

# URBAN —LIVING NETWORK



Urban Living Network covers news about new homes and apartment developments, retail trends, job locations, density related to railway stations, urban projects on city fringes, strata and planning reforms. We aim to provide real data on trends, housing supply and demographic change. ULN is essential reading for all those involved in urban living including politicians, councils, planners, architects, developers, financiers, legal firms, real estate agents and strata bodies.

**Tom Forrest**  
CEO - Urban Taskforce Australia

**30 June 2023**

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## **1. ICAC finds former NSW Premier engaged in serious corrupt conduct**



The ICAC this week found that former Premier Gladys Berejiklian engaged in serious corrupt conduct in failing to discharge her duty under section 11 of the ICAC Act to notify the commission of her suspicion that former Wagga MP Darryl Maguire had engaged in activities which concerned, or might have concerned, corrupt activities.

Her conduct undermined the high standards of probity that are sought to be achieved by the ministerial code of conduct – which she as Premier administered.

A sorry chapter in the history of NSW politics closes.

It's more than 600 pages, but we have attached the Operation Keppel report [here](#) for a bit of light weekend reading.

## **2. Urban Taskforce to the Australian Institute of Architects – “stick to architecture, leave the economics of development alone”**



The fact that the Australian Institute of Architects would put out a release commenting on the economics of housing development shows that they are more a quasi-political party than an institution representing their profession.

The economics of affordable housing supply is way beyond the brief of these wannabe alternate government! This call from AIA has absolutely nothing to do with architecture, design or urbanism?

Their criticism of the Minns Government's affordable housing incentive initiatives, where affordable housing must be held for 15 years (they want it to be held in perpetuity), betrays their ignorance of the reality of the economics of development.

The result of the AIA policy would be the same as that of the last 5 years when former Minister Stokes had the Government Architect's Office effectively take over planning policy and they produced no affordable housing and a housing supply crisis.

To read the Australian Institute of Architects media release, [click here](#).

### **3. Minns Government takes first step in sort out tangled mess of planning responsibilities across Government**



The Minn's Government announced this week it was streamlining its approach to strategic planning by axing the Greater Cities Commission and the Western Parkland City Authority and folding back its resources into the Department of Planning.

The decision will create a clear line of responsibility for planning policy and outcomes delivery.

A byzantine system of bureaucracy had evolved over the last 8 years which simply created confusing lines of accountability and responsibility.

Who was responsible for planning? The Premier? The Minister for Planning? The Minister for Cities? The Minister for Local Government? ... Who was responsible for Infrastructure? The Minister for Water? The Minister for Transport? The Minister for Education or for Health? The Western Parkland Cities Authority? The GCC? The Treasurer? Who???

The answer to these questions was, as it turned out, that no-one knew, and something had to change.

Under the former Government, the GCC had basically set up a mini alternative Government – an array of Commissioners all with responsibilities that replicated entire Government agencies.

You had a Commissioner responsible for Economics (clearly the Treasury could not help here); a Social Commissioner (FACS and Aboriginal Affairs needed to be replaced according to the GCC); and an Environment Commissioner (who replaced the "E" from DPE!!)

Then along came a new Government and after careful assessment, they took the controversial decision to allow Government Departments an opportunity to participate and remove this alternate universe.

And while they were there, the axe also fell on the Western Parkland City Authority with their resources also being wrapped back into DPE.

With bureaucrats either falling over each other or duck shoving responsibility, no wonder the state of strategic planning in NSW was a mess.

The real tragedy was not the duplication, it was the fact that we find ourselves in the midst of a housing supply crisis that began and grew under the watch of the GCC.

In its first 100 days, the Minns Government has laid down some important markers in terms of rationalising roles, establishing accountability, removing red tape, and providing incentives for more housing.

To read Urban Taskforce's release on the recent changes, [click here](#).

To read the Premier and Minister for Planning's release, [click here](#).

## 4. Minns Government forces through new tax on housing supply



The NSW Legislative Council this week passed the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Amendment (Housing and Productivity Contributions) Bill 2023*.

Disappointingly, the Minns Government failed to support amendments moved by Tania Mihailuk MLC which would have moved the incidence of the tax from the CC stage to the OC stage. This was a point strongly argued by the Urban Taskforce when presenting to the Upper House inquiry into the Bill. We were pleased to see the Coalition support this amendment along with Liberal Democrat John Ruddick MLC.

