustainable future.

Swan's commitment to sustainability - The Strategic Community Planning Project

The Strategic Community Planning Project is the City of Swan's approach to community planning. Its aim is to provide strategic direction to planning for the quality of life of its community. The Quality of Life Framework is the basis for this planning. There are three phases to this project.

Phase 1 – Position Planning

Position planning was a research phase, concerned with the identification of global issues, and their relationship to local issues. In going back to first principles (i.e. considering the Quality of Life goals and objectives across the Quality of Life Framework were developed. This was completed in November 2001, and is summarised in the attached "Foundations for the Future" document.

Phase 2 – Strategy Planning

Strategy planning involved the preparation of strategies according to the Quality of Life Framework, using the goals and objectives and associated research as a starting point. Rather than viewing the issues, and developing strategies, based on traditional functional areas eg transport and housing, strategies are based on outcomes such as Productive Places and Liveable Communities. Major activities were: research and analysis of issues, identification of networks and partnership, and identification of key policies, plans and projects. The outcome is a series of strategy papers for Swan outlining the important issues, strategies and actions at the community level. This phase of the project is expected to be completed June 2002.

Phase 3 – Place Planning

The Place Planning phase of the project involves assessment of local data and issues, place visioning and application of direction provided by the strategies. Community liaison and involvement is crucial at this stage. This phase of the project is expected to commence in the second half of 2002.

Vision - What Western Australia will look like in the future

Whilst the City of Swan recognises that the purpose of the Focus on the Future consultation paper is to stimulate discussion, garner feedback and provide a basis for action. Our own process of leading the development of a long term community strategy for our region has underlined the importance of visioning in any government-led sustainability policy and/or program.

As the problems, and therefore basis for action, are well documented at the international, national and local scale, an important component of a state approach must be visioning – working with the community in understanding the issues and thinking about the future of individual places. Recognition and articulation of long term community outcomes is vitally important in directing the strategy and developing indicators by which to judge its progress. Measuring the progress towards these outcomes is discussed below.

Visioning is about long term forward thinking and, if undertaken well, will create its own momentum, independent of the political cycle.

Impact measurement and assessment

Rigorous and ongoing measurement and assessment is essential to quantify impacts. It is important to differentiate between "outcomes" and "impacts" in this context. "Outcomes" essentially refer to the goals for the future – what the community wants. For example, protection of biodiversity.

"Impacts" refer to long term effects of decisions or courses of action (such as the impact on biodiversity of a particular strategy), and represent the trading-off of competing social, economic and environmental factors. The impacts to measure and the way they are measured need to be closely related to the outcomes – quantifying impacts is the method by which progress towards outcomes is assessed. Impact measurement is driven by performance indicators, which are an essential part of the sustainability strategy.

Assessment of impact involves both quantifying current situation and estimating the future impacts of particular courses of action. Environmental impact assessment is an accepted part of the state government approvals process, as is economic impact assessment. Local government also undertakes

smaller scale assessments as part of its planning processes. These processes could be improved, but their existence and government commitment to them is encouraging.

Of concern is the lack of development and rigour in social impact assessment in decision making by all levels of government. It is not routinely undertaken, and obviously needs some focus.

While impact assessment is important, of greater importance is the integration of the social, environmental and economic results of assessment into decision making. The challenge continues to lie in bringing these results together and making balanced decisions based on criteria from the three sustainability areas.

Community behaviour and obligations

In planning community facilities and infrastructure, often there is conflict between the public good and individual attitudes. This occurs time after time across a range of projects at local and state government level. Resistance to change and the “not in my backyard” mentality are a major obstacle in the planning and implementation of community facilities and infrastructure. Obviously government (both state and local) has a responsibility to improve its community consultation and participation processes, but the community must also look to long term sustainability - social, economic and environment – in its response to project proposals and in working with government in locating and designing community facilities and infrastructure.

Government has a role not only in working with and consulting the community, but also in educating and promoting sustainability and its application to decision making. This would assist the community to provide maximum input to debate and consultation. The “think global, act local” slogan is linked to environmental issues, but it may also apply to social and economic issues, and discussion of issues in this context may assist in balancing community debate.

Components of sustainability

The environmental and economic components of sustainability are well recognised, and often government decision making is an exercise in balancing issues from these two areas. There seems to be an assumption that as long as economic and environmental issues and trade-offs are made, there will be positive social benefits. Although this may be the true in a limited number of cases, most indicators suggest that social issues are worsening over time. The Sustainability Consultation Paper mentions suicide rates, decreasing Aboriginal life expectancy and the increasing gap between rich and poor as indications of social decline in some sections of the community.

Overall capital expenditure by government in social and cultural areas is increasing, particularly in education and health, but it could be argued that the value for money and value of the social investment overall is declining. Greater numbers of people are welfare dependent, which broadly indicates declining social standards. Swan is particularly impacted by lower levels of skills, high unemployment and high levels of public housing.

The political system and its relationship to sustainability is an important point. The nature of the political cycle (ie periodic changes in government) requires the community to build long term visions and accept the role of custodian of these visions, independent of this political cycle. This will assist in maintaining an ongoing commitment to sustainability.

The social and cultural aspects of sustainability are of particular importance to Swan. Despite its proximity to the centre of Perth, the region is socially disadvantaged and lacks cultural focus (no major tertiary institution is one example). Sustainability needs to be considered in terms of the inter- and intra-regional inequities that exist in a City where growth is driven by demand for living near the coast and where investment in social infrastructure favours the wealthier areas, despite concerns about the sustainability of continued linear growth.

