

# Moreland Apartment Design Code

## A potential solution for apartment design guidelines

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Like other inner city municipalities, Moreland is experiencing significant levels of apartment development. Should there be new standards for this type of development, and if so, what should they be?

One of Council's major concerns about the design of apartments has been in relation to internal amenity – low levels of daylight, poor outlook, an over-reliance on screening to address privacy, the small size of dwellings (which are getting smaller), inadequate storage space, unusable balconies, poorly configured communal areas (if provided at all), poor natural ventilation and over-reliance on mechanical heating and cooling. Many new apartment developments also provide an insufficient number of bicycle spaces.

As well as the concerns about internal amenity, Council is worried that some proponents for apartments are not adequately considering the impacts on developable adjoining sites. This has the potential consequence of limiting the reasonable development opportunities of those sites or potentially impacting on the future amenity of residents of newly developed apartments.

### Moreland's award winning response

Council's response has been to prepare the Moreland Apartment Design Code (the Code). Its predecessor the Moreland Higher Density Design Code received two PIA awards for excellence in 2012, Best Planning Ideas (Large Project) and the President's award. The Code has standards covering three main objectives: passive design, internal amenity and the reasonable development opportunities of adjoining sites. It will operate like ResCode: you may vary a standard if you meet the objective.

A key feature of the Code is in relation to building separation: these standards specify the distance to be provided between buildings to adjacent sites, to laneways (a common feature in Brunswick and Coburg) and within sites. The building separation standards have been derived from technical analysis to achieve a daylight factor of 1.0 to living areas and

0.5 to bedrooms and thus provide reasonable levels of daylight into apartments for everyday living. Building separation also helps achieve better outlook, more privacy and ground-level open space and landscaping.

As a consequence of the different daylight factors the Code sets building separation distances according to outlook and height. Separation distances increase relative to height, maintaining amenity for lower levels. The building separation requirements also differ between outlooks from a living room, bedroom or where there is no outlook.

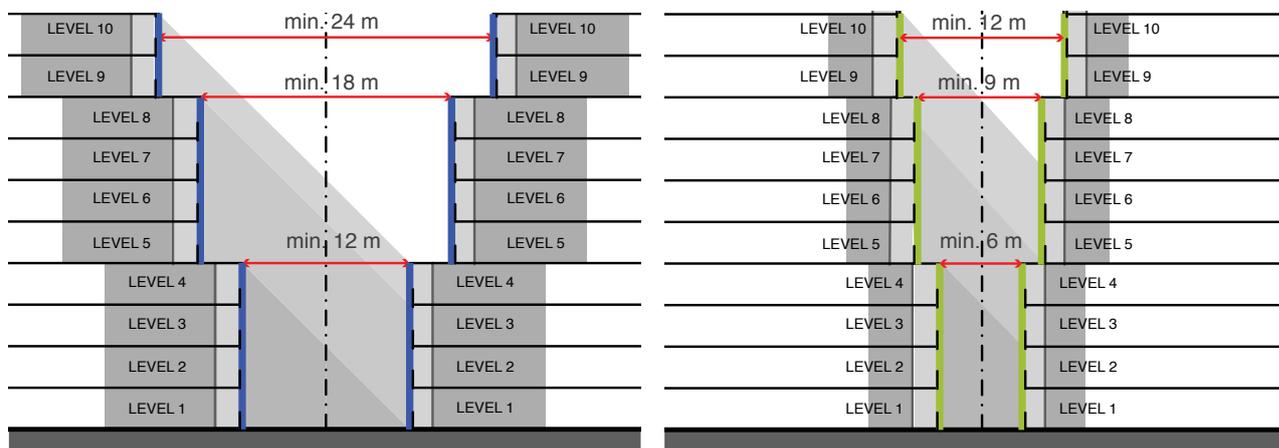
In Council's view, the recommended building separation requirements have strong justification to achieve a good level of internal amenity and should replace the default standard nine metre building separation derived from the overlooking provisions in ResCode that appears to have won general acceptance at VCAT.