However, Labor chose on this occasion to join the Greens, AJP and the Legalise Cannabis Party to block the amendment. In tough times for our sector, this new tax will cause developments to stall at CC. Treasury won't get the anticipated revenue and worse, the tax will act to dampen housing supply.

Urban Taskforce will continue to call on the Minister for Planning to act administratively to move the timing of the HPC tax from CC to OC.

The Minns Government has been positive to date on addressing the housing supply crisis. This was their first legislative test when it came to housing supply.

Urban Taskforce took the opportunity to call on the Government to defer the implementation of new BASIX requirements on October 1, 2023 as well as coming up with a solution to water infrastructure costs which did not place the entirety of the impost on new home buyers.

To read Urban Taskforce's release, [click here](#):

## **5. City of Sydney approves Meriton's housing development at Zetland**



Despite raising objections over the impact of a tower on street alignment (we're still trying to work that one out), Randwick Council's objections to much needed housing at Zetland (not even in the council area) has been rejected by City of Sydney Council, with all bar one councillor voting in favour of the development.

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**“This is density done well”**

**Councillor HY William Chan, City of Sydney Council meeting, June 26**

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The project will deliver 784 apartments and 30 townhouses.

To read more [click here](#).

## 6. Former Finance Minister now repudiating his own policy in Opposition



Urban Taskforce notes with irony the fact that the Leader of the Opposition in the Upper House, the Hon Damian Tudehope MLC, is now asking questions in Parliament of the Minister for Water on the negative impact of the proposed Water DSP charges on housing supply.

Now everyone knows that former Treasurer Matt Kean did not have much in common with former Finance Minister Tudehope, but he might have noticed that as the shareholder Minister for Sydney Water, he co-signed a direction to them requiring Sydney Water to make a submission to IPART that resulted in precisely the increase in fees and charges he is now questioning!

Policy gymnastics or was he just paying no attention at all?

The Treasurer, Daniel Mookhey, quickly retorted in Parliament that "This was your charge!"

Correctly so, but now it is in the Government's bailiwick to address what is a serious threat to new housing supply in Western and Southwestern Sydney.

## 7. Urban Taskforce CEO interviewed on converting commercial office space to residential





Urban Taskforce has consistently said a range of strategies and reforms needs to be deployed to address the mounting housing supply crisis.

Sarah Abo from Channel 9's Today show interviewed CEO Tom Forrest on the idea of converting disused or underused commercial buildings to residential purposes.

As long as health and safety, ventilation, fireproofing and other pertinent issues were addressed, this could open up a number of sites in well located areas.

Up until recently when Council went OTT on zoning militancy, there were plenty of examples of empty office buildings being converted successfully into residential buildings.

Tom noted that 118 Alfred St at Millers Point, a commercial building just down the road from the Channel 9 studios in North Sydney, was converted into residential apartments, and noted a number of vacant office buildings that could get similar treatment if Council planning bureaucrats were willing to be more flexible. This is particularly so in B grade office buildings, where demand had collapsed during and post COVID.

The message is simple. There is a housing supply crisis and that means doing something to fix it, not standing in the way.

This is just one strategy that could help turn around housing supply.

To watch the interview [click here](#).

## **8. NSW Housing Minister reprimands Bayside Council for go slow on housing**



Kudos to NSW Housing Minister, Rose Jackson, who this week scolded Bayside Council for deferring consideration on a proposal by Land and Housing corporation (LAHC) for a 152 apartment development with 45 social housing units. It would replace 26 existing social housing apartments. All about 1km walk to Mascot rail station.

A win-win surely?

Not so for Bayside, which now wants another year (or two) to undertake “further investigations”. LAHC originally lodged documentation for the redevelopment in 2017! If it takes this long to approve a DA from LAHC, what hope do the rest of us have?

The Minister publicly expressed her dismay at the go slow tactics of Council:

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*“We need projects like this to get off the ground and we can’t wait five years, site by site, for this stuff to not even be approved.”*

**Minister for Housing, Rose Jackson MLC, SMH, June 26**

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Go Rose!!!

To read more, [click here](#).

## **9. Aland development at Campbelltown frustrated by local planning panel**



*More housing and more community facilities – but still being held up by a planning panel*

You need look no further for frustrations in the current planning system than developer Aland's Campbelltown Park proposal.

