

## **NOTES – Play Australia Presentation (11<sup>th</sup> March)**

### **SLIDE 1:**

Thankyou Barb and to Play Australia for the opportunity to present today on a subject I am passionate about.

Today's conversation will centre around municipal strategic planning for play in the form of play or playspace strategy. This doesn't assume that other forms of planning that involve play (such as master planning are not important) its just that for the benefit of this forum we wanted to be quite focussed in our discussion.

### **SLIDE 2:**

So why plan for play?

This may of course seem like a 'no-brainer' to most of you, but in my experience many municipalities do this work in varying degrees – so to begin lets touch on the fundamentals of why your organisation should consider this approach.

**Pro-active development.** Where there is a holistic understanding of community need and a clear program to tackle what needs to be done in an equitable way. There are also clear guidelines and budgets to work with.

**Re-active development.** Responses only happen when needs arise and decisions are often made in isolation and on the hop. There is often the situation of 'trying to make do' with inappropriate or out of date budgets.

### **SLIDE 3:**

Examples in this slide demonstrate the difference.

LEFT: A well planned and budgeted for playspace in a suitable location. The result is an accessible, high play value, suitable for age and in context playspace.

RIGHT: The open space is unsuitable for play or access and the playspace not considered in regards to any defined development standards or design guidelines. The result is an almost unused, inaccessible, low value playspace.

These of course represent extreme ends of the spectrum and most playspaces will fall between, but gives you a picture on why planning for play is so important.

### **SLIDE 4:**

So what benefits does a play or playspace strategy provide?

Firstly a collective and tailored municipal vision on play.

This allows for alignment with other council planning and policy, as well as the unique opportunity to shape the direction of this planning in a 'local' way.

**SLIDE 5:**

The opportunity to reflect on what is current practice in your organisation around play – both good and bad. It also provides the opportunity to see how what you're doing stacks up against other similar municipalities and is responding to current trends or practices.

Assessments of existing playspaces (either on the ground or via desktop analysis) should build a picture of provision beyond just asset condition and standards compliance, going as far as to consider 'play value', access and inclusion and the effectiveness of supporting infrastructure among other matters.

**SLIDE 6:**

The opportunity to ask your community what they think? What are there observations on the ground (as they are the most common user group)? What's missing? What's loved? What doesn't work? What are their future aspirations and expectations for play?

This can sometimes be tricky to initiate in high-level planning – but tools such as QR codes linking to online surveys and interactive maps, social media and face to face consultation are useful to draw out different responses. It is however important to make sure you give an equitable voice to the community.

Where possible, meaningful and practical also involve or encourage families to involve children and young people in the conversation as well.

**SLIDE 7:**

The opportunity to plan from the macro to the micro level, which allows for a more fair and equitable understanding and approach across different communities in your municipality. This should be clearly demonstrated in the resulting priorities and action plan.

Ad hoc or Silo planning as we've already discussed tends to result in duplication, under or over development or inappropriate development.

**SLIDE 8:**

The opportunity to plan play within a broader open space context, supported by suitable design requirements and a framework that allows play to be so much better embedded and maintained in its environment.

That can only be good for supporting better quality open space outcomes.

**SLIDE 9:**

The opportunity to work through considered and practical responses to common issues or concerns.

These policy positions should be consistent across council planning and by including them in the strategy – a consistent reference point is created for staff providing information and initiating projects for the community.

**SLIDE 10:**

The opportunity to prepare a thoughtful and prepared business case that considers future cost projects and most importantly the capacity and cost implications of more complex playspace development on maintenance.

**SLIDE 11:**

If you are here today because you are considering or definitely undertaking a municipal play or playspace strategy. Note that in a living strategy (one that has relevant use) there are 5 essential planning tools that the strategy should provide:

1. Assessment reports (for reflection and direction)
2. Design Guidelines & Development Standards (for a consistent approach)
3. Accurate Budgets (to support new development, renewals, upgrades and ongoing maintenance)
4. Processes (for an equitable approach to consultation and delivery)
5. A 15-20 Year Priority Program (your action plan)

And I would possibly add a further sixth tool in which is evaluation methods for review and measures for success, as this is a long-term plan and you need to check in with how its travelling periodically.

**SLIDE 12:**

So as a final takeaway I would say:

In my experience the best approach to developing a play or playspace strategy is a 'collaborative' one – where time is allocated for cross-council and community input.

Strategies like this need to be owned and have use daily across all areas responsible for play provision. They also need adequate funding and achievable and relevant outcomes to be successful.

Just engaging a consultant is not enough – if your aim is to make meaningful or valuable change.