

Strategic visioning

“Designing a dream city is easy; rebuilding a living one takes imagination.”

— Jane Jacobs

The vision is the touchstone for a project. It inspires and informs everyone involved in the project and leads to an outcome everyone aspires to.

What is strategic visioning?

Strategic visioning is the process of developing a shared aspiration for a place. Through working together to develop a vision, a project’s clients, end users, community and other stakeholders can identify and agree on common goals for their precinct, neighbourhood or site.

This shared aspiration is usually expressed as a high-level statement outlining the project’s overarching principles. The vision statement identifies – at the inception of the project – the values held by local stakeholders and the wider community, and the outcomes they expect. This is a useful mechanism for immediately establishing the role that design will play in the development of the project.

Why is this important?

Strategic visioning provides a clear definition of how people hope to see a place in the future. A strategic vision is also a critical reference point that guides decision-making throughout the life of the project.

Being aspirational, strategic visioning is optimistic and open to possibility. It challenges participants to depart from routine preoccupations and expectations into the realm of innovative and creative problem-solving.

When do we start?

The process should be undertaken in the early stages of a project, so it can inform decisions made

during the design process. Once the vision has been established it will provide a reference point for testing scenarios and options and identifying how well they align with project goals.

What is the process?

Various processes can be used to establish a vision. Generally a range of stakeholders will be involved as active participants, often through workshop activities.

A strategic vision must be grounded in a strong appreciation of the place, and this should involve site investigations, undertaken at various times, both on foot and by car or other mode. Whether you are developing a site, a neighbourhood, precinct or a city – a strategic vision should be informed by the unique qualities of the place and the values of its community.

The main steps in developing a strategic vision are:

- Visit the site.
- Engage widely and learn from others.
- Identify ambitious benchmarks.
- Identify the important qualities of the place you are aspiring to create.
- Gain broad support and agreement from within your organisation and among key stakeholders and the community.
- Focus on the big picture.
- Express the vision in a clear statement.

GANSW ADVISORY NOTE

Making Government a Better Client

V2. 12/09/2018

Tailor your vision statement so it is challenging and specific to the place and the project; avoid generalisations and platitudes.

While strategic visioning is a collaborative and inclusive exercise that requires design expertise, getting the vision right is the responsibility of the project's client.

What are the benefits?

A clear and agreed vision can ensure everyone involved understands the higher-level thinking that is guiding your project goals and objectives.

By establishing an agreed vision and objectives early in the project planning phase, participants will build a common understanding of what is collectively sought, and what the expected outcomes are. The vision and its associated objectives will also provide criteria for reviewing and evaluating the various scenarios and options which will emerge during the design process, including looking at the project's feasibility and budget. The vision and objectives provide a reference point for the project's overall ambitions.

It is essential the base foundations or drivers of a project are clearly established from the outset and are strongly focused on the social, environmental, and economic outcomes for local communities. When other drivers become sole considerations, such as cost minimisation or the demands for vehicle access and parking, the ultimate quality, longevity and ongoing efficiency of the urban spaces or buildings you are creating

is likely to be compromised.

How can GANSW help?

GANSW offers expertise in design thinking – a powerful capability to help organisations better understand problems and explore a range of possible futures.

Through a variety of collaborative approaches, GANSW can help you develop a strategic vision and define objectives for projects that:

- respond to a deep and holistic understanding of influences, parameters and opportunities
- evolve through participatory processes and reflect the values and aspirations of many different stakeholders
- incorporate principles of good design, as outlined in Better Placed: An integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW (GANSW 2017).

GANSW can work with you to develop a strategic visioning process appropriate for your project and stakeholders. Various techniques such as participatory workshops, speculative design testing or ideas competitions, can provide powerful tools for engaging people in the collective effort of imagining possibilities.

Further information

For more information see Better Placed: An integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW available on the GANSW website: ga.nsw.gov.au

Government Architect NSW

GANSW provides design leadership in architecture, urban design and landscape architecture. In this role, GANSW works across government, the private sector and the community to establish policy and practice guides for achieving good design. GANSW provides strategic advice across design, planning and development to support good policy, programs, projects and places.

Contact GANSW

GANSW makes every effort to keep its advice up to date. From time to time we will release new versions of these advisory notes. For further advice, or if you think there is information missing, please contact GANSW.

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