

# Planning reforms a step forward but they could add more red tape

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The package of reforms passed by the NSW Parliament are a step forward for the planning system in NSW but the detail resolution of the reforms could lead to some elements slowing planning applications down says the Urban Taskforce.

"The big picture reforms that have gone through the NSW Parliament sound like progressive moves to lift strategic planning and get communities on board with planning decisions but the detail could create more red tape rather than a more efficient system," says Urban Taskforce CEO, Chris Johnson. "A focus on strategic planning is good but to require yet another planning document in the form of a 'local strategic planning statement' could add significant time and could lead to different interpretations with Local Environmental Plans. By adding another layer we are concerned that this may make planning slower and more complicated."

"The requirement that 'Community Participation Plans' are produced by each council sounds reasonable but the Urban Taskforce is concerned that these plans could lead to further delays for individual projects or they could encourage greater negativity to development. We are concerned that there seems to be little guidance to councils on just what a 'Community Participation Plan' should include. There must be an acceptance of State Government housing targets, State Government infrastructure investment, Federal Government Immigration policies and the impact of these areas on the need to accommodate growth. There must also be a requirement that participation involves all of the community not just individual action groups and that participation is handled in a timely manner. The regulations that support the new legislation must control all of these issues."

"The inclusion of design quality as an objective in the act is a good move particularly as greater densities are likely and communities will be more supportive of well-designed environments. The roll of the NSW Government Architect in giving guidance on design quality is a good use of this position that has been an input to the built environment in NSW over 200 years."

"The rationalisation of Development Control Plans (DCPs) into a standard format is a positive move that should be replicated with Community Participation Plans and Local Strategic Planning Statements. To allow each council to develop very different formats and requirements will only lead to a slower and more complicated planning system. The Urban Taskforce is seeing a lack of discipline in policy terms with housing affordability with multiple government agencies and multiple councils all having very different policies that are leading to a well-meaning but ultimately unsustainable planning system."

"The reforms in the area of building certification will give greater community confidence in this process but we are concerned that certifiers are under so much scrutiny and must certify every step in the planning and building process that the practitioners in this area are finding the future of certifiers is limited. The NSW Government must support this industry rather than continually add so many conditions that the industry is marginalised."

“Another recent reform to the planning system in NSW has been the proposal to amend the definition of ‘bulky goods premises’ to make this definition less restrictive. This is a simple amendment which reflects the changing nature of retail in Australia. This kind of adaptiveness and flexibility should be adopted to other areas of the planning system”

“The Urban Taskforce supports reforms of the NSW planning system that simplify the process as this will reduce the cost of housing. Our concern is that a number of the recent reforms, while being popular with communities worried about future growth, will add more layers and red tape to the planning system which will end up lifting the cost of housing in NSW. We are keen to work with the NSW Government in ensuring that the detail of the planning reforms included in regulations do not turn well-meaning policies into excessive red tape.”

*The **Urban Taskforce** is a property development industry group, representing Australia's most prominent property developers and equity financiers.*

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