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Local Government

Sensuous flows and curved shapes should be the norm for Sydney, writes **James Robertson**.

Are Sydney's planners too afraid to colour outside the lines? That's the message from the city's development lobby, which this week warned that conservatism among council planners was stifling creativity.

Urban Taskforce boss Chris Johnson said the city's planners were too wedded to "orthogonal" and boxy designs that did not stand out from the existing cityscape.

With some obvious exceptions, Mr Johnson said Sydney's architecture "followed the rules and lines up with the street edges".

"An exotic-looking building can set off alarm bells in planning de-



Where will the next design to rival the Sydney Opera House come from?

partments and the culture breeds more of the same," he said. "Planners often prefer projects that sit comfortably within the rules and the existing character". He argued

this approach was at odds with a new Sydney style of architecture that employed "sensuous flows" and curved shapes. David Ryan, from the NSW Planning Institute

said Mr Johnson had made a valid argument - up to a point. "When someone comes along with the next Opera House, you need to be able to recognise that. But the greater

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problem would be if you took a no-rules approach. Planning rules need to provide certainty - and developers themselves like that."

Several councils, such as Parramatta, actively encourage innovative designs with bonuses such as extra floor space. "Some [councils' planning controls] can be overly restrictive," Mr Ryan said.

Last week, new laws took force that strengthened the hand of councils to police breaches of their planning codes. They can issue immediate fines of up to \$15,000 for businesses found to be in breach of their development consents, while the maximum fine able to be dispensed by a court for the same breaches increased to \$5 million.

Eoghan Lewis, from Sydney architecture firm ELA, thought Sydney planners could stand to "loosen up" and be less prescriptive about designs. "But once you do, it's a question of whether you use that freedom for good or evil."