



Mitchell Shire Council

## COMMUNITY CENTRES POLICY

January 2008

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## **1. Executive Summary**

The provision of community facilities to serve existing and emerging residential communities is a basic task of local government. The services provided at such facilities are considered crucial to the balanced development of a local community. Mitchell Shire's Community Facilities Policy is designed to outline Council's expectations to the community and to residential developers regarding the development of future facilities.

- 1. Community centres should provide a wide range of services on the one site whilst still being accessible at the local level to the catchment each centre serves. To achieve this, one community centre will be provided to each population catchment of 10,000 people.***
- 2. Community centres should be designed and constructed to enabled the shared use of facilities between different services and users, and be flexible in its layout to ensure an "extended life" for the centre.***
- 3. Community centres should have a building area of not less than 1,000m<sup>2</sup>.***
- 4. Community centres should have a site area of approximately 0.4 hectares subject to site design requirements.***
- 5. Community centres should be located as central to the population catchment it will serve as possible;***
- 6. Community centres should be located on the main arterial road network;***
- 7. Community centres should be located on a public transport route (existing or future), or no more than 400 metres from a public transport route.***
- 8. Community centres should be co-located with public open space, and where possible, be in the vicinity of an activity node such as shopping facilities and / or schools.***

## 2. Introduction

The provision of community facilities to serve existing and emerging residential communities is a basic task of local government. The services provided at such facilities are considered crucial to the balanced development of a local community.

In recognition of the role community facilities have in local communities, an appropriate policy must be established in order to ensure provision occurs in a cost effective, timely, responsive and economically viable manner whilst meeting the needs of the community.

The *Mitchell Community Centres Policy* is intended to establish a basis for the Mitchell Shire to continue to provide community facilities and their associated services.

## 3. Purpose of the Mitchell Community Centres Policy

The *Mitchell Community Centres Policy* has been prepared for four purposes.

**Firstly**, the Community Centres Policy is to outline the preferred method upon which Mitchell Shire plans and implements the development of community centres within Mitchell.

**Secondly**, it will be used by Council as a basis for decision making on matters relating to the provision of new and refurbishment of older community centres. It will provide consistency in the provision of community centres for the benefit of the local communities they will serve.

**Thirdly**, it provides detailed guidelines for community centres. More specifically, the policy outlines and justifies: -

- the location and access standards to be applied to new community centres;
- the building requirements for community centres;
- the site area required for community centres.

And **finally**, the policy has been prepared as an information tool for stakeholders, primarily residential land developers and users of community centres. It provides an outline of what can be expected from community centres within the Mitchell Shire into the future.

## 4. Background

Mitchell Shire owns and/or manages a number of community centres that perform a variety of functions, some functioning as specific purpose centres and others as multi-purpose activity centres.

Services that have historically been provided through community centres include: -

- *Early childhood services, including maternal and child health care, kindergarten, and playgroup;*

- *Community meeting facility, available for public meetings, adult education and recreational activities;*
- *Youth activity centre, capable of accommodating 30-50 people;and*
- *Elderly persons centre, including meeting and recreational facilities.*

The provision of community centres by local government is intended to be responsive to the immediate needs of the community. The success or otherwise of this approach is influenced by a range of factors, including the rate of growth of the community, availability of funding, existing facilities and the projection of the long-term needs of the community.

#### **4.1 Existing Provision of Community Centres**

Previously, no formal policy existed on the provision of community facilities in the Mitchell Shire. The approach in determining facility provision has largely been influenced by the existence of historically provided buildings, availability of funding and community demands.

In more recent years, community centre planning has been incorporated into the Concept Plans for new residential developments within Mitchell and in considering developer contributions.

#### **4.2 Deficiencies in the current provision of Community Centres**

A number of problems exist with the way community centres have previously been provided within Mitchell Shire. These include: -

- A lack of integrated service delivery;
- A sense of fragmentation amongst different community centres;
- Competition amongst centres for limited funding dollars;
- Centres are too small to engage in viable community development activities;
- A lack of public recognition;
- A lack of integration of community centres with the wider community;
- Poor siting of centres on quiet streets which do not have adequate levels of pedestrian and vehicle traffic and which are isolated from other services and activities;
- Some community centres operate out of converted houses which is less ideal than purpose built facilities;

#### **4.3 Findings of Mitchell's Community Services Plan (2007)**

This policy identifies some key principals upon which the Mitchell Shire should be providing community centres. These have been derived from the research undertaken in the preparation of the policy, which included: -

- assessments of the anticipated growth and social profile of the municipality;
- community needs;
- the cost of providing services;
- assessment on how a shared facility can be best provided.

Five key outcomes should be sought in the planning and use of community centres in the Mitchell Shire.

