

INFORMATION BOOKLET

NATIONAL CAPITAL DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

JANUARY 2021



Australian Government
National Capital Authority



ACT
Government

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Acknowledgements

The National Capital Authority and the ACT Government would like to acknowledge the valuable contribution that jurisdictions outside of the ACT have made to the development of the National Capital Design Review Panel process and for sharing their experiences and insights into their respective design review panels.

We would like to acknowledge the Office for Design and Architecture South Australia (ODASA), Office of the Victorian Government Architect (OVGA), Department of Planning and Environment NSW Government, Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage Western Australia and Auckland Council.

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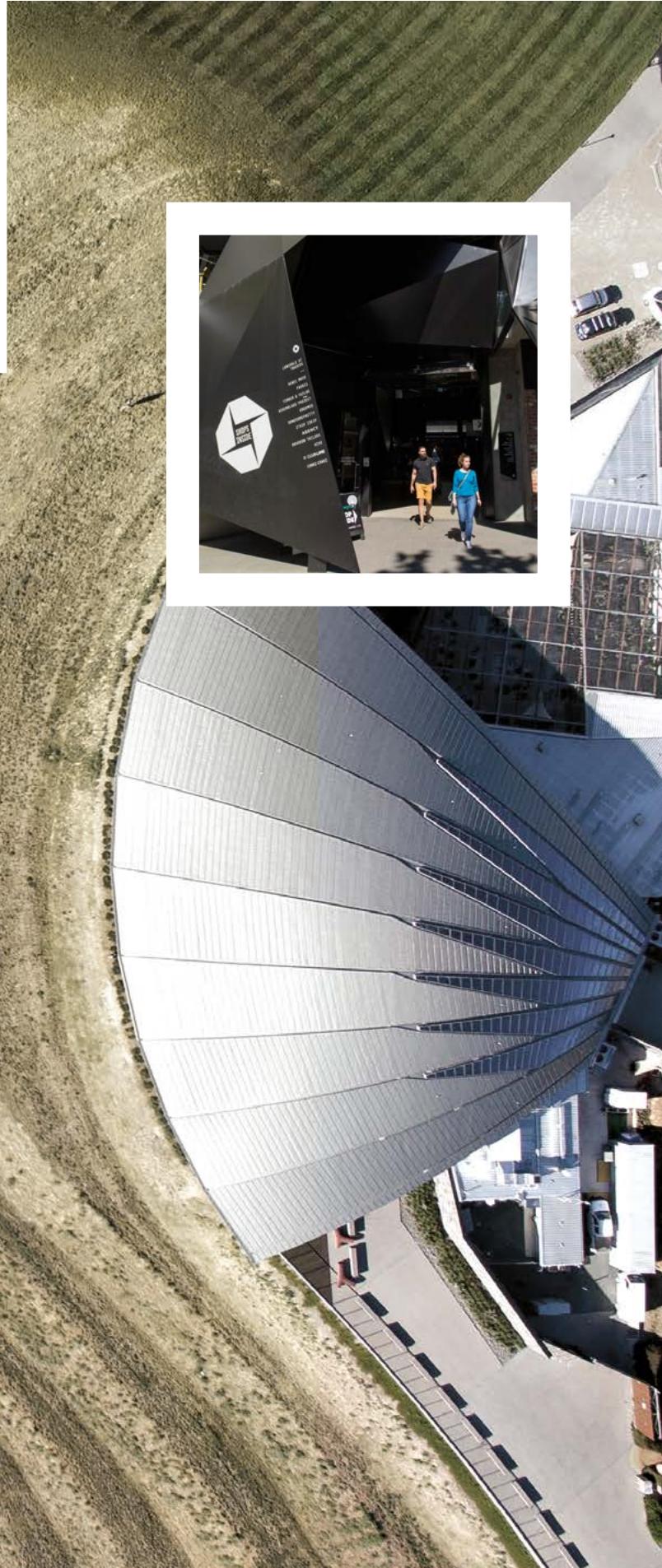


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INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared for anyone who has an interest in how design review is being applied in Canberra and provides information about the role and benefits of the National Capital Design Review Panel (NCDRP) for the ACT.

