NEW PLANNING SYSTEM TO BOOST REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

New planning laws in NSW will help reboot the economies of regional and rural communities by setting upfront rules for fast-tracked approval of townhouses, retail and office projects.

Legislation for the new planning system has passed the Legislative Assembly in the NSW Parliament and is due to be debated in the Legislative Council in November.

Planning and Infrastructure Minister Brad Hazzard said regional communities already led the way in using streamlined planning approvals.

“Regional councils have shown this can unclog the approval system, get much-needed development happening faster and free up vital council resources from handling individual development assessments,” he said.

“Most new homes, renovations and extensions can already be approved under the NSW Housing Code as complying development.

“A number of councils - such as Coonamble, Coolamon, Jerilderie and Junee – currently approve more than half of their applications using this simpler, faster process.

“We now want to extend those benefits to the next level of developments, including medium density housing and commercial buildings.”

The Planning Bill proposes an additional streamlined approval track, called ‘code assessment’, designed primarily for growth areas.

“Under this code Regional councils – in consultation with their communities – will be able to choose where streamlined assessment should apply.

If an application complies 100 per cent with the rules set upfront by council in consultation with the community, it will go through a fast-tracked assessment by a council planner.

Many councils from regional and rural areas – including Albury, Armidale Dumaresq, Singleton, Lake Macquarie and Mid Western Regional - supported the Government’s use of streamlined assessment in written submissions on the reforms.

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In less than 20 years an additional 2 million people will live in NSW, Mr Hazzard said.

“One in five NSW residents will be aged 65 years or older, this is a significant trend across the state with particular impacts for regional areas,” Mr Hazzard said.

“Planning for this growth is vital and will be carried out major service providers and government agencies to identify housing, employment, infrastructure and service priorities.”

OTHER BENEFITS FOR REGIONAL NSW:

  o A NSW Planning Policy for Agriculture and Rural Resources will be prepared system to provide specific guidance about how the needs of agriculture are addressed.
  o A new Planning Advisory Service will offer a single point of access for advice and resources on the planning system for councils and the community;
  o New Community Participation Guidelines will include specific tools and practices tailored for regional and rural settings; and
  o Upfront and better co-ordinated planning for infrastructure to ensure the necessary infrastructure is provided alongside growth.

HOW E-PLANNING WILL BENEFIT REGIONAL NSW:

  • The NSW Government is introducing a number of ePlanning initiatives to make life much easier for mums and dads and small businesses, particularly in rural and regional areas.
  • Already 41 councils in regional and rural areas have either switched on, or are adopting, the Electronic Housing Code, which allows people to access planning information at the click of a button to help them more easily lodge fast-tracked applications.