## 5. Key Outcomes

### 5.1 Community Centre Provision to Population

As a result of the research, options for community centres can be provided at three levels: -

- (1) A local centre serving a population catchment of **1,000 – 3,000** people;
- (2) A multi-purpose centre serving a population catchment up to approximately **10,000** people;
- (3) A regional centre serving a population of over **30,000** people.

The research suggests that smaller local facilities are too limited in size to provide effective and complete service provision because of building size and population catchment. They tend to be forced to focus on a narrow range of services that do not cater for a wide cross section of the community. It is also recognised that they include and accrue proportionally higher recurrent management costs than the larger centres.

The larger “regional type” centres are most cost effective and can better provide coordinated services. However, provision at this rate cannot provide adequate services at the local level. Access to the centre is reduced where a regional facility is provided as it becomes physically remote from a significant proportion of the population. Further, regional centres are unable to “concentrate” the large number of local services required in the one centre without conflict and peak congestion.

**The research undertaken indicates that community centres which serve a population of approximately 10,000 people provides a balance between the costly provision of numerous local centres, and the congestion and lack of access provided in the regional facilities.**

## 5.2 Range of Services

The provision of the widest possible range of services on the one site should be an objective of any policy position for the provision of community centres. Multi-purpose centres are seen as being more ideal than centres that can only offer a limited range of services and therefore, only cater for a limited cross section of the community.

Ideally, community centres should have the ability to provide the services (and ancillary facilities) on the one site as outlined in Figure 2.

Figure 1 – Services required on the one site.

|  |
|--|
| <i>Kindergartens</i>                           |
| <i>Maternal and Child Health Care</i>          |
| <i>Play / Activity Groups</i>                  |
| <i>After School Care</i>                       |
| <i>Youth Facility</i>                          |
| <i>Meeting Rooms</i>                           |
| <i>Adult Education</i>                         |
| <i>Adult Disability Assistance and Support</i> |
| <i>Seniors Clubs</i>                           |
| <i>Public Hall</i>                             |
| <i>Kitchen</i>                                 |
| <i>Reception Area</i>                          |
| <i>Office Area and Storage Space</i>           |

## 5.3 Multiple Use of Floor Space

In planning for multi-purpose community centres, there is the ability for various uses to share floor space where conflict between the uses can be minimised in order to reduce the total floor space required in each centre. This approach offers cost benefits in terms of building size and associated construction costs, as well as a reduced site size.

Figure 3 outlines services which should be provided in community centres which, by efficiently using floor space, do not generate a full floor space demand of their own.

Figure 3 – Uses Not Requiring a Dedicated Floor Space Allocation

| <b>Service</b>                          | <b>Floor Space</b>                                     |
|---|--|
| Play / Activity Groups                  | Use of Kindergarten or public hall                     |
| Youth Facility / Seniors Club           | Meeting Rooms and / or public hall                     |
| Adult Education                         | Meeting Rooms and / or public hall                     |
| Adult Disability Assistance and Support | Shared use of all facilities                           |
| Meeting Areas                           | Use of Kindergarten as overflow meeting rooms at night |

#### 5.4 Accessibility

Each facility should be easily accessible to its intended catchment population, and pedestrian access should be a factor in siting a facility.

It should be central to the catchment and within a subdivision road design that enables direct access to the facility and on a road that is a public transport route (bus).

#### 5.5 Best Value for Building Construction

Buildings should be designed to enable as flexible a range of services as possible to ensure an extended “life” for each building. They should be designed to provide for services ranging from childcare, health, youth and aged services as well as meeting rooms and small public hall facilities.

The potential to provide for services not currently provided by local government or private services should also be considered.

### 6. New Standards for Community Centre Provision

The following principles will be applied to the design, siting and size of community centres within the Mitchell Shire. These have been derived from an assessment of current community provision, the anticipated future needs of the community, and ensuring the most cost effective outcome is achieved.

#### 6.1 Community Centre Provision to Population

Providing a wider range of services on the one site offers many advantages including the ability to allow multiple use of floor areas as well as operating cost benefits in the provision of community centres. However, there is still a need to maintain local access to a community centre and the services it provides. Community centres will therefore be provided as follows: -

- ***Community centres should provide a wide range of services on the one site whilst still being accessible at the local level to the catchment each centre serves. To achieve this, one community centre will be provided to each population catchment of 10,000 people.***

#### 6.2 Community Centre Design

This policy recognises that the multiple use of community centre floor space can achieve cost benefits to the community, and that the actual building design should enable multiple use to occur in the provision of a flexible range of services, including traditional services such as child care, health, youth and aged services, but also services which are not currently provided by local government. As such: -

- ***Community centres should be designed and constructed to enabled the shared use of facilities between different services and users, and be flexible in their layout to ensure an “extended life” for the centre.***

### 6.3 Community Centre Size

Section 4.2 of this policy outlined the type of uses that should be provided in community centres. To determine the size of the building(s) and site for future community centres, an allocation of the floor space required for each use is shown below. Not all uses generate a floor space requirement as per Section 4.3 of this Policy.