A separate document, titled *Preparing for Design Review in the ACT*, is available for those who are preparing to access this pre-development application service.

In late 2017, the National Capital Authority (NCA) and ACT Government established the interim NCDRP to provide advice on significant and time critical projects across the city. The interim NCDRP provided advice on more than twenty (20) significant projects in town centres, the city centre, Northbourne Avenue and Central National Area. The interim NCDRP offered the opportunity to refine the design review processes and procedures to ensure that the NCDRP offers clear benefits to government, proponents and the community.

Prior to establishing the interim NCDRP, the NCA, ACT Government and the ACT Government Architect spoke with several state and local governments to determine a 'best practice' design review approach that could be practically applied in the ACT. The design review approach that has been adopted for the NCDRP is closely modelled on the well-established design review panels that exist in South Australia and Victoria. The NCDRP is based on the Principles of Good Design Review, developed by the Design Council in the United Kingdom, formally known as CABE, to provide a sound base on which to apply design review in the ACT.

SNAPSHOT

The National Capital Design Review Panel (NCDRP) is a joint initiative between the ACT Government and the National Capital Authority to provide independent advice on the design quality matters for development proposals across Canberra.

Advisory role

The NCDRP provides independent, expert and impartial design advice for significant development proposals in key growth and renewal areas across the city.

The NCDRP reviews a diverse range and scale of development proposals; including apartment, mixed-use and commercial developments; public infrastructure projects; public parks and spaces; master plans and estate development plans.

Guiding principles

The Design Principles for the ACT supports the review of projects by the NCDRP and provides high level guidance for proponents when preparing for design review.

Independent and expert

The NCDRP reviews development proposals, under the supervision of the ACT Government Architect and, for proposals under the jurisdiction of the National Capital Authority (NCA), also by the NCA's Chief Planner.

The panel consists of a multidisciplinary and independent membership that is selected for their expertise, experience and communication skills.

Early engagement

Proponents should consult with the NCDRP as early as possible to gain the greatest benefit from the design review process. The Panel's Advice is provided within 10 working days after the design review session.

Regular sessions

Design review sessions are held once a month. A list of the forward session dates can be found on the EPSDD website at www.planning.act.gov.au/designreview.

Self-referral

Proponents are encouraged to present development proposals to the NCDRP that are outside of the development thresholds as identified. The benefits to design review are outlined on page 7.

Development thresholds

National Capital Plan

The following development thresholds apply to proposals that must be considered by the NCDRP:

- Instruments under the National Capital Plan:
 - Development Control Plan 17/01 Manuka Circle Precinct, Canberra Avenue
 - National Capital Plan - Amendment 91 - City and Gateway Urban Design Provisions.

The NCA may refer proposals determined to be of significance within Designated Areas that warrant design review.

ACT Government planning jurisdiction

From 1 October 2019, development identified as a prescribed development under the Planning and Development Regulation 2008 must consult with the design review panel. A prescribed development proposal is:

- a building with 5 or more storeys
- a proposal to increase the floorspace of a shop by more than 2,000m², that is fully or partly located in a residential, commercial, community facility and/or a parks and recreation zone.

Confidential and free

Presenting to the NCDRP is a confidential and free service at the pre-development application stage.

Transparent and accountable

The Terms of Reference, panel membership and governance process can be found on the EPSDD website at www.planning.act.gov.au/designreview.

Additionally, the Panel's Advice and a proponent's response to the Panel's Advice is made publicly available when a development proposal is lodged as a development application with the ACT Government.

Contact

The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) provides secretariat support for the NCDRP.

Email: designreview@act.gov.au

WHAT IS DESIGN REVIEW?

Design review is an independent advisory process in which a panel of built environment experts review the design quality of development proposals. The design review process encourages proponents to achieve the best possible outcome for development.

Design review is an efficient and cost effective way to enhance the design quality of development proposals, including buildings, public infrastructure and the public domain.

The NCDRP offers a structured process of design review, involving site inspections, independent review of a proposal, and the issuing of independent written advice to proponents and government.

