



Ten ways local government can advance gender equity

Land use planning and design

The fact sheets, *Ten ways local government can advance gender equity*, are part of a resource package designed to build the capacity for local governments to consider gender equity in their planning, policy and service delivery.

Local government plays an important role in creating and supporting environments that enable community to achieve optimal health and wellbeing. Reducing gender inequity for women is a key strategy in achieving this goal, as it allows for a more just, inclusive and fair society for both women and men. The fact sheets include practical information and practice examples of ways local government can advance gender equity for women. The ten fact sheets are:

1. Why gender matters
2. Gender analysis
3. Infrastructure
4. Land use planning and design
5. Promoting women in leadership
6. Workplaces
7. Sports and recreation
8. Access to services
9. Key concepts and definitions
10. Further resources

Local government's role in land use planning and design

Land use planning refers to how spaces are designed and used and the planning policies and processes that shape conditions in which people live, work and play. Local councils make many land use planning decisions that affect their municipality, such as public transport infrastructure, the size of shopping centres, the location of parks, bike paths and new roads. Every municipality has its own planning scheme, which sets out policies and provisions for the use, development and protection of land for an area. As such, local government plays an important role in creating well designed environments that all members of the community can enjoy. Such places are accessible, environmentally sustainable, affordable and safe for everyone. They enhance the cultural, social, physical and environmental diversity of a region and help foster healthy, socially inclusive communities.

Why is gender relevant to land use planning and design?

Planning policies and processes can unintentionally exclude or discriminate against groups in our community. Planning policy can ignore the fact that women and men use public space differently. It has been argued that urban and suburban spaces support stereotypically male activities and planning methodologies reflect a male dominated society.

Given the relationship between gender, space and power, the form and function of the built environment can make a difference to women and men's use of a space and should not be overlooked.¹

For example, women consistently express greater fears for their personal safety in urban environments than do men.² However, built environments are often developed with little consideration of women's needs. Utilising the 'Safer Design Guidelines for Victoria' is therefore important as well designed and maintained urban environments are essential to improve safety and perceptions of safety for women in our community.

Planners and practitioners involved in land use planning and design are becoming increasingly sensitive to gender perspectives in response to the past tendency to exclude the experiences of women in urban space when defining, interpreting and acting upon planning issues. Planning courses are now including subjects such as gender and planning that aim to explore, examine, analyse and challenge conventional planning thought and practice from a gender perspective.³

How can local government advance gender equitable land use planning and design?

Opportunities for local government to consider gender inequity and effectively integrate gender into land use planning and design include:

- **Improve the understanding of gender equity and how it relates to planning and design.** Undertake a gender audit on existing policies and strategies and consider where there are gaps. For example, women generally seek a home that is located within proximity to services, family networks, public transport, educational opportunities and employment. When developing housing it is important to understand these considerations.⁴
- **Improve knowledge on the ways that consideration of gender can influence building requirements.** For example, building design and assessment should consider location and access, childcare, baby changing facilities, public toilets, lighting and accessible facilities.
- **Develop and implement gender impact assessments.** This will assist decision making and input into the planning scheme, and will involve considering who is affected and how, as well as how planning will impact on a given group in the community including women, men, youth or older residents.

¹ G. Burgess, *Planning and the Gender Equity Duty – Why Does Gender Matter?* University of Cambridge: Cambridge, 2008.

² Women's Design Service: <http://www.wds.org.uk/index.htm>

³ W. Bell, *Women's and Community Safety*, Bell Planning Associates: South Australia, 1998.

⁴ Women's Planning Network, *WPN Research Project Toolkit for Affordable Housing for Women*, Women's Planning Network: Carlton, 2006.

⁵ Women's Design Service: http://wds.org.uk/www/pub_current.htm

- **Plan for appropriate data collection and research.** Use sex-disaggregated data and research to highlight the different experiences and needs of females and males in relation to land use and design. Doing so will identify and respond to the potential experiences of both sexes when undertaking planning decisions. This will better ensure that local government knows the community it is designing for, both now, and into the future.
- **Ensure consultation includes gender equity considerations.** This could involve recruiting a group of local women to go on a 'walkabout' around the city or site with planners and designers at the early planning stage or project scoping. Their views could be included in the designer's planning brief and ongoing consultations. Consultation with a women's advisory committee and reference groups is another important way of ensuring that land use planning and design is responsive to the needs of women in the community.

A Case Study of Safety in Public Urban Space

The Women's Design Service's Making Safer Places Project worked with groups of women to produce safety audits on local parks. Better lighting and maintenance of clear sight lines by cutting back vegetation was a common recommendation. Women also suggested giving pedestrians priority over traffic, and in particular removing pedestrian subways. Clear signage was also considered important from a safety perspective, while the presence of CCTV made women feel that an area was unsafe. The most important factor contributing to women's sense of safety was the presence of other people. One way to attract a wide range of people to a public urban space is to make it beautiful – a concept rarely considered in the context of community safety and wellbeing.⁵

