

Urban planning and management in Apia – everybody's or nobody's business in 2002

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to detail the outcomes of the Urban Planning and Management Project for Apia undertaken from June to December 2001. The Project is a technical assistance project jointly funded by the Government of Samoa and the Asian Development Bank. The paper begins by looking at understanding past attempts to developing an urban planning and management system in Samoa. The paper proceeds to explore the demands for the existence of an urban planning and management system considering the range of key issues that are emerging in light of urbanisation processes occurring in Samoa and particularly Apia. Such issues include the concentration of the urban population and its impacts on the use of land, managing infrastructure, land tenure conflicts, community needs and demands, and the role of the urban economy. Urban management and planning has been identified as a way of carefully managing our resources as we move towards a better future.

The paper focuses on the proposed institutional arrangements for urban planning and management and its core functions, the legislative framework needed to provide the legal support for management of resources, and the budgetary and financial implications of the proposed system. The paper also provides an overview of the approach used by the Project Team in developing a planning system for the Apia urban area with application at the national level. The basic premise of the paper is that urban planning and management for Apia and Samoa generally has been nobody's business to date, with lots of varying interest shown but no responsibility taken. In the light of the current planning project being undertaken, the key question is will urban planning and management be everybody's business in 2002 or continue to be nobody's business?

Attempts at previous projects

There are numerous urban issues and concerns associated with the lack of urban planning and management which can be observed in the Apia central area and in the growing urban fringes - for example, the absence of safe public spaces such as pedestrian footpaths, building on flood prone lands, the lack of building and planning setbacks, and the continual unearthing of infrastructure inter alia that does not consider the views of both the public and other service providers. Over the last half-century, various projects have tried to develop a system to manage these rising urban issues and concerns. One of the consistent themes that have emerged from the analysis of past attempts is that none of these efforts have led to the establishment of an integrated urban planning and management system. History clearly suggests that the pressures to maintain the *status quo* have proven stronger than those attempting to bring about change to manage the urban area. The reasons why past attempts to establish an integrated urban planning and management system for Samoa and particularly Apia have not come to fruition are speculative, but are likely to include:

- a lack of coalition of support for a new system in both Government and the community;

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- lack of consultation in the planning process including the involvement of village level decision makers such as the *pulenuu*;
- emphasis on primarily Government activities rather than the needs of the wider community, of which Government is only one of a number of players;
- the cost of the system in relation to affordability at the household and Government level; -
- the underlying norms, aspirations and values embodied in the system were not representative; and
- an emphasis on physical master plans and land use plans whilst ignoring the social and economic underpinnings of change, especially sustainable human development issues.

Another key reason for the failure of past efforts to establish an urban planning and management system is that recommendations have been ambitious and have not involved an incremental and staged approach. The most recent effort in 1996, for example, was to create a new independent Urban Management Commission at a cost of S\$14.2 million. These recommendations for this new lead agency gave little explanation of how the Commission would relate to existing socio-cultural systems of decision-making at the local village level, the implications of how it would be resourced with staff and overall impact on Government budget.

Key planning and development issues

Attempts at developing an urban planning and management system can be seen to revolve around the constant themes of human activity, their concentration such as within Apia, and the pressures they place within localities. The Apia population combined with the urban sprawl along the North Western Upolu corridor accounts for 47% or 76,492 persons of the total population¹ – that is, nearly half of the national population now lives within this area. Such population growth poses numerous concerns for the environment in that land use developments are generally not controlled and there is minimal infrastructure capacity in place to support developments. There are also rising social concerns with a diversity of people in the urban area and the stresses posed by the cash economy - for instance, unemployment, substance abuse, suicide, lifestyle diseases, crime, mental health, disorderly behaviour, road rage etc. It has been stated during consultations that although the *pulenuu* (that is, the village mayor on customary land) acts as a way of remedying some of the ills on customary lands, their jurisdiction fails to influence those on freehold lands. This is important given there is a mix of customary, freehold and Government lands within the expanding Apia urban area.

