

Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre to 2036 DRAFT Urban Design Framework

May 2020

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Description

Review of Strategic Direction
Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre
Draft Urban Design Framework
May 2020

Prepared by MGS Architects

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The Wurundjeri– Balluk Tribe are the traditional custodians of the land on which Box Hill is located. The tribe, whose traditional language is Woi Wurrung, is one of the five tribes that make up the Kulin nation. The tribe has historical links with the wider area now known as the City of Whitehorse extending over 40,000 years. Whitehorse City Council respectfully acknowledges the Traditional owners of the land which is now called Whitehorse, the Wurundjeri people and their elders past and present.

Date	Status	Compiled by	Authorised
05.02.2020	Draft submission V1	MGS Architects	-
27.03.2020	Draft submission V2	MGS Architects	-
04.05.2020	Final submission V1.1	MGS Architects	-

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Glossary of terms

ACZ	Activity Centre Zone
BHOSS	Box Hill Open Space Strategy
BHITS	Box Hill Integrated Transport Strategy
BHTI	Box Hill Transit Interchange
BHURTG	Box Hill Urban Realm Treatment Guidelines
CBD	Central Business District
ESD	Environmentally Sustainable Development
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (State Government of Victoria)
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act 1992
DDO	Design and Development Overlay
MAC	Metropolitan Activity Centre (<i>Plan Melbourne 2017-2050</i>)
VIF	Victorian Government's Victoria in the Future forecasts

Introduction

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1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the *Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre Urban Design Framework* (BHMAL UDF) is to provide recommendations for a revised built form framework for the centre, to ensure that future built form outcomes are both aligned with the vision for each neighbourhood and collectively with the centre. These recommendations underpin the built form and design objectives contained in the *Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre to 2036 Structure Plan*.

Structure

This document is organised into three sections (in addition to this introductory section):

- 1 Introduction:** provides an brief overview of existing built form controls and key issues.
- 2 Recommended Built Form Framework:** proposes new built form requirements and guidelines for the centre.
- 3 Testing Outcomes:** demonstrates the overall outcomes from the combination of proposed planning controls.
- 4 Implementation:** proposes an implementation framework for the direct integration of the built form framework into the planning scheme.



The revised Structure Plan

The revised Structure Plan, *Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre to 2036*, aims to reconcile the significant forecast growth in population, housing and employment with the necessary underpinning amenity, character, connectivity and resilience to support the centre's role as the pre-eminent urban centre of Melbourne's east. The

plan provides a new vision that is supported by a suite of objectives, strategies and actions. A key aspect of the plan is the establishment of a network of distinctive neighbourhoods (see Figure 1) and the introduction of overshadowing controls to ensure sunlight access is provided to the primary pedestrian network. This includes ensuring that built form outcomes are both consistent with the preferred character for each neighbourhood, as well as promoting a collective vision, through emphasis on an enhanced role for placemaking in the Centre.

The Vision for Box Hill

Box Hill is the pre-eminent urban centre for Melbourne's east. The centre supports a regionally significant focus for health, education and employment serviced by a major public transport hub. It provides a diverse and growing range of business, retail, entertainment, community and living opportunities.

An interconnected network of complementary and distinctive, accessible and vibrant neighbourhoods respond to the diverse community's desire for sustainable, engaging, safe, caring and healthy places. Future change in Box Hill will deliver a people-friendly environment with open and welcoming public spaces for all.

