POLLICY ON THE DESIGN QUALITY OF HARD URBAN SPACES AND STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS IN TSHWANE

A POLICY AIMED AT ENHANCING THE APPEARANCE AND PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLINESS OF TSHWANE'S HARD URBAN SPACES AND ENSURING THE COORDINATION OF A VARIETY OF STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS

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1. Introduction

The Strategic Executive Officer (SEO): Housing, City Planning and Environmental Management initiated the development of a policy on the design quality of hard urban spaces and streetscape elements with the aim of –

- enhancing the appearance (aesthetic qualities) and pedestrian-friendliness of Tshwane's streets, squares, malls and other hard urban spaces; and
- ensuring that the placing of all public furniture, utilities, amenities and other streetscape elements within a hard urban space, which normally involves a number of municipal departments, is properly coordinated.

Hard (built) urban spaces, together with the soft (green) urban spaces, play an important role in the social and economic life of the city and its inhabitants. However, the majority of Tshwane's hard urban spaces, such as streets, are currently regarded merely as road reserves, ie motor vehicle and service conduits. Consequently, they are frequently designed in a way that other activities, such as strolling, sightseeing, enjoying refreshments, people watching, busking, window shopping and trading, become unpleasant or, in extreme cases, even impossible.

While the Municipality places the emphasis on road building and the provision of engineering services, the creation of people-friendly hard urban spaces, such as pedestrian malls and squares, is left largely to the private sector. Although the private sector is capable of providing quality spaces (eg Menlyn Park, Brooklyn Mall, Brooklyn Square, Sammy Marks Square and Hatfield Square), having the private sector provide these spaces has several negative consequences:

- The spaces are not necessarily provided where they are needed, but are provided where they are commercially viable.
- The spaces have limited social/cultural value, as the urban experience that they offer tends to be limited to mere shopping and passive entertainment.
- The spaces have limited potential for boosting civic pride, as they are seldom perceived by the general public as being truly civic or communal spaces.

The local authority must therefore pay attention to ordinary, genuinely public, streets and squares and ensure that they are designed not only as road reserves, but also as social and aesthetic spaces for the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike. The aim of this policy is not to turn every road in Tshwane into a Church Street-style pedestrian mall (with extraordinary paving materials and tailor-made street furniture), but simply to ensure that all Tshwane's hard urban spaces meet at least
the minimum requirements in terms of aesthetics and comfort for both drivers and pedestrians.

Furthermore, the public urban environment in Tshwane has traditionally been created through the numerous uncoordinated activities of different municipal departments. For example, a city street is normally created as follows:

- The street's basic (three-dimensional) form and overall character are determined by the City Planning Division, which uses the applicable town-planning scheme, site development plans and building plans to control the types of buildings that are built on the abutting properties, their setbacks from the street boundaries, their use and their appearance.

- The City Planning Division also controls the position and appearance of the advertisements and outdoor advertising structures that may be placed within the street space.

- The Roads and Stormwater Division controls the road geometry, i.e., the position, layout and dimension of roadways, kerbs, sidewalks, stormwater drains and catch pits, as well as the position and appearance of a variety of traffic signs, traffic signals and other traffic regulation devices.

- The Roads and Stormwater Division also approves wayleave applications, i.e., applications for any works within the road reserve (but mostly from a traffic safety and engineering services point of view).

- The Public Transport Division decides on the position and appearance of bus shelters and other bus and taxi facilities.

- The Environmental Management Division plants trees along the street and decides on the position and appearance of litter receptacles.

- The Electricity Department places street lights, overhead power lines, substations, transformers, distribution boxes and other electrical installations on, adjacent to or above the sidewalks.

- The Water and Sanitation Division is responsible for placing hydrants and water meters on or adjacent to the sidewalks.

- The Tshwane Metropolitan Police Department controls the position and appearance of parking meters, CCTV cameras and other devices aimed at ensuring safety and security and enforcing the law.
The Local Economic Development Division controls the demarcation of street trading areas, as well as the position and appearance of trader stalls.

Occasionally these departments do coordinate and synchronise their activities, but mostly they compete with one another for status, space and funding, thereby unintentionally yet effectively undermining one another’s efforts and ultimately damaging the quality and potential of the public environment.

A need therefore exists to coordinate all these activities, not only from a traffic safety and engineering services point of view, but also from an urban design perspective.

2. Terminology

A public urban space is any external or internal space that is accessible to the general public without control or restriction, regardless of ownership. Examples of public urban spaces include malls, arcades, streets, avenues, boulevards, squares, parks and promenades.

A communal urban space (which is also referred to as a semi-public urban space) is a space that is accessible to only a specific, well-defined, heterogeneous group of people and their visitors. Examples of communal urban spaces include spaces within large office parks or group housing schemes. Spaces used exclusively by smaller and homogeneous groups of people (such as individual families; circles of friends; religious congregations; social clubs; and political, business or other organisations) are private spaces and should not be referred to as communal.

A hard urban space is a built (constructed, paved, etc) urban space. It is meant to accommodate people on foot, either exclusively or together with people in motor vehicles. Hard urban spaces include the following:

- Mixed-mode streets (streets that are open to vehicular traffic, but also accommodate significant volumes of pedestrians or other non-motorised users, eg street vendors, shoppers and buskers);
- pedestrian streets, malls and arcades;
- squares/plazas;
- markets;
- parking areas that are occasionally used for other purposes; and
- public urban spaces associated with public transport facilities (such as stops and stations).