Like the LAHC proposal, this has been seven years in the making. In this case, Campbelltown City Council has backed the proposal after Aland replaced an 8 storey residential tower with a community building along with one acre of communal open space.

Despite an amended plan gaining the support of Council, the planning panel now responsible for its assessment has knocked it back because of an extra storey on the community centre.

To read more, [click here](#).

## 10. The advantages of density - Ross Gittins

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***“But the people who already live near the centre and the amenities like their detached, single story low-density lifestyle. They vote for local and state politicians who will resist pressures for infill”- turning factories and warehouses into medium rise or high-rise housing.”***

**Ross Gittins, SMH, June 26**

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SMH economics editor Ross Gittins this week outline the case for density in our cities.

The economics of agglomeration, of life in the centre, delivers benefits – amenity, transport links, jobs, entertainment and night life. Gittins points out the source of tension as stated in the quote above.

And he dismisses NIMBY's claims that they are already packed to the rafters – noting that Melbourne and Brisbane have higher density inner suburbs than Sydney, not to mention truly global cities like New York, London and Paris.

To read a great analysis of the advantages of density in the inner suburbs, and the push back from rent seeking NIMBY's, [click here](#).

NIMBYism is classic rent seeking behaviour – an attempt to grow one's existing wealth by manipulating the social or political environment, without creating any new wealth.

By pressuring MP's to come out against housing, NIMBY's seek to ultimately restrict new supply and keep property prices high. Self-interest lies at the heart of their actions.

Over the last 2 decades NIMBYism was largely left unchallenged. This is no longer the case – and perhaps one of the silver linings of the housing supply crisis is a franker debate on the need for well-located homes that follow demand rather than outdated planning edicts and the desires of the pampered NIMBY brigade.

A similar sentiment was conveyed by Aaron Patrick's AFR article on the challenge taken on by Premier Chris Minns is confronting Sydney's property foundations." Yet it was increasingly becoming a battle between the minority in their NIMBY enclaves and the rest of Sydney...

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***“Therein must lie Minns’ political calculation: the benefit to the majority will overcome, electorally, resentment from voters whose million-dollar north shore and eastern suburbs gardens are overshadowed by new apartment blocks.”***

*Aaron Patrick, AFR, June 28*

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To read Patrick's take on the challenges that lie ahead of the Minns Government in the planning space, [click here](#).



The NIMBY rent seeking way

## 11. Woollahra Council Mayor opposes affordable housing reform while Urban Taskforce calls out rank NIMBYism



Page 6 of the Wentworth Courier, June 28

You wouldn't be knocked down with a feather, but the Mayor of Woollahra Municipal Council has passed a Mayoral Minute opposing the Minns Government's affordable housing initiatives. In the minute, Mayor Wynne somehow construed the provision of housing for young people, for key workers and for the disadvantaged, as "a further denial of democracy " and a "further step in the systematic dismantling local government."

Strong views from the Mayor; huge leaps in logic and bizarrely warped priorities.

To read more, [click here](#).

Meanwhile, CEO Tom Forrest's defense of the Minns Government's proposed affordable housing reforms and calling out NIMBY motivations for what they were, all printed in the Wentworth Courier, may have caused a few eastern suburbs NIMBY types to choke on their breakfast granola.

Tom pointed out that the entrenched opposition to date was a compelling reason to take planning powers off NIMBY councils in order to deliver the market and affordable housing Sydney in particular needed. The comments would have caused many readers of the Courier to choke on their amaranth-quinoa and oatmeal-milk granola ...

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***“I think that was a deliberate move, taken by the government to push through the NIMBY attitude that has dominated the eastern suburbs and North Shore councils”***

**CEO Tom Forrest, Wentworth Courier, June 26**

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The same article appeared in the North Shore Times, ensuring Urban Taskforce's maintains its strong following in these communities.

To read more, [click here](#).

## **12. Waverley Council spending up big trying to stop housing**



Another bête noire of the Urban Taskforce, Waverley Council, apparently spent \$764,309 of rate payers' funds in the 12 months since June 2022, on top of \$630,000 in 2021/22, on legal proceedings related to deemed refusals.

Waverley Council has appeared at 43 appeals in the Land & Environment Court over the past 12 months.

Even Council staff are now starting to admit this ideological extravagance is not sustainable and are now saying that this is resulting in a redirection of council funds for the assessment of DA's.