The NCDRP supports decision-makers in delivering high quality, inspiring development and public spaces that meet the needs of the broader community and ensure integration with the surrounding environment. Through the process of peer-review by a panel of highly experienced design professionals, design review assists with achieving good design outcomes for development proposals.

The experience in other jurisdictions demonstrates that design review is most effective early in the design process, when there is still an opportunity to make efficient and cost-effective changes to achieve the best possible outcome for a development proposal. When proponents genuinely engage with the design review panel's advice, design review will streamline the development assessment process by enabling issues to be identified at an early stage, thereby reducing the risks and costs associated that can be associated with the planning process.



PRINCIPLES OF GOOD DESIGN REVIEW

For design review to succeed, it must be carried out using a robust and defensible process. The Design Council in the United Kingdom, formerly known as CABE, developed the design review process that is used by governments across the world. Informed by their experience of establishing the panel process, they identified the following ten principles for successful design review:

1. **Independent:** It is conducted by people who are unconnected with the scheme's promoters and decision makers, and it ensures that conflicts of interest do not arise.
2. **Accountable:** The design review panel and its advice must be clearly seen to work for the benefit of the community. This should be ingrained within the panel's terms of reference.
3. **Expert:** It is carried out by suitably trained people who are experienced in design and know how to constructively critique a proposal. Design review is usually most respected where it is carried out by professional peers of the project designers, because their standing and expertise will be acknowledged.
4. **Advisory:** The design review panel does not make decisions, but it offers impartial advice for the people who do.
5. **Accessible:** Its findings and advice are clearly expressed in terms that design teams, decision makers and clients can all understand and make use of.
6. **Proportionate:** It is used on projects whose significance, either at local or national level, warrants the investment needed to provide the service.
7. **Timely:** It takes place as early as possible in the design process, because this can avoid a great deal of wasted time. It also costs less to make changes at an early stage.
8. **Objective:** It appraises schemes according to reasoned, objective criteria rather than the stylistic tastes of individual panel members.
9. **Transparent:** The design review panel's remit, membership, governance processes and funding should always be in the public domain.
10. **Multidisciplinary:** It combines the different perspectives of architects, urban designers, urban and rural planners, landscape architects, engineers and other specialist experts to provide a complete, rounded assessment.

Design Review Principles and Practice, CABE (2013)

THE BENEFITS OF DESIGN REVIEW

The intent of the NCDRP is to ensure that each development proposal realises its full potential through independent peer review for the benefit of the ACT community. The panel will look at each project in terms of surrounding context and character, built form and scale, density, sustainability, landscape, amenity, safety, housing diversity and social interaction, and aesthetics. The NCDRP will provide constructive and independent advice that gives full consideration to the project history, the site context, budgets and timelines.

The NCDRP process will provide key benefits to stakeholders that include:

- **Community** – enhanced design quality of development proposals that result in increased amenity for occupants, neighbours and the broader community and provide further confidence in the development assessment process.
- **Developers** – reduction in risk, time and potential costs by identifying issues early in the design process to gain a level of certainty with a proposal before investing in detail design and development application.
- **Design professionals** – receiving early recommendations for change when it is most useful and more easily implemented. Design review is also an opportunity to gain support for innovative design intentions.
- **Government** – ensuring that design quality is important by promoting independent expert advice for development proposals. Ultimately, design review panels help to enrich the design industry with fresh perspectives and advice arising from the professional examination of projects through peer review.



PRIOR TO DESIGN REVIEW

Pre-design review panel meetings

The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) offers information meetings ahead of presenting to the design review panel and before submitting a development application. These meetings are provided to help guide a proponent through the NCDRP and development application processes.

A pre-design review panel meeting is not mandatory and is a free service. Proponents are encouraged to attend these meetings as early as possible in the design development stages and well in advance of presenting to the NCDRP.

Refer to the Practitioners Guide for how to apply for a pre-design review panel meeting or present to the NCDRP.

Pre-application meetings

Pre-development application meetings is an existing service provided by the EPSDD. Pre-application information may take the form of a meeting or formal advice from EPSDD to a proponent.

Pre-application meetings are held to discuss a development proposal prior to lodgement of a development application and are a free service. Hand written notes are recorded at these meetings.