With the increased population in Apia, demand for land has led to rapid growth along the urban fringes, namely south towards the catchment areas, east despite topographical limitations, and the majority of the growth occurring along the North Western Upolu coastal corridor. The demand this places on the sustainable capacity and natural threshold of the land on which development activities are * taking place, is far-reaching. Uncontrolled pollution, erosion, sedimentation and flooding have implications on biodiversity, loss of habitats and vulnerability of Samoa's cultural heritage sites and existing built-up environment, are only a few of these far-reaching consequences. The growth areas such as Vaitele and Vailele are increasingly demanding social and physical infrastructure from utility providers and Government. However, with no agreed plan, poor coordination and integration, service providers have been subjected to meeting ad hoc demands. In some cases, the church has played an integral 'stop gap' role in providing social infrastructure in communities such as the school complex at Vaitele.

Observing the current form and structure of the urban area, it is apparent there is no rhyme or reason as to the locations of different land use developments and activities. There are no land use controls or guidance as to desired village character. Landowners can do as they wish with their lands, subject to family and communal obligations that may apply depending on the prevailing land tenure. The Project Team has identified that a clear plan would be beneficial and importantly, would enable both infrastructure providers and the community at large to have greater certainty as to their investments and locations of their utilities. Hence, the costs would be well spent in a system that provides greater certainty and transparency. This will also guarantee the most appropriate use of land, soil and water within the growing urban catchment.

The importance of urban Apia to the Samoan economy cannot be understated. In 2000, total GDP for Samoa in current prices is estimated to be S\$773.7 million. Of this S\$537.2 million or 70% of the total GDP is estimated to have been generated either directly or indirectly by economic activities based or undertaken in the Apia urban area. This implies that an urban area containing approximately half of the nation's population generates 70% of its national income. Clearly, Apia is the hub and driving force in the Samoan economy, being the commercial and industrial centre of the nation. There are no major centres of economic activity outside Apia, all reinforcing the need for an effective planning and urban management system to support and facilitate such economic growth.

Overview of the current planning framework

The current system of planning at the national level is highly developed and is based around the development of the 'Statement of Development Strategy'. The process incorporates an excellent methodology of public consultation undertaken by Treasury. Unfortunately, a key weakness is that it does not provide for a system to set urban objectives at the macro or Apia level. This is a major shortcoming given the high level of population concentration in Apia and the North West Upolu corridor and importantly, the large degree of population mobility between Upolu and Savaii.

The Apia tier involves a range of Government and state-owned enterprise players with activities fragmented across many national agencies such as EPC, PWD and DLSE. Significantly, there is no lead agency to integrate, advocate and facilitate an agreed overall plan to coordinate planning and development. Key issues identified include no planning guidance or direction, minimal building control and no institutional ownership for drainage, sewerage and other rising infrastructure issues. The result is that service provision generally occurs independently, sometimes with little knowledge or care by agencies as to their impact on other developments. At the village level, there is a clear social structure responsible for management of village level activities. On customary lands, the role of the village fono and the pulenuu dominates. However, the type of landholding - customary, fee simple, lease, or church lands - defines the organisational structure dominating the pattern of village decision-making at the Apia level. As such, villages vary significantly in their commitment and organisational arrangements to undertake 'good' village planning where the interests of both the village and landowner can be balanced.

Results and implications of the community consultations

Some of the key findings emerging from consultations have indicated and supported the increasing role of urban drift, emerging social and family breakdown, pollution and other environmental concerns within the catchment, the need for land use controls and guidance, better traffic and pedestrian oriented management such as school drop off points, urban

healthcare and rising sanitation and flooding issues. These concerns will have implications for the planning of the use of land, soil and water to help alleviate some of the public's perceived urban concerns and issues.

A major theme emerging from all consultations is that people need to actively participate in the decision-making processes as it relates to land use and development activities. This will require a mind shift to reveals people's desire for choice within an agreed framework, including balanced development, better coordination, a broader definition of the "urban" environment, an appropriate institution for planning, and importantly, the need for us to consider 'planning for the future' as opposed to the "business as usual" scenario. This can be reflected into the key principles of transparency and accountability so as to reach better urban outcomes.