Our point exactly.

For context, Waverley Council gave 156 approvals in the 12 months to December 2022!

Yet the eastern suburbs form of NIMBYism is not content to slug it out in the Courts.

Last year we reported on Council engaging an internal “community planning advocate” on a 6-figure salary to help fight against development proposals within the Waverley LGA.

They also have sought to force developers to explain the impact of development on the “spiritual health” of residents.

The extravagance and indulgence of this Council shows the ludicrous and wasteful ends some will go to stop new housing.

Waverley Council is “Exhibit A” when it comes to demonstrating the extravagance, self indulgence and overwhelming unfairness of eastern suburb and north shore Councils to share the load when it comes to housing.

To read more, [click here](#).

## 13. Woolworths to appeal North Sydney Council decision on shop top development at Neutral Bay



Current



Proposed

Woolworths has lodged a rezoning review of North Sydney Council’s decision to reject its proposal for a new supermarket, 63 units and improved public space and car parking to replace the aged supermarket at the current Neutral Bay site.

The red tape required to get a well-conceived redevelopment, one which places housing on top of major retail, is symptomatic of the ills of the current planning system. Do they really hate housing supply that much at North Sydney Council?

To read more, [click here](#).

## 14. Hornsby Town Centre Plan - Feedback Report



Hornsby Shire Council has generated a Feedback Summary Report which summarises submissions received on its plan to reinvigorate the Hornsby Town Centre.

Urban Taskforce wrote a submission in support of the aims of the town centre plan – to generate significant uplift in residential housing, supported by additional jobs, which is fitting for the location and proximity of the Hornsby CBD to public transport infrastructure.

Hornsby is a strategic centre with good transport links which would benefit from more housing.

Council is using feedback to help decide on the next steps, including potential changes to the proposed development of the Town Centre.

There is also further work required in terms of State agency collaboration, feasibility and infrastructure costing review and drafting of planning controls. Urban Taskforce would expect State Government agencies to work productivity with Council to help realise its vision for the town centre.

To read the feedback report, [click here](#).



## 15. Albanese Government finalises HomeBuilder extension



Minister for Housing, Julie Collins MP, announced last Friday that the Albanese Government had negotiated a revised National Partnership Agreement to deliver certainty for existing HomeBuilder applicants.

This is welcome news, as the Urban Taskforce led the charge in pushing the Commonwealth to extend the timeframes. In the midst of a housing supply crisis, increased labour and construction costs, this is a positive for the broader industry facing very tough times.

Under the revised deal, which has been signed by all states and territories, the deadline for existing HomeBuilder applicants to submit supporting documentation has been extended to 30 June 2025.

This will help thousands of existing applicants access grants of up to \$25,000. It gives all existing HomeBuilder applicants another two years to finalise construction and submit all required supporting documentation. The extension is available for all applicants, including for those with contracts for off-the-plan purchases, new builds and renovations.

To read the Minister's press release, [click here](#).

From July 1, the threshold for stamp duty exemptions will increase from \$650,000 to \$800,000 and the threshold for stamp duty concessions will rise from \$800,000 to \$1 million.

Based on the current housing market, NSW Treasury expects about 8,600 first home buyers in the \$650,000 to \$800,000 range to pay no stamp duty over the next year, and about 4,400 first home buyers in the \$800,000 to \$1 million range to pay a concessional rate of stamp duty.

To read more, [click here](#).

## 17. Other News

# THIS WEEK...

## **Core logic report**

A Core logic report release this week showed an alarming loss of housing stock across Australia with property investors starting to drop dropping out of the market.

New listings added to the market were -20% below the previous decade monthly average across Australia. The 'months of supply' ratio, which measures the amount of time it would take to deplete stock based on the current rate of home sales, fell to 1.8 months in May.

To read more [click here](#).

## **Minns Government increases stamp duty exemption thresholds for first home buyers**

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To read more, [click here](#).

## 18. Council Watch



### Bayside Council

Bayside Council has been making news but for all the wrong reasons. After the go slow on the NSW Government's plan to increase social and market housing at Botany, it now appears that the Council in rewriting its LEP is seeking to down zone in a number of key areas – effectively banning townhouses across much of its residentially zoned land through removing Additional Permitted Uses.