Proponents may be advised to present their development proposals to the NCDRP at a pre-application meeting prior to lodgement of the development application.

More information about pre application meetings can be found online at: http://www.planning.act.gov.au/topics/design-and-build/da_assessment/pre-application

NATIONAL CAPITAL DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

Design review is recognised across Australia and internationally as an effective way to raise the design quality of the built environment. It offers the opportunity for peer review of development proposals by independent design professionals with the aim of achieving the best possible outcome for significant development proposals and public spaces.

The National Capital Design Review Panel (NCDRP) is a joint initiative by the ACT Government and the National Capital Authority (NCA) to provide a single city-wide design review panel process. The NCDRP also offers an efficient and consistent approach to delivering independent design advice for development proposals across Canberra.

Under the supervision of the ACT Government Architect and the NCA's Chief Planner, the NCDRP provides design advice to decision makers, developers and their design teams.

Interim panel

The interim NCDRP commenced in September 2017 to provide independent, expert and impartial advice on priority and time critical proposals while the panel was being formally established.

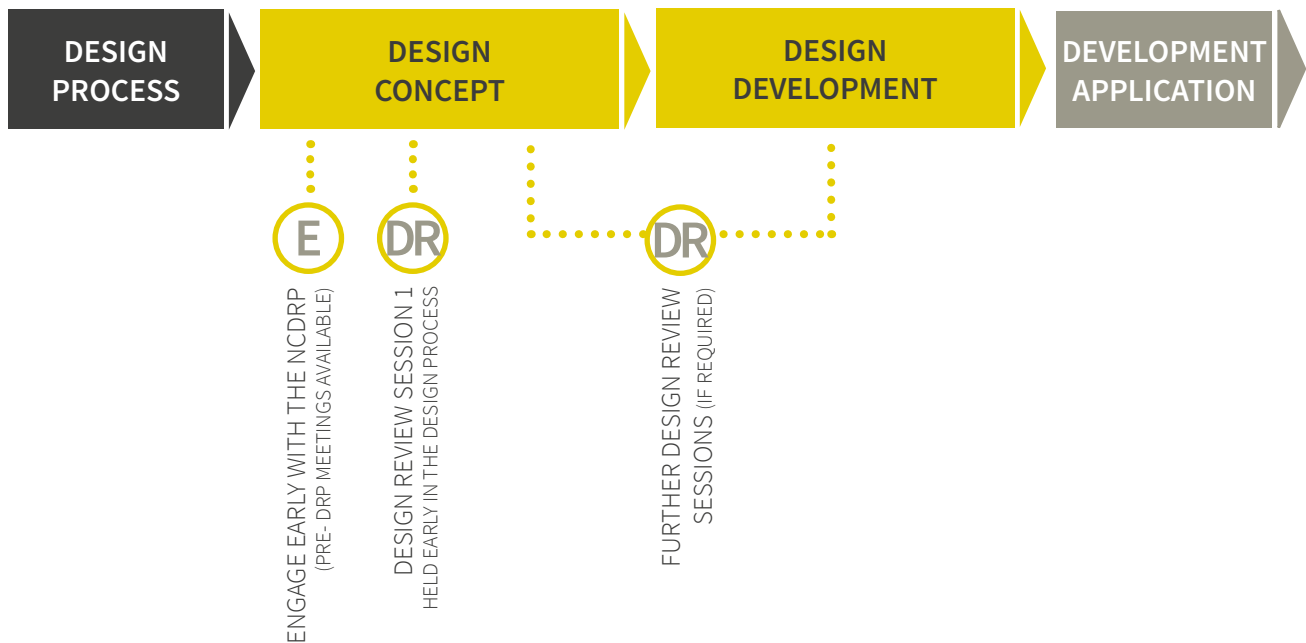
The interim panel also allowed for the testing of the design review processes and provided the opportunity for those who went through the interim process to provide feedback to government. This feedback has been used to refine the NCDRP processes and procedures.

Design review approach

The NCDRP is available as part of the pre-development application process and compliments the design process that would normally be undertaken by a design team.

