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3 ways urban community design needs to change

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The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the limitations of historic urban design, putting the pressure on urban planners and property developers to rethink the way we build our communities. I believe new directions are required to design, develop and promote masterplanned communities, to suit the needs of people both now and into the future

Masterplanned communities are wonderfully designed for self-contained living, with all the local amenities residents would need right on their doorstep. However, traditional planning has focused on connectivity, not just through sentiment, but through physical design and landscapes and there are still design changes within our communities that we need to consider for a post-COVID world.

For developers like us at AVID, the challenge now is finding a solution to an integrated philosophy of 'connection' while creating built environments and community spaces that allow for physical distancing. Three key areas for reimagining the urban design of communities include: streets, parklands and home designs.

1. Building wider paths and narrower roads

In the past, engineers would design streets predominately with vehicle-use in mind. Now we need to consider design that allows for the movements of people. Reports continue to show that more people are using walking and cycle pathways since COVID-19 with an increase of up to 79 per cent in some areas¹.

The narrow paths and wide roads of today don't allow enough space to allow movement of people with safe social distancing². We need to adapt our built environment for more pedestrian and cyclist dominant movement over vehicular focused streets to prepare us for new waves of COVID-19 or similar future health pandemics.

It has also become clear that we need the foresight to create dedicated zones to allow safe pedestrian and cyclist traffic, which could also include a separate zone for more intense use of pathways for fitness. This would be one way that we could manage safe social distancing requirements under movement restrictions, such as the 5 kilometre radius rule.

2. Innovating park designs and recreational spaces

People have a need for fresh air and open spaces to manage their health and wellbeing, especially under the trying times of COVID-19. For people living in Melbourne, the lack of open parklands is impacting people's mental and physical health with recent reports indicating that 340,000 people don't

¹ Bicycle Network, April 2020, [Swap our streets for cycleways to keep people riding](#)

² UNSW Newsroom, 2020, [How streets could become more liveable and inclusive post-coronavirus](#)

have sufficient access to open space, with only between 0 to 4.5 square kilometers of parkland within 5 kilometers of their home³.

While parklands are an essential feature of masterplanned community design, our recreational spaces will need to change. They are typically hubs of activity and social interaction for families and new innovative designs need to be explored that include surfaces that don't have to be touched or cleaned every day to be enjoyed.

We need to think outside the box and look to more sensory experiences as opposed to hard landscape. At AVID we are asking ourselves, 'what does a more sensory and immersive play area look like?' In some of our own communities, plans are already underway to integrate these new design ideas into our communities to future proof our projects.

3. Changing home designs and living spaces

Another added benefit of masterplanned communities are close partnerships with builders who we can work with to provide building designs that meet the changing living arrangements of Australians.

Changing home designs have been very much under discussion in the construction, building and design industry. We are seeing design trends that provide a more comfortable living experience as we spend more time in our homes. For example, designs with additional light and space, larger backyards for private outdoors spaces and gardens, home office spaces or nooks and more options to keep homes hygienic and germ-free, are trends being seen across the industry globally⁴.

Final thoughts

As we look to innovative ways of community development, we would need to retrofit existing communities. But with proper urban planning and rigorous investigation into how we can best meet the needs of a changing world, we can strategically design these new requirements right from the beginning of new projects.

BIOGRAPHY

Peter Vlitas

AVID PROPERTY GROUP GENERAL MANAGER VICTORIA



Peter Vlitas manages AVID Property Group's project portfolio in Victoria. He has extensive experience in land development, medium density and detached housing management across the full development life cycle.

He has held senior positions in a number of prominent Australian private and government housing and development companies, including Development Victoria and AVJennings.

Peter holds a Bachelor in Surveying (Honours), is a Post Graduate of the Mt Eliza Business School Leadership Development Program and was a Board member and Past President of UDIA Victoria.

¹ ABC, August 2020, About 340,000 [Melburnians have little or no parkland within 5km of their home](#)

⁴ Financial Times, 2020, [Will our homes look different after the pandemic?](#)

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About AVID Property Group

AVID Property Group (AVID) is an award-winning Australian developer responsible for a diversified portfolio of residential communities in key growth precincts across Australia.

Having delivered \$2.6 billion worth of projects over the past 13 years, AVID's current portfolio includes more than 14,300 residential blocks and a gross revenue pipeline of \$4.9 billion.

With 38 projects across the eastern seaboard, AVID has a diverse mix of developments, including masterplanned communities, completed homes and apartments.

Led by highly experienced senior management, AVID deliver exceptional communities, valuable shareholder returns and wonderful environments for its customers.

For more information, visit www.avid.com.au.

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