

## **National Trust/ LGSA Public Meeting in Opposition to Planning Changes**

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Tuesday 3 June 2008  
Cr Genia McCaffery

Thank you.

A warm thanks to the National Trust for coordinating tonight's meeting.

And thanks to everyone for coming along at short notice– you are all busy and I am sure there are places you would rather be at 6pm on a Tuesday night.

But your attendance shows how worried we all are – in Local Government, in industry and in our community - about these planning laws.

My colleague, Cr Bruce Miller, the President of the Shires Association and I have been vocal about the implications of many of the changes for councils and their communities since the Government released its discussion paper in November last year.

Practically, this has meant several formal submissions to the Government; the tabling of an alternative model; meetings with the Premier, ministers, the cross bench, industry representatives and community groups; the 'Keep It Local' campaign to make sure communities understood what the changes would mean for them; and an open letter to the Premier in metropolitan and regional newspapers.

I know that many other organisations have undertaken similar actions.

Yet, despite this widespread, constructive and insistent opposition, the Government has tabled the changes and is intent on passing them. At any moment.

What we are talking about here are the biggest changes to planning in this state in almost 30 years.

And the impacts for councils and their communities will be extreme.

### *Loss of Community's Right to have a say*

Most worryingly, will be the loss of our – your, mine, Joe Blogg's and Mary Kay's – right to have a say on what is built and demolished in our streets, our neighbourhoods, our cities and towns.

When I explain to concerned residents how this will happen through the extension of exempt and complying development, they don't believe me.

Private companies – certifiers – paid by the developer – will be able to approve major extensions and renovations – which could take away your view – affect the character of your street – or mean the difference between living next door to a one or two storey house – without you knowing.

You will literally find out when the bulldozer arrives.

### *Loss of character of our neighbourhoods*

The standard building codes, which are supposed to dictate the specifications for houses from Bourke to Balmain and Walgett to Woollahra –will lead to 'cookie cutter' neighbourhoods.

Streets and streets of identical homes that have no reference to the community which they are in.

Residents have a right to choose where they want to live based on the character and look of neighbourhoods.

We know that people exercise this choice. People value the neighbourhoods in which they live.

That choice is going to be lost.

#### *Cuts to local services*

But the impacts are more than aesthetic.

Councils will lose up to \$4 million dollars per year each to put towards building and maintaining community centres, child care centres, local roads and footpaths.

It will mean the cancelling or delaying of projects.

And it will mean that councils, already facing an \$8 billion infrastructure back log, will face increasing pressure from their communities - understandably frustrated at not having access to the services and facilities they need, want and have a right to.

#### *Costs to Ratepayers*

The financial impacts of these changes extend beyond cuts to services.

As difficult as it is to fathom, ratepayers will foot many of the bills that result from the infestation of new panels and overseers.

Specifically, the costs of housing the panels, staffing their research, and paying many of them, will fall on the shoulders of councils.

But most outrageously, ratepayers will have to pay to defend decisions made by arbitrators' when those decisions are appealed.

Decisions that councils and communities will have no say in, and may not agree with.

And council staff may be slapped with fines and tried criminally if they fail to provide information to these panels.

#### *Complexity*

While the minister claims the laws will reduce the complexity of the system, this is delusional.

The resources required to implement all of the extra layers and changes will significantly increase the strain on council planners, and for the foreseeable future further slow processes.

I see lines and lines of confused applicants in council foyers wondering which authority, panel or company they are supposed to submit their DA to.

#### *Conclusion*

There is no doubt the NSW planning system is complex and in need of reform so that homeowners can have their minor extensions handled quickly and easily.

But the planning changes proposed by the Minister aren't the right ones.

They have more holes than a rusty bucket.

Given the Government, reminiscent of a runaway train, is ploughing ahead with the changes,

the only solution is a full and open Public Inquiry, so that communities can understand the implications of the changes, have input into them and be confident that when changes *are* made they are the *right* ones.

The result should not only be quicker approvals.

We all want a more efficient, effective and affordable planning system.

But above all else we want a system where people have a say in creating communities where people want to live.

Thank you.