

Sydneysiders' cash windfall

Hot Property
Chris Johnson

After an examination of the NSW government's Apartment Design Guide, the Victorian government issued its own Better Apartment Design Standards on April 13. There are some fundamental differences between the two documents.

The NSW guide is 180 pages packed with micro detail while the Victorian document is 40 pages of fairly general material. The reason for this difference is that when the NSW standards were being developed a few years ago, housing affordability was not a hot topic.

The environment in which the Victorian standards were developed, however, was in the middle of national debates about worsening housing affordability. The result is that the Victorian standards are far more relaxed on apartment size, solar access, car parking, cross-ventilation and ceiling heights for kitchens than the NSW standards to ensure affordability.

The Urban Taskforce asked a planner, an architect and a quantity surveyor to measure the difference in what a buyer would need to pay for a two-bed, two-bath apartment in Sydney if it could have conformed to the new

Victorian standards. The result of their studies was a massive saving of \$150,000.

I am sure the higher standards are well meaning and worthwhile but they come at a cost. Most air travellers would prefer the bigger seats and the flow of champagne that comes with first class but then most passengers go for economy to balance their budget with the level of amenity.

So are Sydney's planning rules creating bigger homes than we can afford? The answer must be yes and a bit more research shows that in the past 50 years Australians have been exponentially increasing their homes in terms of size. Australian homes are at the top of two world league tables. But our cities, particularly Sydney, are in the top two least affordable cities for housing in the world.

Clearly, there is a link between having the biggest homes and the least affordable homes. It is in this context that the NSW government should review our well-meaning, but costly, standards for apartments. Rather than proudly claiming to have the biggest homes in the world we should trade off some of this space to make housing more affordable for future generations.

Chris Johnson is the chief executive of the Urban Taskforce.