Figure 1 illustrates the two main steps in the design process (design concept and design development) leading up to a development application. Initial engagement with the NCDRP is encouraged early in the design concept stage. Pre-design review panel meetings are available to proponents to meet with the NCDRP secretariat to discuss the design review process and documentation requirements. After the first design review session and after the panel's advice has been addressed by the proponent, there is the opportunity for further design review sessions for individual proposals.

Figure 1: Design process and design review



The Panel's Advice

Following each design review session the proponent will be issued with a written recommendation within approximately ten working days, known as 'the Panel's Advice'. This Advice will be informed by the views of the panel and will evaluate the design quality of the development proposal. Where appropriate, other key stakeholders may be copied into the Panel's Advice, such as the development approval agencies.

The Panel's Advice is not a minute of the design review session discussion, rather it expresses the view of the Chair as informed by the panel's deliberation.

If an advice is found to contain an error, it may be withdrawn, corrected and re-issued. The document will retain its original date, however will be clearly marked and accompanied by a re-issue explanation.

THE CHAIR AND THE PANEL

The Chair

The NCDRP review of development proposals will be under the supervision of the ACT Government Architect (GA) and, for proposals under the jurisdiction of the NCA, the NCA's Chief Planner.

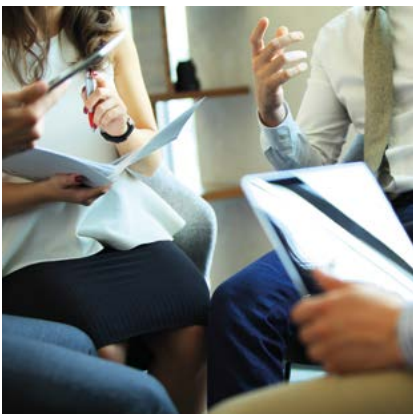
Where conflicts arise or the Chair is unavailable, a suitably qualified panel member will be identified through the expression of interest process to chair design review meetings.

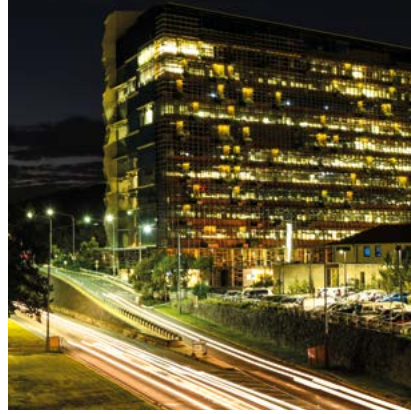
The Panel

Design review panel members are selected from a pool of experts identified for their skills, expertise and record of achievement in one or more professional fields relevant to planning, design and development.

The panel is composed to achieve a balanced representation of skills and experience in professions including Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Planning, Urban Design and Civil Engineering. A minimum of three and a maximum of five panel members will attend each NCDRP session, with additional panel membership sought by the Chair, based on the scope of a project.

Where a specific skill set is required, additional panel members will be called in on an as-needed basis. These may include advice from fields such as heritage, education, sustainability and environmental services, universal design, structural engineering and transport.





How does the NCDRP assess proposals?

A set of design quality principles (Design Principles for the ACT) have been developed to support assessment of projects by the NCDRP and to provide guidance for proponents when preparing for review. The Design Principles for the ACT have been benchmarked against best practice from design review panel documentation across Australia and New Zealand, including the principles outlined in NSW's State Environment Planning Policy (SEPP 65) and WA's Design Review Manual.

The design principles are provided in the booklet titled, *Design Principles for the ACT*, which is available on the EPSDD website at www.planning.act.gov.au/designreview.

Interagency Collaboration

The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) is responsible for the secretariat support for the NCDRP. The NCDRP secretariat will provide the first point of contact for the proponent, and will act as an intermediary between the development assessment areas within Government, the ACT Government Architect, the NCA and the proponent.

ACT Government directorates and the NCA will have the opportunity to provide technical and contextual guidance into the design review process upon request by the NCDRP secretariat. There will also be an opportunity for Government stakeholders to provide a pre-briefing to the NCDRP in a meeting on the day of the review.

Incorporating key stakeholders into each stage of the NCDRP process will ensure that an integrated and consistent approach to design advice is delivered across the ACT.

