

Development reform to consider local communities



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Local Governments support streamlining processes to assist economic activity as the community recovers from the pandemic, and are committed to working with the State Government to ensure local residents continue to have a say.

Wide-ranging planning reforms are being progressed through the WA Parliament, including a new development application process with an 18-month fast track option for larger scale developments worth more than \$30 million.

As the Planning and Development Amendment Bill 2020 currently stands, the community involvement in these larger scale developments is unclear.

What is unquestionable though is the need for projects to move efficiently through the approvals process to stimulate the economy and get Western Australians back into jobs.

The WA Planning Commission will become the sole decision maker for these significant building projects and won't be required to take community feedback on board.

These are extraordinary powers for an extraordinary time and it is hoped that decisions won't be made without the appropriate level of community input.

While Local Government supports planning reforms and cutting red tape, the sector has concerns that not enough consideration has been given to the potential impact on local residents.

Councils play a crucial role in reflecting local views, issues and expectations in proposed planning

changes and in the assessment of applications.

Local Governments go through exhaustive community consultation in the development of local planning schemes and these established community views should not be lost in the application of any new powers.

After all, it is the community who has to deal with the potential impacts once projects are completed, such as possible overshadowing, loss of heritage, environmental values or impact on local amenity.

There is no question we have a need to stimulate activity to reduce the economic downturn arising from COVID-19, but the timeframe of the proposed reform is at odds with the haste with which it was introduced into Parliament.

Under the Bill, the fast track option is open for 18 months and projects are not required to commence substantially for another four years.

These changes may free up the construction and development companies to pursue their commercial ambitions, but the risk that this could be to the detriment of the needs and views of the local community needs to be mitigated.

While well-intentioned, it would be unfortunate if these reforms leave our communities with negative and long term impacts arising from ill-considered developments.

Local Government is totally on board with looking at opportunities for common planning approaches without diminishing the views of the community. However, it also needs to be part of the discussion on the Bill.

The sector has been working closely with the State Government in the pandemic response and as WA moves into the recovery phase, the strength of this relationship will only benefit the community.



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