

MERCURY

Planning for the people

Planning regulation is seldom considered one of the more compelling discussion topics, until it affects people personally. It's not unexpected, most of us are content to ignore the minutia of height limits and setbacks until it's time to plan an extension, or erect a shed or, God forbid, a proposed development affects our interests directly.

For many years it has been widely acknowledged that the state's planning regimen has been in need of reform. Having 29 councils and even more planning schemes is a recipe for inefficiency and waste.

Planning and Local Government Minister Peter Gutwein has said as much — talking up the benefits of uniformity and consistency.

It is clear the new rules have caused a deal of consternation in the community, something that Mr Gutwein reassures is not grounded in the reality of his reforms.

Two developments — both on the Eastern Shore — illustrate a deeper issue in planning and government.

The Shandong Chambroad project at Kangaroo Bay and the proposal for Wirksworth at Bellerive have attracted vocal and organised opposition from community members.

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Central to the overlapping campaigns is a sense in the community the consultation from state and local government has been inadequate.

While there is a place for decisive government action, conducting meaningful community consultation is now regarded as vital in securing social licence for projects such as these.

Late, slow or perfunctory consultation is not good enough, nor is consultation which has no chance of affecting outcomes, nor are glib rejections of dissenting voices. Democracy has evolved.

Given the long-term impact of development, people have a right to feel they have a say in how that community will look in the future. Any resident of Hobart can nominate their own favourite planning disasters, inappropriate developments which have blighted our fair city. We must learn from these mistakes.

Engagement with the community can be difficult and at times ugly, but done well it ensures better outcomes. The perception that people have not been kept well-enough informed about the actions of governments they elect is underlined, for example, by the decision not to reveal the sale price of the council-owned land on which the Shandong Chambroad development is to proceed, as reported in today's *Mercury*. There is little doubt the figure will emerge in time, making the secrecy puzzling.

In planning regulation, a bit like many areas of government endeavour, there is a trend for regulations to change over time so that at times the balance tips towards those opposing development, and sometimes in favour of proponents.

Time will tell whether the community believes Mr Gutwein has achieved the right balance.

In a state like Tasmania, where employment growth is so dependent on fostering economic opportunities, like that represented by the Kangaroo Bay development, it is essential that planning balances competing interests well and that the process itself has the full confidence of the public.

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