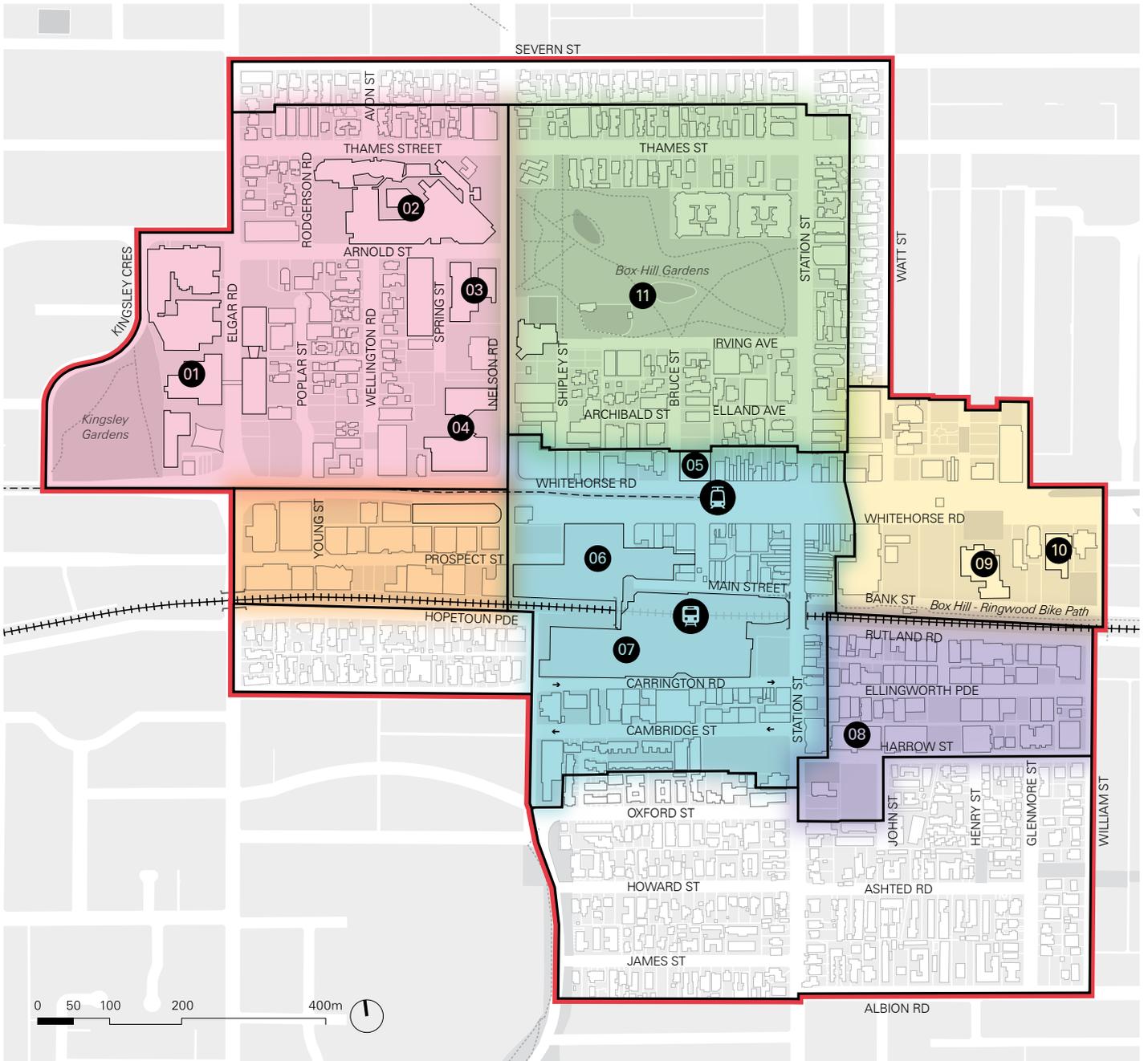


Figure 1 Distinctive neighbourhoods of Box Hill as proposed in the *Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre to 2036 Structure Plan*.

Legend

- Structure Plan (Activity Centre) Boundary
- Precinct Boundary

Neighbourhoods

- Precinct 1: Central
- Precinct 2: Health & Education
- Precinct 3: Prospect
- Precinct 4: Garden
- Precinct 5: Civic & Cultural
- Precinct 6: Enterprise
- Precinct 7: Transition

- T Tram 109 terminus
- S Box Hill Station

Key Places

- 01** Box Hill Institute | Elgar campus
- 02** Box Hill Hospital
- 03** Epworth Hospital
- 04** Box Hill Institute | Nelson campus
- 05** Australian Tax Office
- 06** Box Hill Central North
- 07** Box Hill Central South
- 08** Centrelink & Medicare
- 09** Box Hill Town Hall
- 10** Box Hill Library
- 11** Box Hill Gardens

1.2 Existing built form controls

Unlike many major or metropolitan activity centres in Melbourne, there are no tailored zones or overlays relating to built form applicable in Box Hill: such as the Activity Centre Zone (ACZ) or Design and Development Overlay (DDO), (with the exception of DDO) for the neighbourhood centre located at Thames and Station Streets. As a result, there are no specific statutory mechanisms which specify built form objectives and requirements to implement the preferred built form outcomes contained in the *2007 Structure Plan*. The existing built form controls are contained within statements of desired outcomes and guidelines which specify building height limits, solar access, ground and upper level setbacks with varying degrees of clarity and precision.

Building heights

Heights are inconsistently specified in existing controls, with a preferred maximum in storeys and metres specified for some precincts whereas a range of storeys (4 to 6-storey) or no height limit is specified in Precinct E and F respectively.

Street wall height

None specified.

