

High-rising costs



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Urban Taskforce CEO
Chris Johnson

Rachel Visser says it's impossible to buy even a small apartment.
Picture: Bob Barker

EXCLUSIVE
ANNABEL HENNESSY & CHRIS HARRIS

SYDNEY apartment prices could be slashed by more than \$150,000 if tough NSW Planning regulations were ditched for Melbourne rules, an Urban Taskforce report has found.

The new report, released exclusively to The Daily Telegraph, reveals planning rules including those applying to ceiling heights, sunlight and floor sizes add \$157,200 to the price of the average \$750,000 two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment in Sydney.

Urban Taskforce chief executive Chris Johnson is now calling on the state government to relax planning laws to Melbourne standards for projects that contribute to



housing affordability. The report — by Sydney Planners HDC, architects Turner Studio and quantity surveyor John Ferrarin — found that rules dictating an extra 10sq m floor size for a two-bedroom unit add \$100,000 alone to the sale price.

Sydney standards require a minimum 75sq m for a two-bedroom unit. In Melbourne units can be 65sq m.

Rules for cross ventilation, solar access in winter and building depth requirements

add another \$24,000, while rules dictating “excessive” ceiling heights of at least 2.7m add at least \$2000.

Mr Johnson said in some cases strict rules around solar access stopped units from being built altogether.

“The requirement for 70 per cent of apartments to get solar access in midwinter for two hours between 9am and 3pm means many housing proposals in high-rise urban areas will be rejected by zealous council planners,” Mr

Johnson said. “In Melbourne and Brisbane, where there are no such solar access requirements, high-rise apartments will be feasible.”

Mr Johnson said there were not enough differences between Sydney and Melbourne’s urban space to justify the stricter NSW standards.

“The NSW standards are from well-meaning planners wanting big apartments that get lots of sunshine but these amenities come at a cost that is forcing many purchasers

out of the market,” Mr Johnson said.

Planning Minister Anthony Roberts said the guidelines were reviewed in 2015 when “councils, industry, practitioners and the community all commended the policy for the positive effect it has had on apartment design”.

Mr Roberts said the review did relax a number of rules, including solar access in some areas. He added the government had shown its commitment to housing affordability with new stamp duty concessions for first-homebuyers.

Surry Hills resident Rachel Visser said it now seemed impossible to buy a small apartment on her teacher’s salary. “Even now tiny apartments are selling for unbelievable figures,” she said. “Maybe I’ll have to move to Melbourne.”