



**City of Gosnells at heart of urban consolidation: The Good the Bad
and the Ugly**

Peter Vintila 2017



No single development will so seriously affect the residents of the City of Gosnells than State Government decisions to consolidate the Perth metropolitan area in coming decades. The two major political parties are in agreement about this. The purpose is to accommodate growing population growth while limiting urban sprawl, further traffic congestion and road demand. Over 300,000+ new dwellings will be required in the next 15 years and a further 4-500,000 by mid-century. That's substantial and rapid growth.



The State Government currently aims to fit about half of this new housing development into the existing metro area as infill. The rest remains destined for the fringe but a fringe developed at significantly higher densities. The strategy is called urban consolidation and current planning targets can be found in a glossy planning document called **Directions 2031 and Beyond**. Its mission statement tells of "a world class liveable city that is green, vibrant, more compact and accessible [and possesses] a unique sense of place." Most of Perth's residents -especially those in the middle and outer suburbs- will be settling for a lot less.

The City of Gosnells

In fact, **Directions 2031** will bring huge stresses to middle suburban areas like those in the City of Gosnells which accounts for 7 - 8% of Perth's current population. To meet the plan's requirements, the City of Gosnells will need to find room for at least 12,000 new infill dwellings in the next 15 years and for as many as 35,000 in the next 33 years. That's a lot of infill and this kind of development can bring tough challenges.

Such development must often shoulder existing houses aside, as well as deal with fragmented land ownership and adapt to impossible original service networks not designed for planned new housing densities and forms. It is also worth noting that infill is bitterly opposed in wealthier have money and influence. They do not always win but they win a lot more often more than their poorer cousins.

The good, the bad and the ugly

Whether the rich do this or not, state governments (of both major political parties) are determined and just work around the richer rebels living west of the city. So the consolidation show is on the road and working at redevelopment to the south, north and east....of the central city. Demonstration projects and pilot developments have been out there for some time, and for better or worse, they are already leaving their marks on the city - see photos below.

To briefly sum up, consolidation turns out to be mostly good for those in Perth's central and western areas - typically where money has long been accumulating. It is bad for those in the middle or outer suburbs beyond. For them, especially down along Perth's long south-eastern axis, it's also looking grim. It is definitely a case of the good, the bad and the ugly. Compare the photos below again.

Figure 1: The Good ,the bad and ugly design

The Good - inner city consolidation in Subi-Centro



The Bad & Ugly - consolidation in the middle and outer suburbs



Can you spot the differences? The City of Gosnells, led by its Councillors, must impose more effective design controls on Perth's ongoing consolidation . I promise to do this.



Most of the images above are intended to direct attention not to the housing but to public and shared space, to the street scapes and the built environments in which the houses sit. Where consolidation is good, the built environment speaks of care and attention. It welcomes the community, young and old and some might think is very expensive. To be sure, it can take time (eg the time needed for trees to grow) but as built environments go, it is not expensive. A few percent of the overall land development budget goes a long way with plants. Ultimately, the mature tree's beauty and shade and multiple ecological services are **gifts**.

When the public realm as built environment is done well it is also appealing and attractive and adds value to the neighbourhood. When you step out of your front door, you smile and think to yourself "I like living here". Or kids want to go out and play. In the language of urban design, it is liveable and liveability in these forms is, again, not expensive.

City of Gosnells must do more to limit bad and ugly

None of these observations apply, however, where consolidation is bad and ugly – and that's why it is bad and ugly... and empty. Making it good is the work of public authorities and they are failing here. The photos clearly tell us that. Whose fault is that? It's a complicated question but the short answer is the state... and local government is, of course a part of from state.

The City of Gosnells could at least protest more loudly. As a councillor I will lend my voice to this task, too. Public authorities in democracies are supposed to treat us all equally – rich or poor. That's why we expect equal levels of hospital care whether rich or poor or equally good schools for our children. Those responsible for our streets, shared neighbourhoods and built environments are treating us less and less us equally. And they are failing democracy. If you don't believe me, look at the photos above again or better still, get out there, take a long walk and have a proper look.

WA's most senior state planners – the Department of Planning, the Planning Commission and (now) the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority (MRA) – clearly know how to make beautiful and liveable urban precincts and neighbourhoods. They work hard and do award-winning work in newly wealthy inner suburbs like East Perth and Subiaco shown above. But they appear to have forgotten that they are public servants in a democracy and that they must devote their time and resources and considerable talents equally to all of us - in the middle and outer suburbs too. The "Bad and the Ugly" show consolidation in Maddington at and around Maddington Centro which is a design disgrace. As a local government councillor, I would be happy to remind them on your behalf.

Public and private wealth

Some of you may think that rich and poor neighbourhoods are just different. Well, that's certainly true of the houses in them. If this is OK, it is OK because houses are built with



private money and, as most of us know, there is more of it in the inner (and western) city. For both good and bad reasons we live with certain levels of inequality in our society and most people accept that we can't all live in luxury homes or penthouses. But these are not the issue here. The issues here are what you have or see when you step outside of your house. Some might say that this applies only to more essential public services like hospitals, schools and public transport. I beg to differ. It matters locally and to local government, too.

My issue. Again, is with public places, assets, services or environments and the public effort and resources and money they require. Expenditure here should be equal. In the case of our neighbourhoods, taking their place in a democracy, we can and should expect equality: grass, or good surface treatments, attractively planted verges or islands, well maintained good-looking shady street trees, street lighting, street furniture, and urban open space that is cultivated, cared for and a source pleasure and a place of leisure for all. A place and can make us smile.

In, other words the level of care, investment and cultivation should be equal – and they are not that hard to equalise. Big money, again, is not involved: the tree grows itself. Urban planners and designers employed by the state are required to treat us equally. As they give way to elitist impulses in a privatising world, they are actually neglecting democratic entitlements and rights. Subiaco and East Perth set high quality design benchmarks and that is good and credit where credit is due. But, at the moment, these best practice examples are not for everyone – and that is bad. It is politically ugly, too

Award-winning consolidation in New East Perth - trees half grown



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