

# State Significant Development: Housing Design Competition Exemption Pathway Advisory Note

This advisory note explains the design competition exemption pathway for State Significant Development (SSD) housing projects.

## Background

To streamline planning processes and accelerate the delivery of new housing, the Department has introduced a design competition exemption pathway for SSD housing projects. This pathway will be made available for a 2-year period.

This advisory note provides information to assist applicants, architects and local government on the process and criteria to obtain a design competition exemption and undertake an alternative design excellence process.

## Where are design competitions required?

15 Local Environmental Plans (13 metropolitan and 2 regional) and 3 State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPPs) include requirements to undertake a competitive design process if a development meets certain thresholds (e.g. key site, building height, capital investment value).

A competitive design process is defined as a 'design competition held in accordance with the Design Competition Guidelines published by the Department in September 2023'. In the City of Sydney competitions are held in accordance with the City's Competitive Design Policy.

## What is the design competition exemption pathway?

The design competition exemption pathway introduces an alternative design excellence process for applicants seeking exemption from a competition requirement. The alternative design excellence process will ensure design excellence is still achieved, but will not provide a bonus of height or floor space that may have been available through a competitive design process. Bonuses will still apply to projects that elect to undertake a competitive design process in accordance with the relevant Environmental Planning Instrument (EPI).

This pathway will replace the existing competition exemption pathway that has been previously introduced for Housing Delivery Authority (HDA) housing projects.

To request a design competition exemption for a housing project that is deemed State Significant Development, applicants need to obtain approval of an Alternative Design Excellence Strategy that satisfies the 8 criteria listed below.

### Criteria to obtain approval for an Alternative Design Excellence Strategy

1. Outline how the project will address the design excellence considerations of relevant environmental planning instruments (including sustainability).
2. Provide evidence that the proposed design team has demonstrated experience in multi-residential housing, and has received peer and industry recognition in delivering quality housing design outcomes.
3. Provide details of the full design team, and note how specific areas of design expertise will be applied across the project (e.g. this could include architecture, urban design, landscape architecture, public domain, connecting with Country).
4. Provide confirmation that each nominated architect is a person, corporation or firm registered as an architect in accordance with the Architects Act 2003 (NSW) or, in the case of interstate architects, is registered with their equivalent association.
5. Demonstrate how the proposed design team will deliver diversity and variety of design to suit the character of the location. To ensure architectural diversity across sites that include multiple buildings, provide confirmation that no more than 2 buildings are to be designed by each nominated architectural firm.
6. Confirm that the full design team are appointed for all stages of the project, through to completion.
7. Commit to undertaking design review and addressing the recommendations and design advice provided. Include confirmation of design review through either: the State Design Review Panel (SDRP) in accordance with the [NSW SDRP Guidelines for project teams](#) or, a Design Review Panel (DRP), administered by an independent consultant to the applicant that meets the 'Design Review Panel for a State Significant Development Design Competition Exemption Terms of Reference'.
8. Consult with the local council, including sharing the Draft Alternative Design Excellence (ADE) Strategy for council's review. Provide evidence of the consultation process and any outcomes required for consideration by the design review panel. These items are to be summarised in the strategy, with any relevant documents attached as an addendum.

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## The design competition exemption process

1. Applicants are required to submit a formal request for a design competition exemption to the Government Architect NSW (GANSW). The request should be sent to [designcompetitions@dpie.nsw.gov.au](mailto:designcompetitions@dpie.nsw.gov.au)
2. For eligible projects, GANSW will confirm that an alternative design excellence pathway is available and that an Alternative Design Excellence Strategy (Strategy) is required.
3. The draft Strategy must be prepared in accordance with the SSD Housing Design Competition Exemption Pathway - Alternative Design Excellence Strategy Guidelines and submitted to GANSW for review and feedback.
4. Following the issue of SEARs, GANSW provides written endorsement of the Strategy prior to design review commencing.
5. The applicant must undertake the alternative design excellence process in accordance with the endorsed Strategy, with the process and outcomes documented in a design excellence report signed by the Chair of the nominated design review panel.
6. The applicant should include the endorsed Strategy and design excellence report when submitting a State Significant Development Application (SSDA) for the project.
7. During planning assessment, the consent authority will consider the advice from the State Design Review Panel or Design Review Panel contained in the design excellence report and determine whether design excellence has been achieved in accordance with the relevant EPI.
8. Formal confirmation of the design excellence competition exemption will be provided to the applicant by the GANSW prior to determination following advice from the consent authority.

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## Find out more

For further information on the design competition exemption pathway for SSD Housing projects, see our frequently asked questions on the Department's website or contact Government Architect NSW via email: [designcompetitions@dpie.nsw.gov.au](mailto:designcompetitions@dpie.nsw.gov.au)