Figure 4 – Floor Areas Required

| Service                                    | Total Floor Area Required for Each Use |
|--|--|
| Kindergarten (2 to be provided);           | 250m <sup>2</sup>                      |
| Bathrooms                                  | 40m <sup>2</sup>                       |
| Maternal & Child Health (2 to be provided) | 100m <sup>2</sup>                      |
| Craft Room                                 | 60m <sup>2</sup>                       |
| Youth Facility or Senior Club              | 100m <sup>2</sup>                      |
| Meeting Rooms For 60 people                | 100m <sup>2</sup>                      |
| Large Hall                                 | 200m <sup>2</sup>                      |
| Large Kitchen                              | 30m <sup>2</sup>                       |
| Office Entry & Storage                     | 100m <sup>2</sup>                      |
| Staff Bathroom                             | 20m <sup>2</sup>                       |
|  |  |
| <b>TOTAL FLOOR AREA REQUIRED</b>           | <b>1,000m<sup>2</sup></b>              |

NB. The above list of uses does not include those uses capable of co-using floor space which therefore do not generate a floor space requirement in their own right. Circulation space is also included in the total floor space.

The uses required in each community centre, and the floor areas necessary to ensure adequate space is allocated to each use, results in a building floor area of approximately 1,000sq.m. As such, the following building size is required: -

- ***Community centres should have a building area of not less than 1,000sq.m.***

### 6.4 Community Centre Site Area

Given the identified building size above, and the requirement for outdoor open space areas, car parking, and the need to achieve the appropriate siting of the building in relation to its surrounds, the following site area is required: -

- ***Community centres should have a site area of approximately 0.4 hectares subject to site design requirements.***

## 6.5 Community Centre Siting

Under this policy, each new community centre in Mitchell will serve a population of approximately 10,000 people in the long term.

Whilst the provision of one community centre to 10,000 people has numerous benefits, the siting of the community centre is crucial to ensure a reasonable level of access is provided to residents and community centre users within each catchment owing to the larger travel distances which will be incurred by some parts of the catchment by the provision of only one centre.

The geographical location of community centres is therefore a crucial consideration. To overcome any reduction in users' access to community centres, the following standards will apply in determining where a community centre should be located: -

- ***Community centres should be located as central to the population catchment it will serve as possible;***
- ***Community centres should be located on the main arterial road network;***
- ***Community centres should be located on a public transport route (existing or future), or no more than 400 metres from a public transport route.***

## 6.6 Co-Location Opportunities

Community centres are ideally co-located with public open space. This allows not only for overflow use of the community centre onto the public open space, but also helps to minimise any conflict between the community centre and more sensitive land uses and developments.

It is also recognised that locating community centres in activity nodes is beneficial as it increases the visibility of the centre to the community it serves. It also allows for multi-purpose trips to occur (ie. combined shopping trip with use of community centre) and increases public transport access to the community centre. Therefore,

- ***Community centres should be co-located with public open space, and where possible, be in the vicinity of an activity node such as shopping facilities and / or schools.***

## 7. Alternative Provision of Community Centres

Whilst the standards identified above are to be applied to the provision of community centres in Mitchell, there is some scope for a variation on these standards to occur.

Principally, the alternative provision of community centres involves one of the kindergartens and maternal and child health care facilities being located separately from the main multi-purpose centre. This second minor centre would be co-located with a primary school, but as with the provision of the single centre, this should be central to the population catchment.

The rationale for this is that the provision of one centre to a population of 10,000 people does result in some peak congestion where two kindergartens and maternal and child health facilities are provided on the one site. By having one kindergarten and one maternal and child health facility on a second site, some of the peak congestion is removed.

In many instances there are existing facilities in towns that may be experiencing growth. Where this is the case, planning for new facilities needs to accommodate the existence of these facilities.

Notwithstanding the ability for this alternative provision of community centres within each catchment, the standards outlined in section 4 will need to be applied to community centre planning regardless of the potential for the alternative provision of community centres. This is owing to the reality that in many instances, there are existing community facilities that don't require duplication. Where this is the case, the planned facility may not need to accommodate all the spaces outlined in this policy.

## **8. Conclusion**

The Mitchell Shire Community Centres Policy is a response to the need to provide community facilities in the municipality.

The Policy articulates the standards that will be used in providing for community facilities into the future and meets a need to have a policy pertaining to community facilities where previously none existed.

It is intended that this policy will be flexible in its implementation to ensure the provision of community facilities is in line with the expectations of the community and the ability for Council to provide the services.

Notwithstanding this flexibility, Council's Community Centres Policy will provide certainty and transparency for residential land developers and the community at large.