Considering all the issues and concerns raised by key stakeholders, the overall purpose of the emerging urban planning and management system is recommended *"to improve the quality of life for all Samoans"*. The key outcomes that shall reinforce the purpose can be summarised as:

- safe, healthy and cohesive communities that meet peoples needs and supports and enhances village character;
- sustainable natural resource management in Apia and the catchment;
- a supportive environment for business which assists in economic growth opportunities; and
- appropriate urban structure and form for Apia's development so as to provide equitable access to transport, services, recreational facilities and jobs

These outcomes will be underpinned by guiding principles that need to be reflected in the underlying system legislation and administrative processes. These principles will include incorporation of a community-needs driven approach, ensuring effective community participation, improving coordination of urban service providers, providing greater certainty to business and community via accessibility to information and services, and importantly, creation of a versatile "tool box" for implementing plans and achieving outcomes of the proposed urban planning and management system.

The Project Team have identified a number of key system components² fundamental to achieving these urban outcomes such as goal setting for urban improvement, developing plans and policies, regulating development, mobilising resources for urban improvement, implementing improvement through annual operating plans, achieving the desired urban outcomes, and monitoring and reviewing the process. These system components form the three core functions that will need to be carried out by the system to achieve the agreed outcomes, namely, the making of plans and policies, regulating development and urban management and the coordination of urban services (see Figure 1).

One key planning tool would be the preparation of a structure plan for Apia. This would become an important outcome as it ensures that the location of future land use and development makes the most of existing resources. It also indicates the future distribution and type of development including infrastructure and services, provides certainty for landowners and developers, and reflects an agreed plan by which stakeholders can work within – a physical framework plan, which will have the force of law (see Figure 2).

