

Housing Delivery Authority: Design Excellence Competition Exemption Pathway

This advisory note explains design excellence competition exemptions for housing proposals deemed State Significant Development as recommended by the Housing Delivery Authority.

Background

The Housing Delivery Authority (HDA), launched in December 2024 as part of the broader NSW housing response, offers a planning pathway for large residential and mixed-use proposals to be assessed as State Significant Development and State Significant Development with a concurrent rezoning.

To support the HDA Program and streamline the delivery of housing in NSW, the Department has made a design competition exemption pathway available.

Where are design competitions required?

Design competitions are required in 13 Local Environmental Plans (11 metropolitan and 2 regional) and 4 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, number of storeys).

What is the design competition exemption?

The design competition exemption removes the requirement for a competitive design process and replaces it with an alternative design excellence pathway. The alternative design excellence pathway will ensure design excellence is achieved. It will not provide a bonus of height or floor space that may have been available through a competitive design process.

To request a design competition exemption for a residential proposal that is deemed State Significant Development by the Housing Delivery Authority, applicants need to address the criteria below.

Criteria to obtain approval for an Alternative Design Excellence process

1. Outline how the proposal 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 proposal (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 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 a consultant to the applicant that meets the 'Design Review Panel for a State Significant Development Design Competition Exemption Terms of Reference' and addressing the recommendations and design advice provided.
8. List the outcomes of consultation with the local council regarding the alternative design excellence process, in accordance with Undertaking Engagement Guidelines for State Significant Projects as identified in the proposal's Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements.

The design competition exemption process

1. Applicants are required to submit a written request for a design competition exemption to Government Architect NSW (GANSW) demonstrating how they meet the criteria. The request should be sent to designcompetition@dpie.nsw.gov.au
2. For eligible proposals, GANSW will confirm that an alternative design excellence pathway is available and that an Alternative Design Excellence Strategy (Strategy) is required. The confirmation should be included when requesting Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs), submitting a Development Application (DA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), or undertaking any other planning process.
3. For information on what to include in a Strategy please refer to Housing Delivery Authority - Alternative Design Excellence Strategy Guidelines.
4. The draft Strategy must be submitted to GANSW for review and feedback, and the Strategy endorsed by GANSW prior to design review commencing.
5. The applicant then carries out the activities required under the endorsed Strategy and the process and outcomes are documented in a design excellence report.
6. The applicant includes Strategy and design excellence report when submitting the DA.
7. When assessing the DA, 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.

Find out more

For further information on the design competition exemption pathway for Housing Delivery Authority projects, see our frequently asked questions on the Department's website or contact Government Architect NSW via email: designcompetition@dpie.nsw.gov.au