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THE VOICE OF TASMANIA

MERCURY

# Planning now centre stage

**T**HE future of our planning system could well be one of the defining issues for Tasmania over the next 12 months.

The State Government came to office wanting to cut red and green tape, and promising to cut much of the complexity from a system that has frustrated planners, builders, developers and home owners.

Planning Minister Peter Gutwein has argued that 80 per cent consistency can be achieved, improving on the present 15 per cent across the state's 29 councils. They aim to have a system in place by the end of next year.

The changes have the strong support of the influential Property Council, which says it will cut needless complexity and make the state more attractive for investors.

But there also appears to be growing community concern at the breadth of the proposals.

A coalition of 20 community and environmental groups has called a public meeting to highlight what they say is a one-size-fits-all approach that could effect the character of suburbs, increase development in sensitive areas and give communities less scope to oppose changes.

The challenge for both sides is to not make this yet another fight of the left versus the right.

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Potential solutions, compromise and outcomes become lost in name calling.

If there is genuine community concern, which at

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this early stage there seems to be, then the government must listen. To its credit, it has shown a maturity and capacity to do so in recent times.

The challenge for opponents will be to see if any changes do have merit, whether there is scope for compromise between what the government says it is trying to achieve and what opponents view as the worst-case scenario.

Much will hinge on how councils react.

It is difficult to see any council allowing so-called McMansions in heritage suburbs.

Likewise, there is a need to provide more affordable housing to allow young Tasmanians to enter the market.

Another interesting prospect is whether the government will assume control of major planning decisions from councils if a project meets a certain threshold; in South Australia, this occurs when projects in the state's capital hit the \$10 million mark.

The threshold would likely be lower here, but it has strong support from within both state and local government circles, where concerns have been raised about the professional capacity of elected members, many of whom have very little planning experience, to make major decisions on complicated planning issues that can shape the futures of our key cities.

It has been a busy year, with major issues from energy, to the age at which we send our children to school, to the future of fish farming on the East Coast, dominating the agenda.

Grassroots planning may have been seen as something of a sleeper issue. Rest assured, it is that no longer.