



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### COUNCILS OFFER PLANNING ALTERNATIVES

The Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW today put forward a number of alternative planning reforms which aim for faster development decisions without compromising the character of neighbourhoods or community input.

Changes to building certification and broader appeal rights for residents were two possible solutions tabled at a forum in Sydney this morning, attended by 250 NSW mayors and general managers.

“The Government’s changes will lead to homeowners being denied a say in what is being built next door, the character of many neighbourhoods being compromised, and the same rules being applied to residential developments regardless of whether you are in Bourke or Balmain,” President of the Local Government Association of NSW, Cr Genia McCaffery said.

“As community representatives we have a responsibility to oppose changes that are not good for the community, and float ideas which protect the rights of residents and ensure good development decisions are made.

“The alternative suggestions, which we have asked the Government, community and industry to consider, focus on making sure planning decision makers are accountable, building codes reflect local needs and neighbours have the opportunity to appeal developments.”

Among the suggestions put to the floor included:

- Building Certifiers’ certificates made to the council with strict turnaround times for developments already certified;
- Consideration be given to broad third party appeal rights (available in other states);
- Encouraging the use of advisory Independent Hearing Assessment Panels (IHAPs) to conduct hearings outside the adversarial arena of the council meeting where findings are reported to elected councils for a decision.
- Changes to court procedures to take away the ‘win lose’ approach, reduce costs for councils and shorten hearings.

Some of the Government’s suggestions were supported, including: a planning assessment commission, but with parliament overseeing its operations and membership; improvements to plan making; strengthening enforcement and sanctions for building certifiers; and the extension of e-planning initiatives. Councils also spoke of the likely impacts of Government plans to slash development contributions.

“While there is a much greater awareness of the implications of the government’s plans to slash development contributions, we have still had no commitment to abandoning or altering the proposed changes,” President of the Shires Association of NSW, Cr Bruce Miller said.

“The cuts will greatly reduce councils’ capacity to provide crucial social infrastructure, in an environment where many are already at financial breaking point.

“We are demanding the Government provide more time to consider solutions to current planning problems so we can agree on workable solutions which don’t compromise the fundamental right of residents to have communities where people want to live.”

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