

Tasmania needs to plan for housing

LGAT Opinion Editorial - Submitted 14.4.2021

Local Government makes decisions daily that influence how local communities evolve. We do this by planning for future developments via the preparation of our planning schemes and then by approving individual development applications. However, in many parts of Tasmania, councils are struggling to keep up with the demand for new housing and in many cases this is due to the outdated nature of our Regional Land Use Strategies.

The identification of land suitable for housing development is the first step in the development process. Housing supply must be well located and well serviced in areas where infrastructure can provide for and attract new residents, with supporting jobs, social and community infrastructure and public transport. In Tasmania however, there has been limited action in planning for and locating new housing supply. Planning resources at local and State Government levels are limited and our efforts in recent years have been constrained by a focus on the Tasmanian Planning Scheme and red tape reduction, at the expense of the sound strategic planning we need to provide housing.

It is the Regional Land Use Strategies where the rubber hits the road for housing availability. It is these strategies that determine when and where land should be released for our growing population. Unfortunately, these strategies are now over 11 years old. Just think back to how different Tasmania was 11 years ago – for instance we had 30,000 less people and there was no MONA.

An update to the regional strategies will support land releases and infill development proposals to accommodate our growing population, provide clarity on what our community now desires for their local areas and will drive any reforms needed in our regulatory system to facilitate the changes.

This work needs to connect state and local land use and transport planning. It should include consideration of where population and housing growth should be allowed versus constrained and where it makes sense to invest in infrastructure, both hard and social. Solutions must be based on a comprehensive understanding of future housing demand and supply by location and designate areas for urban renewal and infill. As you can imagine this all takes time to do well and that is why councils are asking the Government to commence this work now. Minor amendments to the existing regional strategies to deal with specific pressure points will no longer cut it.

While we continue to just tweak our regulatory system, at the expense of the strategic work required to make a plan for achieve our community's expectations for land use and where our growing population will be accommodated, then we will continue to see Tasmanians' unable to secure affordable housing.

Local government supports the review and update of the regional strategies being led by the State Government, with appropriate additional resourcing. However, it must be recognised that councils are responsible for the implementation of planning reform 'on the ground' and consequently local government's understanding of the necessary frameworks to build strong local character must not be overlooked. Local government can provide real value to the next stages of the State Government's planning agenda, but only if engaged and supported to do so early and on-going throughout the process.

For the past few years, the State Government and councils have been implementing a significant planning reform agenda in the form of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme. While a large body of work

has been progressed, there is still much to be done, particularly to address the housing availability crisis.

Now is the time to move from tweaking at the edges of our regulatory system, to commence the important task of planning for our future housing needs. To do this we need to commence a review of the Regional Land Use Strategies immediately, with additional resourcing at the State and local level to support the process.

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14.4.2021