Maintaining commitment to sustainability

Maintaining the commitment to sustainability is vitally important, independent of short term political changes or fluctuations. Implementing legislative and structural changes are options available to government to ensure that sustainability remains a consideration in the decision making process. This should not be read as support for greater bureaucracy or more complex planning and environmental

law. However, it is arguable that the current system and legislative mandates for decision making, which may have “served us well in the past”, are no longer appropriate for the planning of our rapidly changing communities.

Commitment also requires resources to be provided equitably – to regions, communities and individuals – in order to maintain the balance both across the community and between generations.

Sustainability sits across a range of legislative and administrative areas of the government, however some current and future proposed changes to state government agencies and legislation appear to be positive moves towards integrating sustainability into decision making.

Local government

Local government’s close relationship with its community, and mix of planning and implementation activities, make it an integral part of sustainability picture. Local governments deliver a growing range of services to the community and undertake activities on the community’s behalf.

Local government is the only agency whose core responsibility is the planning and management of communities. In this role, the inter-dependencies and relationship between state and local government is important. Therefore, strategies for sustainability must consider the current resource capacity of local government, and give some emphasis to the need for continued structural change in government relations and funding mechanisms.

Managing and reviewing these local services and activities (and their impacts) within a sustainability framework is one of the major challenges.

Planning

Utilising a sustainability framework in planning for the local community is crucial in aligning the delivery of services to long term outcomes and goals. As previously discussed, the Quality of Life Framework defines the long term community goals and objectives for the City of Swan. Long term, impact-focussed performance indicators are an important part of this project, and are also important at the state and national level.

Linking local sustainability frameworks with the state framework (ie the State Sustainability Strategy), would be a powerful way of driving sustainability through the two tiers of government, and would provide consistency in the approach to sustainability and its measurement. Swan has implemented a community planning process that is linked to measurement of organisational outputs that could easily be linked to the planning and delivery of state government services. Integration at all steps within the planning and delivery cycle would provide greater opportunities for sustainable outcomes, as well as major efficiency gains.

Regional planning and the development of regional approaches to issues is an important part of sustainability. On issues of regional interest, bodies such as the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council can initiate and facilitate strategy development and planning.

The implementation of plans developed at the regional level, and planning at finer detail, should continue to be undertaken by individual local governments. This can occur at the local government scale (for example, for the whole of the City of Swan), or at a smaller scale within the local government area, at the “place” level. Places can be defined according to social, economic and environmental criteria. Places are often the areas with which the local community identifies, rather than the region or whole local government area. Place boundaries are often not discrete, and may vary according to the issue and the criteria used to define them, but in Swan, for example, there will be up to 12 “places”. Smaller local governments may contain 3 or 4 places of similar size to the places in Swan, but perhaps of greater internal diversity.

Given that the local community identifies most strongly with their place, the City of Swan sees this as the most appropriate level at which to undertake detailed visioning and consultation processes. Essentially this process consists of interpreting the Quality of Life Framework and associated strategies for the particular place, and making local decisions according to the sustainability framework. The three components of sustainability have differing priorities and mean different things to different places, and the aim of the place planning process is to articulate this.

A crucial role for Local Governments is the ability to monitor, critically assess and disseminate key data to stakeholders (including the state government) concerning its regional requirements as a basis for better planning at the local level. In disseminating information on its regional requirements, local government is also acting as an advocate for its community.

Implementation

Implementation is about providing or facilitating the services that have been identified in the planning process. Local government has two main roles: as a planner and service provider, and as an advocate or facilitator, attempting to get the community's needs recognised and catered for. Planning at both state and local levels needs to recognise that plans have to be realistic and within the capacity of government to implement. Without adequate financial resources, plans for improvement to community infrastructure or services will only increase public expectations unrealistically. There are examples in the past where the state has prepared ambitious plans for urban growth or infrastructure development, with no matching commitment of funds to implement such plans. Sustainable urban growth cannot occur without realistic levels of funding set aside for implementation.

More specifically, the activities in which Local Government has involvement or a role are: land use planning and development control, community service planning, facilitation and service provision, infrastructure construction, management and maintenance. Coordination and integration of activities and services undertaken by a number of agencies in a single place will increase their effectiveness, and avoid duplication. For example, there are examples of capital work being undertaken in isolation by one government agency or department (both state and local), and then another agency or department undertakes work in the same area later on that requires the re-design or modification of the previously undertaken work. To be effective, there needs to be greater flexibility as to the application of standards and a recognition that different areas will demand different levels of service.

In some areas, existing partnerships are used to provide services, but in many cases these are crisis services or ones for which few resources are available and the target groups are disadvantaged. The devolution of State responsibilities to local government can only continue to occur if sufficient resources are provided to ensure that services and facilities can be provided effectively and equitably.

The implementation of long term sustainability strategy will require more flexible processes for coordination between state and local government.

Partnerships and Opportunities

The City of Swan, and more broadly, local government, has a significant role to play in the development and implementation of the State Sustainability Strategy. The City is keen to participate in further discussion and provide input on sustainability issues.

The City is interested in sharing its knowledge and lessons learnt through its Strategic Community Planning Project. The City is also keen to develop partnerships and work co-operatively in the next phase of this project, the place planning. As previously discussed, this is phase of the project where the strategies are translated to the local level through a visioning and prioritisation process, that is intended to engage stakeholders in a two-way communication with a very specific sustainability agenda.

Conclusion

The State Sustainability Strategy is welcomed by the City of Swan, and the City looks forward to the opportunity for further involvement in its development.

The City of Swan is committed to working within a sustainability framework, and has made progress towards development and implementation. The attached "Foundations for the Future" document is evidence of this, as is the ongoing work on the sustainability framework that is discussed throughout this submission. Stakeholders, including the state government, have an important role in this framework.

Integration and consistency in the approach to sustainability across state and local government has the potential to create opportunities and ultimately make a large contribution to sustainability in this State.