

New planning rules mean we will look just like anywhere else

How do we imagine our future here in Tasmania? Do we want to look like everywhere else or do we want to keep the special qualities which make Tasmania internationally famous?

If we value suburban liveability and streetscapes, our Tasmanian heritage and our wild places, it is time to stand up for what matters.

Right now, we are experiencing an onslaught of new planning rules which will seriously undermine the character of our special Tassie places, and we are largely uninformed, until they hit us.

Imagine this; now the neighbours can build 3m tall, actually on your boundary wall, to your rear and to your side, sloping up at 45 degrees to 8.5m (9.5m height in the city).

From last week, a new Ministerial directive came into force. With no prior consultation, this completely blindsided community, professional planners and Councils. We are not told why a Ministerial Directive can take effect before there is any consultation? Seriously undemocratic.

From last week there are now no limits to the amount of hard surface on a block, so imagine rooves and concrete over an entire block with flooding, heat island effects, plus the storm water public investment required. Living rooms (or any rooms) no longer need to face north for sun, and connecting decks and gardens with living space is not required, nor must the garden face north to receive sun. These are permitted, you cannot object.

Are we setting up slums for the future? In the 21st century why is there no quality or green design encompassed in the planning rules? A building surveyor once told me he thinks Tasmania is becoming third world, squeezing in lots of units with poor design. Where will children play? We all know sun is vital for our physical and mental health, as are green space and playgrounds.

These Ministerial Planning Directives PD4.1 from 2014, and the latest Interim Planning Directive IPD 4 2021, definitely do not meet community expectations in our view. Back in 2016, the Planning Commission recommended the residential standards needed comprehensive review. Instead, more pro-development rules are being rushed in.

Right now, there is a push to remove planning from local Councils. Local government is the tier of government closest to the people, and employs many outstanding planners, working with the public to find the right balance between community and developer needs. At the local level, Councillors and professional staff have indispensable local knowledge. Councillors can sometimes represent their communities, although under the 2014 Ministerial Directive (PD4.1) Councils **must** approve proposed developments which fit the building envelope, despite potentially dominating streetscape, disregarding local character and what communities want.

There is currently a big push to release more land for social housing, (as in the article by Mark Berry chief executive REIT, Examiner 26 Feb). Who exactly is pushing for this land release under the pretext of providing social housing? Who gets a free ride out of deregulation of planning?

Increasing social housing availability is much more nuanced than supply and demand, and arguing land release is over simplistic. Some excellent ideas are included in “Experts say this is what Australia needs to do to solve the housing crisis” Carol Raabus (ABC News 27 Feb 21). “Australia needs a national housing policy, and we could consider rental assistance and subsidised housing, as in Singapore where 80% of people can buy government-subsidised housing”.

There is also a push to extend the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB). We know re-zoning increases the value of land and developers are pushing to extend the urban growth boundary, often citing the need for social housing. (Mercury, Mon 1 March, “Hunt on to Provide Land for Housing”.) Planning Matters Alliance Tasmania recommends there be no re-zoning of land beyond the UGB until the Regional Land Use Strategies are updated, based on clear data and good modelling.

With high government population targets and interstate migration, home construction in Tassie is going gangbusters. Want a builder now? There will be a huge wait and inflated prices. Traffic congestion, urban sprawl and dense development are happening in all directions, eg along the South Arm highway to Lauderdale, with rooves squeezed in, and eaves almost touching.

State-wide planning rules have been changed to facilitate easier, denser development and our wild places, biodiversity, heritage, local character and liveable suburbs are under assault.

Right now, we run the risk of knowing the price of everything but the true value of nothing, as government directives dictate land-use planning, and the increasing push for “development at all costs” undermines the Tasmania we know and love.

Planning Matters Alliance Tasmania, Australia’s 2020 “Planning Champion”, welcomes your help as we advocate for strategic, sustainable, visionary planning which meets community expectations. Most importantly, it’s time we all tell our government what we truly value about Tasmania.