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Community participation in local planning enhanced

The community will have a greater voice in planning decisions in their neighbourhoods through a suite of reforms to the planning system.

Changes to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act) will mean that every council, the Department of Planning and Environment and other NSW agencies will need to prepare a community participation plan that details how and when the community will be involved in planning matters.

NSW Department of Planning and Environment’s Deputy Secretary for Policy, Strategy & Governance, Alison Frame, said the recent reforms to the Act will promote confidence in planning through clearer and simpler upfront community involvement in the decision-making process.

“It is imperative that the community has a say on what is going on in their local area, city and state, so we are putting the provisions in place that formalise this process,” Ms Frame said.

“The plans will have to meet the minimum consultation requirements for community participation. This includes minimum timeframes for public consultation for various processes under the Act.”

These plans will have to reflect the mandatory minimum time periods which have been gathered together in one easy convenient place in the Act. These include a 14-day exhibition period for Development Applications, unless the Community Participation Plan says otherwise. For LEP’s the minimum exhibition period is 28 days. Authorities will be encouraged to go beyond the minimum requirements, however, in order to ensure the consultation suits the needs of the communities.

As part of the reforms, authorities will also have to take into consideration new community participation principles, which set the bar for how the community should be engaged.

“The principles state, among other things, that the community has a right to be informed about planning matters that affect it, and local residents should be given the opportunity to participate as early as possible in strategic planning,” Ms Frame added.

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