A soft urban space is an unbuilt space with predominantly vegetated or porous surfaces, such as a park, recreational area or playground.
Streetscape elements are the functional and decorative elements that are placed, laid, erected, planted or suspended within a public or communal urban space. They include public utilities and amenities, visible elements of service infrastructure, street lights, traffic signs and signals, street trees and other horticultural elements, general public furniture, advertising signs and decorations.

3. Requirements

All hard urban spaces in Tshwane must be designed in such a way that, in addition to being functional and safe, they provide an aesthetically pleasing, interesting and comfortable environment for all their legitimate users, including the disabled.

All activities that take place legitimately in a hard urban space must be seen as equally important and must therefore be reflected equally in the design and equipment of the space. Depending on the type of hard urban space it is, the legitimate activities may include –

- access to properties, facilities and amenities;
- the movement of people (both on foot and on wheels);
- the transport and delivery of goods;
- the parking of vehicles;
- leisure and cultural activities (such as strolling, congregating, playing, people watching, window shopping, sitting and relaxing, eating and drinking, as well as ceremonies and parades, art performances and exhibitions); and
- trading, shopping and advertising.

The legitimacy of an activity in a particular hard urban space is determined by legislation, policies, spatial development frameworks, Council resolutions, tradition and common sense.

The design and placing of all streetscape elements must be guided by the document titled Streetscape Design Guidelines for Different Types of Hard Urban Spaces, which is annexed to this policy. Wherever applicable, this document must inform land-use management decisions, such as those relating to township establishment or a town-planning scheme amendment, as well as the evaluation of site development plans.

All existing streetscape elements that do not comply with the guidelines contained in that document and that may be costly and unpractical to replace in the short term must be relocated or be neatly concealed and be replaced as they become due for repair or replacement or as funds become available.

Maintenance work must not be detrimental to the design quality of hard urban spaces. It must display the same quality of design and
workmanship as that of the original hard urban space and its streetscape elements.

All of the above requirements apply to both public and communal hard urban spaces.

All the municipal departments involved must review their existing practices and policies and, where necessary, bring them in line with this policy.

4. Procedures

4.1 Streetscape elements

The SEO: Housing, City Planning and Environmental Management (Streetscape Management Section) must –

- monitor the development and management of hard public urban spaces;
- monitor the placing and management of streetscape elements; and
- warn other municipal departments when they act contrary to this policy.

Municipal departments that intend to carry out any works that involve removing, altering or adding streetscape elements in certain hard urban spaces (as listed below) must notify the SEO: Housing, City Planning and Environmental Management (Streetscape Management Section) of their intention at an early stage of planning and design. The spaces to which this requirement applies include –

- the highest-order pedestrian activity streets and squares (such as the CBD streets, Esselen Street in Sunnyside and Burnett Street in Hatfield);
- hard urban spaces in which larger amounts of historical streetscape elements (older than 60 years) are still preserved (such as Church Square, Paul Kruger Street and Pretorius Square); and
- hard urban spaces that have been upgraded by means of urban renewal (streetscape design) projects within the last ten years and that have streetscape elements which have been carefully designed and coordinated (such as Church and Minnaar Streets in Pretoria and streets within the Lyttelton Manor node in Centurion).

When municipal departments are uncertain about the design quality or placing of a particular streetscape element, they must approach the SEO: Housing, City Planning and Environmental Management (Streetscape Management Section) for assistance.
4.2 Streetscape development plans

A streetscape development plan must be drafted for all proposed developments that contain one or more than one public or communal hard open space. This plan does not have to be a separate, stand-alone plan. It may form part of a broader (integrated) development framework, site development plan or any other appropriate type of plan. In any event, such a plan must contain the following elements (graphically illustrated, as well as textually described, explained and quantified):

- The system (network) of hard open spaces; how various elements of this system relate to one another spatially; how this system relates to the broader (external) urban context; and what the characteristics of the system are as a whole, especially in terms of permeability, legibility, safety and security; and

- the type and intended character (in terms of both function and ambience) of each proposed hard open space, with specific reference to –
  - the sidewalks/walkways (width of walkways, paving materials, basic design principles to be applied, and pedestrian crossing solutions);
  - the on-street parking arrangements;
  - the landscaping (position and species of trees, basic landscape design, and planting principles to be applied);
  - the public furniture, signage and other public/communal amenities (typology and basic design characteristics, and basic principles for placing/coordination of different elements);
  - outdoor advertising (the need for outdoor advertising and basic placing and design principles to be applied); and
  - the interface with the private realm (basic principles for site boundary fencing and landscaping).

If applicable, a streetscape development plan (or another type of plan containing the above elements) has to be submitted to the Municipality, together with the application for township establishment or town-planning scheme amendment. Thereafter it has to be circulated to all relevant municipal departments for their perusal and comment.

A plan accompanying a township establishment application has to be approved before the proclamation of the township and will inform the pre-proclamation conditions.

A streetscape development plan need not be prepared for a municipal, provincial or national road. However, if the road can be considered an element of a hard urban space (as defined earlier in this document), it must be designed and constructed with due regard to the guidelines.