Upper level setbacks

Varying descriptions of upper level setback requirements but no distances specified.

Side (above street wall) setbacks

Varying descriptions of upper level setback requirements but no distances specified.

Side or rear setbacks

Varying descriptions of upper level setback requirements but no distances specified.

Solar access

Winter solstice controls specified for 11am-2pm to avoid overshadowing of key public spaces, peripheral residential precincts and residential areas outside the centre. This amounts to a discretionary control that applies to Precincts B, C, D and F. However, 'Key Public Spaces' is not clearly defined in the *2007 Structure Plan*. It would appear that this refers to 'Key Open Spaces' in the 'Built Form Precincts' plan (Figure 9, p.58). Furthermore, there no specific application requirements outlined in the Planning Scheme itself.

Table 1 Existing built form controls

Built Form Precinct	Building height	Upper level setback	Side / rear setbacks	Ground level setbacks	Solar access	
A	Peripheral residential		<i>Clause 54 & 55</i>			
B	Low-rise higher density residential	3-storey preferred (11m approx. Including roof)	None required	None required	Match adjoining, adopt less if both sides differ	Solstice 11-2 - avoid overshadowing of Key Public Spaces, Peripheral Residential Precincts or residential areas outside
C	Traditional town centre	3-storey preferred (11m approx.)	Any height above 11m should be setback	Do not create side setback	Do not create ground level setback	Solstice 11-2 void overshadowing of Key Public Spaces
D	Mix-rise commercial and mixed use	4-storey preferred (14m approx. including roof)	None specified	Avoid unless required for access	Avoid	Solstice 11-2 - avoid overshadowing of Key Public Spaces, Peripheral Residential Precincts or residential areas outside
E	Town hall	4 to 6-storey preferred limit (nominally 20m)	No distances specified, set back should respect heritage buildings	None specified	Provide as appropriate to context of significant buildings	None specified
F	Major development	No specific height limit	Varied but distances not specified	Avoid	Avoid	Solstice 11-2 - avoid overshadowing of Key Public Spaces, Peripheral Residential Precincts or residential areas outside



Figure 2 'Built Form Precincts' | Reproduced from the 2007 Structure Plan, pg.17

1.3 Issues with existing built form

An analysis of urban design and built form was undertaken in the *Box Hill Metropolitan Activity Centre Analysis and Options Report (May 2019)*, which underscored the challenge of delivering taller buildings in what remains a largely suburban streetscape and arterial road streetscape. This has introduced a range of issues with existing and emerging built form. These issues will need to be managed to ensure that the centre's continued growth and role as the pre-eminent urban centre for Melbourne's east is supported by high-quality urban design and built form outcomes.

Land use and built form coordination

There have been issues with the integration of built form outcomes and preferred future land uses, due in part to conflicting messages, State Government zone reforms and limited consideration of development economics. In some areas, particularly in the Health and Education Neighbourhood, as well as parts of Prospect Street, existing built form controls have encouraged built form that has not delivered the land use outcomes being sought. Similarly, the Enterprise Neighbourhood has traditionally provided opportunities for a variety of scales of proprietary businesses to prosper but planning provisions have not precluded residential uses. Higher and better land value outcomes have been achieved through predominantly residentially focussed towers which in turn, out-compete lower rise commercial use for value.



Figure 3 Higher density residential development with high-capacity car parks on Fairbank Lane.

In some areas, lots with constrained access arrangements have been overdeveloped. For example, large-scale residential buildings with high-capacity car parks are constructed within street networks that do not support that outcome. Development proposals on modestly scaled sites in hinterland locations are being put forward, which rely on exclusive street access for vehicle loading and pedestrian access. The Forrest Hill Precinct in South Yarra is a mature example of the very poor urban outcome arising from such an arrangement.

The existing policies have not delivered the conversion from shopping centre to town centre achieved in other transit rich urban areas such as QV in the Melbourne CBD. It is noted that Council has recently undertaken steps towards addressing these shortfalls, notably the Box Hill Urban Realm Treatment Guidelines (BHURTG).

Heights, setbacks and building separation

The majority of approved development has been located on relatively small sites, either from a single existing lot or a small number of contiguous lots. Approximately two-thirds of approved developments are on sites measuring less than 1500 sqm, which is approximately the equivalent of two standard Box Hill house blocks. As a positive this has meant that development can occur relatively rapidly without the need for site amalgamation. The negative outcome of these developments from a design perspective is the inconsistent application of equitable development principles, where the development on one lot makes de facto use of some of the development potential of an adjoining site by building close to the boundary. There is also the significantly increased number of inactive sideages where new buildings are constructed up to the lot boundary on all sides. Where habitable rooms face the side boundaries there is an over-reliance on screening to manage privacy and reduce overlooking between developments. It would be preferable that larger setbacks and coordinated outlooks towards public areas are provided.