The section on building separation also includes minimum dimensions on lightwells and this also seeks to achieve adequate daylight into dwellings, particularly to bedrooms which usually face lightwells. Other aspects of the Code under the passive design elements include building orientation, daylight access, natural ventilation and thermal comfort.

Under the internal amenity and facilities elements of the Code there are requirements on dwelling diversity, dwelling size and layout, accessibility, acoustic performance, private open space, privacy, open space and landscape design, communal facilities, bicycle and car parking, private storage space and waste management.

The Code proposes a minimum size of 50 square metres for a one bedroom dwelling with scope to reduce this amount if the layout is functional and liveable. Council's submission on this issue was informed by a report by the Royal Institute of British Architects: *The case for space – the size of England's new homes*. This report highlighted the increased liveability that could be achieved by providing an extra 4 square metres (46 square metres being the average size of new dwellings in England).

The Code has been developed using Council's in-house expertise and was a collaborative exercise between Moreland's strategic planning, statutory planning, urban design and ESD officers. This integrated approach has been important in developing an effective document. It has also gone through four main iterations:



Building separation for primary outlook and secondary outlook.

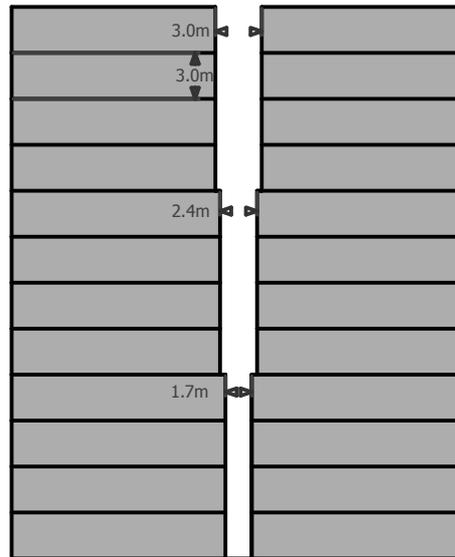
- Version 1 which was subject to public notice
- Version 2 followed submissions and road-testing by Council's planners
- Version 3 which followed a second round of notification and independent testing by two architectural firms
- Version 4 which followed discussions during the Panel hearing. Council tabled the final draft of the Code on the final Hearing day.

The Panel that considered the Amendment to introduce the Code into the planning scheme has recommended adoption subject to a few further changes. The Panel report is available on Moreland's planning scheme amendments web site (Amendment C142) <http://tinyurl.com/or3buvw> and is due to be reported to Council in August.

One issue raised by submitters, including the UDIA and HIA, is that apartment design standards is more appropriately managed at the State level. Council does not disagree with this view but has pursued local guidelines in the absence of a clear State-led approach. Council believes that with the current rate of applications and with increasing concerns about the quality of design, it cannot afford to wait. Any delay would risk Moreland being left with a poor legacy of apartment living.

Another theme of submissions is that there should be no new standards on apartment development at all: that the building regulations already cover a number of aspects such as daylight and ventilation; that additional regulations will stifle innovation and creativity; and that people are able to make informed choices about whether to buy or rent an apartment based on what they see.

Council's submission to the Panel highlighted the gap in planning standards for residential development above five storeys: ResCode only applies for residential development up to four storeys; the Guidelines for Higher Density Development are out-dated (they were released in 2004) and contain insufficient guidance on many important elements of apartment development; and the National Construction Code (NCC) is totally inadequate to provide liveable internal spaces.



Minimum lightwell size – NCC (Required space for windows)

Council's submission also provided an analysis on potential loss of yield. It was estimated that for most developments considered in the test cases the loss of yield was about 10%. There was a higher yield loss in a handful of other developments, but it is these types of developments that the Code is seeking to prevent.

Council welcomes the Minister's release of the Discussion Paper on apartment design. In Council's view, there is a strong need for new standards for apartment development which should be contained within the planning framework. Council believes it has developed a comprehensive set of standards that will go a long way to achieve better outcomes. ●

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# Flower Power

## PIA Local Government Planners Dinner



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