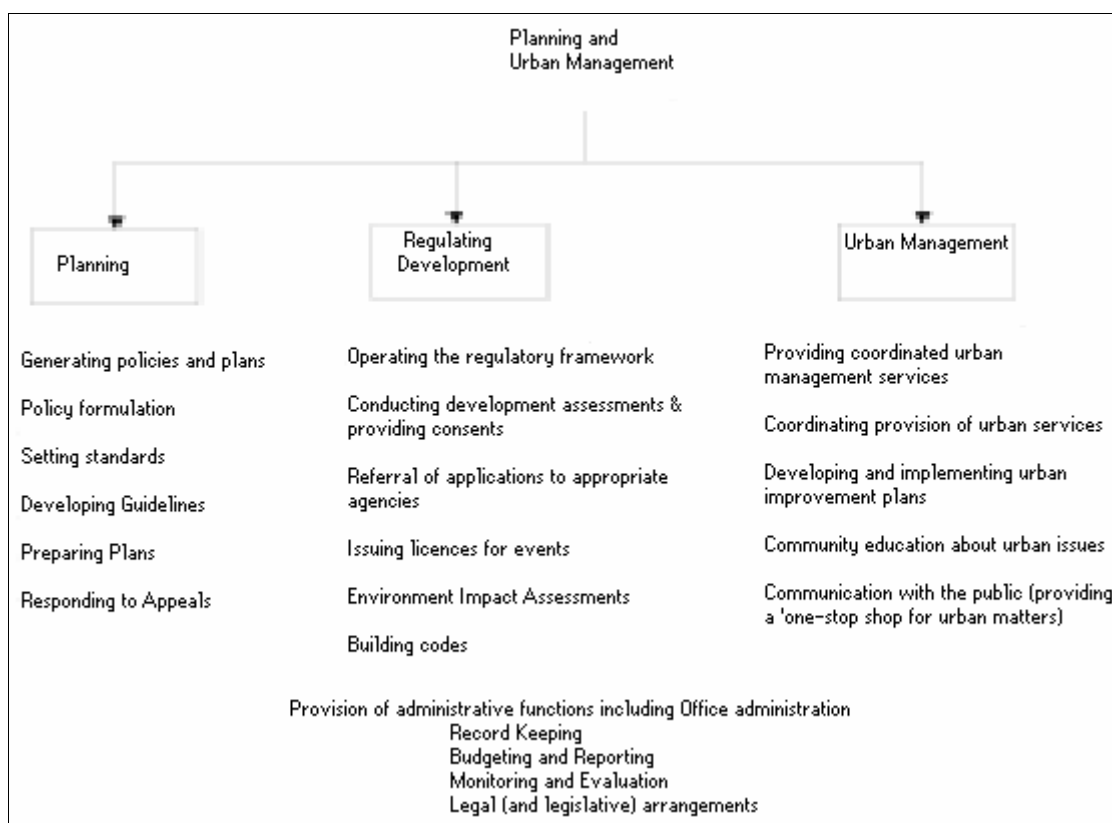


Figure 1 Planning and Urban Management Structure

The major issues that the draft structure plan raises include those regarding the future use of land and development patterns, the distribution of land tenure types, and density and environmental constraints. Because the planning of these resources are of concern to everyone, the public needs to be involved in deciding plans and policies as to the future use of these lands.

A firm commitment by Government will be required to define the true extent of the system application. Should it be applied to special planning areas like the growing Apia urban area, or at the rural level and other developing areas such as Salelologa? Or should it be applied at the national level thus requiring strong deliberation by Cabinet. A strong decision on the urban edge will have political and social ramifications. Regardless of the boundary, a strong decision would be seen as a progressive step towards managing the environmental and natural resources ensuring their sustainability and intergenerational equity for future generations. The establishment of an agency on an urban basis would provide a powerful commitment to decision-making in the urban area.

The Project Team has identified various institutional options such as a local council, a municipal authority and a planning authority/commission as avenues for institutional means to providing an urban planning and management organisation that facilitates and advocates appropriate development. Upon reviewing these, the Steering Committee agreed for an incremental and staged approach within the Department of Lands, Surveys and Environment (DLSE) was the preferred broad option.

DLSE was selected as the preferred home for urban planning and management in Samoa due to the many functions it already carries out. Environmental planning in the context of the

Lands, Surveys and Environment Act 1989 is done within DLSE. DLSE also has mapping, surveying and valuation capacities, and also contains a property and a cadastral information database vital to any planning system. Subdivision, one key aspect of the development process, is already carried out by DLSE. Under DLSE, the Department has broad urban and rural land use responsibilities in which it also carries out some urban improvements. DLSE is also responsible via the Land Board for planning and management of Government lands. These functions provide the basis upon which to build a strong institutional framework for urban planning and management in Samoa and specifically, the growing Apia area.