The R2 low density residential previously permitted townhouses and apartments, now will permit neither;

The new R3 medium density residential, which previously allowed townhouses and apartments, is proposed to only permit townhouses.

For more detail, [click here](#).

## 19. UTA in the news

A busy week for Urban Taskforce in the news...

### 1. CEO on planning woes on 2GB's morning show

CEO Tom Forrest was on the Ben Fordham Morning show, talking to Mark Levy in a wide-ranging interview on the housing supply crisis and the need to crash through the NIMBY wall and deliver the housing a growing NSW needs and demanded by the National Housing Accord:

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***“Really, I don’t accept that COVID was an excuse. And what the planning system should have been doing is racking and stacking the approvals on the shelf so that as soon as we opened the economy and brought the immigrants back and brought the overseas students studying in our universities back, we had approvals on the shelf and we could get on with the job of building them.”***

**CEO Tom Forrest, 2GB, Tuesday 27 June**

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### 2. Build houses where younger people want them

ABC TV News interviewed CEO Tom Forrest on development in Sydney's east, seeing it as ripe for housing given its amenity, transport, and proximity to jobs. Younger generations were increasingly crying out for housing opportunities in these suburbs:

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***"Young people are effectively being locked out of locations like Little Bay but indeed all the way around Sydney, because there's been a shortage in the number of approvals and a shortage in the housing supply"***

**CEO Tom Forrest, ABC, Sunday June 25**

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To read more, [click here](#).

### **3. The role of larger apartments**

The SMH sought comment from Urban Taskforce on their article on what sort of role larger apartments can play in addressing the housing supply crisis. CEO Tom Forrest said that rather than inflexible planning regulations, it was best left to the market to deliver the product demand by buyers:

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***"The fastest way to deliver on housing supply is to remove mandates for one-bedroom, two-bedroom or three-bedroom apartments and allow the private sector to flexibly meet demand without having to run the gauntlet of the NSW planning system"***

**CEO Tom Forrest, SMH, Sunday June 25**

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A market-based solution to a market problem. Who would have thought? To read more [click here](#). Please note, this link may be paywall protected.

### **4. The end of the GCC**

Urban Taskforce CEO Tom Forrest was interviewed by ABC Illawarra on the concerns within industry over the track record of the GCC and why it had to go..

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***“I was concerned that there was no real linkage between the people who are setting the targets and holding the councils accountable for the outcomes. So the Greater Cities Commission was setting targets and then effectively folding their hands and handing it over to the Department of Planning and local councils to deliver on them.”***

**CEO Tom Forrest, ABC Illawarra, Wednesday June 28**

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#### **5. Minns Government imposes a new tax on housing**

AAP covered Urban Taskforce’s concerns with the decision by the Minns Government to ignore a simple tweak to legislation which would have imposed a new housing tax at the end of construction phase rather than the start when cash flow is at its tightest.

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***“Put simply, this new tax will result in many projects stalling before construction starts... It will not deliver the anticipated revenue and worse, it will work against the government's stated commitment to deliver on housing supply.”***

**CEO Tom Forrest, AAP, Wednesday June 28**

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## **URBAN TASKFORCE MEMBER NEWS**

*\*Please note, the links used below may be paywall protected.*

**“...Rebel Property Group and Braxton have won approval for their \$70-million six-storey Marrickville residential project just five months after filing plans...”**[...read more...](#)

*- The Urban Developer, June 26*

**“... Goodman and Charter Hall are among early movers in this space, while single-user e-commerce and delivery companies such as Woolworths and Amazon also see vertical as a viable play...”**[...read more...](#)

*-The Urban Developer, June 27*

**“... Developer Lendlease will lead a major revamp of Melbourne’s famed Queen Victoria Market precinct, with plans for a \$1.7bn overhaul that will transform a block to the south of the iconic property...”**[... read more](#)

...

-The Australian, June 28

**“Ellipse Property Group** has confirmed that it has received development approval for its \$850 million Carrington Place, a masterplanned community in Castle Hill designed by Tony Owen Partners and Stanistic Architects, with **Scott Carver** handling interiors.”...[read more](#)...

-Architecture and Design, 28 June

“... **Goodman**, the Australian industrial property and business space provider heavyweight, is joining the charge towards build-to-rent, revealing plans to level a western Sydney business park and replace it with six apartment blocks.”... [read more](#) ...

-The Urban Developer, 29 June

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