

Planning for High Quality, Well Used Public Open Spaces: New Metrics for Open Space Planning

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The rapid growth of Australian cities is substantially increasing pressure on existing public open space networks and creating demand for new public open spaces. Local governments are charged with planning for the delivery of new open spaces and upgrade of existing open spaces. The last 80 years of local government planning for open space has been driven by two key metrics: quantity and proximity, which are often used concurrently. This includes providing a certain quantity of open space per capita, and more recently, ensuring residents live in close proximity to open space. One of the negative long term consequences of focusing on these two metrics has been the proliferation of poor quality open spaces which are underused, particularly in low density outer suburbs and growth areas.

The usage of and demand for public open space is strongly driven by other factors that are not captured in the metrics of quantity and proximity. Other factors include the characteristics of the local community and the level of amenity/ design quality. This paper describes prospective methods for assessing usage and demand for public open space. It also describes how assessments of local community characteristics and amenity/design quality could be better incorporated into open space provision planning, and explores how these assessments might be translated into metrics or standards for open space provision. It concludes with a case for standards which produce high quality well used public open spaces that reflect and engage with the local community.