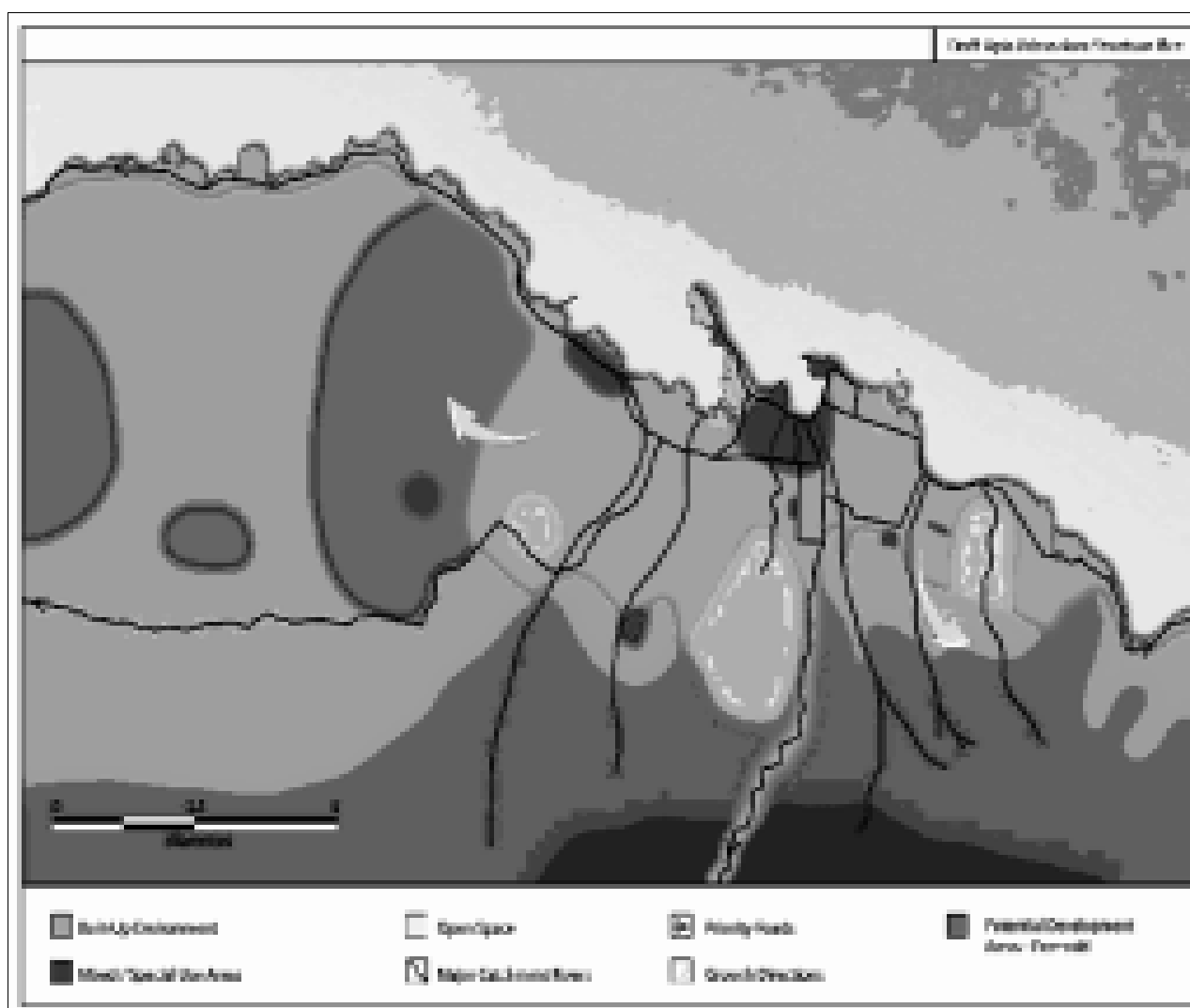


Figure 2 Structure Plan for Apia

The proposed institutional structure shall provide for all three core planning and management functions that have been identified. This body will also provide those services, which could not be provided more efficiently by others. The proposed new structure would be established as a relatively independent body that would be part of DLSE, but must be publicly identifiable. At a later stage, such as five to eight years, the body would be floated off as an authority. This has been supported by the Steering Committee as a pragmatic step to developing an urban planning and management system for Samoa. The above considerations have led to an agreement to establish the Planning and Urban Management Agency (PUMA)

within DLSE as the lead agency for urban planning and management for Apia, with potential application at the national level.

The proposed planning and urban management agency (PUMA)

It is envisioned that the tentative mission for PUMA shall be *“to provide leadership to help ensure that the quality of urban and rural life in Samoa is among the best”*. This mission will emphasize PUMA’s focus on the urban area of Apia principally. The key responsibilities will be to provide plans and policy services for land use and to establish and operate a regulation framework for planning assessment and building control. Significantly, PUMA will also be responsible for establishing and operating mechanisms to ensure urban management services are coordinated and meet the system objectives. PUMA will now be the consent authority for all land use and development matters in the area to be specified by Cabinet.

To meet the purpose of the desired system and operate the above functions, there are certain values that PUMA will need to adhere to. Some of these values shall include accountability to a new Planning and Urban Management Board as well as stakeholders and public. Generally PUMA will also maintain its independence from DLSE as far as practical and importantly, be identifiable by the public as the paramount agency for planning and development matters and coordination of urban management. It is envisaged PUMA will also become accessible as a ‘one-stop’ shop for all urban and rural development and urban management issues, concerns and enquiries. PUMA shall also be supportive of the ‘Statement of Development Strategy’ at the macro level, and be as transparent and cost-effective in all its assignments.