On the few sites large enough to contain multiple towers above podium level (5 projects from our sample) the average separation between towers is 11m. This suggests one potential benefit from the development of larger sites – the greater potential for managing access to light and air between taller built forms. This observation is tempered by the fact that each of these 5 examples has side setbacks of less than 4.5m. While there is adequate separation between towers within the sites, there is potential for taller towers on adjoining sites to be too close, leading to diminished amenity.

Integration with the public realm

Many new developments in Box Hill demonstrate multiple issues regarding the integration with the adjoining public realm. Development on larger sites would more positively integrate with the surrounding public movement network if 24-hour accessible pedestrian and cycle connections were provided. This can be to either replace existing informal connections severed by the new development or to provide new links within impermeable street blocks.

It is notable that many new developments make very little landscape contribution towards quality urban streetscapes, places and amenity. While there are a small number of developments that provide improved mid-block connectivity, there is more generally an absence of contributions towards upgraded footpath capacity in existing streets and lanes. In some neighbourhoods the magnitude of growth means that more space is needed to enable enhanced interconnection of neighbourhoods and key destinations within the activity centre. While the public realm is a council managed space, there is an absence of substantial public realm improvements for areas immediately adjoining the project site, as part of development proposals.

There are many locations where the comfort and amenity of pedestrians at street level is relatively poor. Overshadowing and wind impacts have had a negative impact on the public realm surrounding the development. The consideration of wind effects from taller buildings have in many cases not been demonstrated. The use of canopies and continuous weather protection along active pedestrian-focussed street interfaces is intermittent where provided.

There is inconsistent activation of laneway and street podium interfaces leading to perceived diminished safety and security within the public realm. With respect to building interface arrangements, podium heights appear to be determined more by functional requirements of the internal use than in response to the role of the street and the need for wind mitigation in some locations.

The substantial increase in lot coverage in many areas has resulted in a substantial loss of tree canopy cover and shade as sites have been intensified. This is an inevitable outcome from a substantial intensification in use, however there has been insufficient provision of landscape within the proposed developments and the contribution back towards the broader neighbourhood. There is a need to consider where the landscape opportunities might be accommodated if not in the site, particularly in locations where substantial trees won't fit into the streetscape due to the narrow width of road reserves. Where the public realm is too narrow the landscape contribution to the streetscape will need to be accommodated within individual private lots.

The Council has recently prepared the 'Box Hill Urban Realm Treatment Guidelines'. This operational document defines a hierarchy of public realm types and promotes high quality public realm outcomes through a high-level specification of an improved landscape and materials palette across the centre. These guidelines constitute an important part of a broader overall response that is needed to address these issues.

Cumulative impacts of traffic generation and parking

In all of the instances of permit applications that were analysed, the traffic impacts generated by the development were considered acceptable and able to be accommodated within the existing local and arterial road network. However, the traffic impacts of these applications were considered on an individual, site by site basis. There was no evidence within the decisions that the potential cumulative impact of traffic generated by valid permits was considered.

Some tribunal decisions highlighted that any permit conditions for traffic impact mitigation works needs to relate to the impacts generated by development, not broader traffic management issues. However, there are also developments that require traffic studies to be carried out in the area of other approved developments and determine if mitigating works are required for that precinct. Council is currently preparing the Box Hill Integrated Transport Strategy (BHITS) which seeks to provide an integrated strategy with a clear underlying focus on sustainable and more efficient modes of transport, including addressing the impacts of traffic and car parking.

Built form and design quality

Box Hill lacks clear policy support for design excellence for taller built form as defined through quality and durability of materials and finishes and detailing of ground level services. The quality and long-term durability of materials is a concern that has been noted during community consultation. New development within the activity centre has delivered city scale buildings but the underlying development economics is pushing preferences for shorter life materials and detailing. For example, painted concrete and lightweight claddings have been specified on prominent buildings. On taller built form, commercial glazing systems have been specified that are more appropriate to shorter life commercial buildings. These have been used as longer term solutions for strata titled residential towers without clear consideration about how the maintenance and eventual replacement of these systems will be achieved.

In relation to improved environmental sustainability outcomes, Council has an Environmentally Sustainable Development (ESD) policy through Amendment C130 which was incorporated into the Scheme in November 2015. This policy sets out specific application requirements for different types of development towards incorporating ESD principles in development.