The proposed organisational arrangements³ would see PUMA become a new division within DLSE, accommodating 27 professional staff (seven of which are new positions) and focusing on developing the three core functional areas outlined above. The proposed Board will be the development consent authority for Apia (and possibly other areas as agreed by Cabinet) plus deal with urban management services and issues such as urban improvements and urban development in areas like Vaitele. The Board will also be responsible for approving major plans and policies as well as development applications. PUMA will be modeled on the Land Board, currently comprising six Government representatives and six community representatives, with the chair being the Minister of Lands, Surveys and Environment. There will also be a proposed Appeals Tribunal for the community or individual applicants to challenge planning and development decisions, including planning and building applications and the making of plans and policies.

The major implication of these arrangements for the community is that there will be designated a lead agency responsible for coordinating and managing planning, development and service issues in the urban area. Development will now be assessed in the wider meaning of “environment” - that, social and economic as well as ecological. Stakeholders will now have a say in development matters, thus the community including the village fono, can comment on proposals that affect them during the planning process. The implication of the above is that development and land use decisions will now need to consider the impact on other people, and not be processed in isolation by private or public stakeholders as is current. The community will be represented on the Board and avenues for planning and development appeals will enable legal challenges. This system will adhere to good governance and will also apply to Departments and infrastructure providers. The key service agencies such as EPC and PWD will be represented on the Board, thus improving coordination and integration. It is envisaged that all the above will lead to better urban outcomes.

Proposed budget implications

The budget and financial implications have been identified for PUMA comprising the three functional units. The total budget costs are estimated at SAT\$2.693 million and falling to S\$2.524 million by year two. Of this SAT\$120,000 is included for urban improvements. However, PUMA's incremental budget cost is of SAT\$630,346. A possible user charge is being discussed as funding avenues for PUMA, however this may come into affect in three to five years as the credibility of PUMA is established. A possible scenario where a minimal cost recovery of SAT\$1.915 million is achieved; this comprises existing PUMA revenues plus SAT\$1.5 million raised from a 0.5% payroll levy plus a SAT\$5 per month service charge such as with the EPC account is also likely to fund the system. The implication of the latter is that those benefiting should and would wear the costs or part thereof.

Legislative implications

The establishment of PUMA will require an amendment to the existing legislation, primarily the *LSE Act 1989* and a new Urban Planning and Management Bill. The amended *LSE Act 1989* would deal with the institutional framework for PUMA and PUMB. The proposed new Bill, however, will contain the operational aspects of the legislation to allow PUMA to carry out its three core functional responsibilities. The primary components will contain the objectives that will be crucial to providing links to the contents of plans, strategic planning and development control and assessment. These would all require commitments from landowners in which they agree to give up some individual rights to achieve a broad community benefit. This Bill will be seen to help the new planning and urban management system develop a clear identity.

Conclusion

A way forward for the development of a new urban planning and management system for Apia and Samoa based on the establishment of PUMA has been identified for the next eighteen months, namely, for 2002 and well into 2003. Five core implementation components have been identified as the operating plans and funding, goal setting, planning and policy setting, regulatory setting and urban service coordination and urban management. Currently, a report is going to Cabinet and Government seeking endorsement of the findings presented here and as agreed to by the interdepartmental Steering Committee. It is difficult to hide from the fact that the population and development is continuing to grow, and that PUMA and PUMB provide a window of opportunity to ensure that the adverse effects of this growth are dealt with and managed in an orderly manner. It is important to note that during the extensive public consultation carried out by the Project Team, there was relatively little disagreement with the fundamental philosophy that an effective, transparent and accountable system, such as embodied in PUMA, is needed as a matter of urgency.

The proposed planning and urban management system and establishment of PUMA will provide appropriate tools and processes to enable consideration of a range of problems. Streamlined processes would need to be established to effectively deliver advisory services and infrastructure provision such as that the system requires. This paper has demonstrated the potential of a planning system with respect to its responsiveness to urban issues. However, the system will need to ensure that it listens to its communities in working toward an agreed future for the urban environment. Finally, the system will also need to make sure it does not spend too much time planning without clearly implementing and developing the agreed outcomes for achieving a vibrant and strong community within Apia and other key growth areas in Samoa.

References

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- ² Urban Planning and Management Project Team, “Developing an Integrated Urban and Management System for Samoa”, September, 2001
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