Housing & Planning

VOTE 1
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INDEPENDENT for KEW

Victoria needs more homes, and local democracy is how we build them well. The State Government should set housing targets and hold councils accountable for meeting them. Councils, working with their communities, should decide how and where those homes are built. Local decision-making shouldn't be an excuse to stop housing, it should be how we deliver it well.

As an independent representative in state government, I will focus on modern construction methods, planning certainty, community-based planning and delivering affordable housing.

1. Return planning power to local councils and their communities

The State Government, through the Activity Centre, Development Facilitation Program and Great Design Fast Track, has stripped planning approval away from local councils, sidelining community voices and common-sense decision-making.

Planning approvals can and should be faster, and councils must be held to clear timeframes. But approvals are not the main reason homes aren't being built. Local councils have approved more than 100,000 dwellings that have not yet been built.[1] The bigger bottleneck comes after approval, when high construction costs, labour shortages and finance make projects unviable.

The answer is to tackle those costs and hold developers to their approvals, not to take decision-making away from local councils who know their communities best.

Heritage and growth are not in conflict. Boroondara's streets carry more than 150 years of Victoria's architectural history, and good planning can add new homes while protecting the places that make our neighbourhoods worth living in. That only works when plans are made locally, with heritage built in from the start rather than considered after heights and zones have already been set.

What the Activity Centre Program does:

The State has rezoned land around train stations and shopping centres and imposed new height and built-form controls set in Spring Street rather than by local council, with the backing of community input.

What the Development Facilitation Program (DFP) does:

It lets the Planning Minister approve large projects, bypassing councils entirely. Neighbours have no right to be notified or to seek review at VCAT.

The former Leo's site in Kew Junction shows why it fails. Boroondara Council supported redevelopment and substantially more housing on the site and Council's planning experts proposed practical improvements to height, overshadowing, landscaping and pedestrian movement. Instead, the Minister used the DFP to approve 18 storeys, above the State's own 16-storey control, leaving public spaces with about one hour of sunlight a day during the winter.

What the Great Design Fast Track (GDFT) does:

It extends the same DFP model to medium-density housing. For apartment and townhouse projects of eight or more homes, the Planning Minister, rather than council, is the decision maker and can waive local planning rules. The community has no right to seek review at VCAT. The trade-off is meant to be great design, but in practice projects approved through the pathway don't meet the design principles it was set up to reward.[2] [3] Speed has been delivered, but quality hasn't.

My policy on housing targets, the Activity Centre Program and the Development Facilitation Program is to:

- **Repeal the Development Facilitation Program, the Great Design Fast Track and Activity Centre Program controls, including VC257, and restore the previous zones as an interim measure.**
- **Give councils 12 months to deliver place-based plans, developed with their communities, that meet the state's housing targets in full and protect heritage.**
- **A council that misses the deadline or falls short of its target cedes planning approval back to the State Government.**
- **Plan growth and infrastructure together: public transport, open space, schools, walking and cycling paths, and local services.**

2. Fix planning codes

Fast approvals are only acceptable if the standards being approved against are good ones. The State's new codes approve homes automatically if they meet minimum standards, with no say for neighbours, but those standards are too weak on tree canopy, deep soil, setbacks, overshadowing, space for planting and heritage.

The bigger gap is on larger blocks. The Single Home Code only applies to lots under 300 square metres. On most blocks in Kew, a new house needs no planning permit at all. It is approved against the building regulations alone, which allow 60% site coverage, require only 20% permeable ground, and say nothing about canopy trees or deep soil. That is why family homes and gardens are being replaced by houses that fill almost the entire block.

My policy on planning codes is to:

- **Raise the siting standards in the Building Regulations so every new house, with or without a planning permit, leaves room for canopy trees and deep soil, lets rainwater soak in, sits back from the street and neighbours, and protects neighbours' sunlight.**
- **Review the Single Home, Townhouse, Low Rise and Mid Rise Codes to ensure standards are strong on canopy, setbacks, overshadowing and heritage.**
- **Once the standards are right, projects that fully meet them should be approved without delay. That gives builders certainty and neighbours quality.**

3. Protect our tree canopy

Trees are essential infrastructure: they cool our streets, absorb stormwater and make neighbourhoods liveable. RMIT research shows around 40% canopy cover is needed to meaningfully cool streets, yet in Melbourne's inner suburbs only 3% of buildings have even 30% canopy around them.[4] Fines for illegal tree removal are so low that developers treat them as a cost of doing business.

My policy to protect our tree canopy is:

- **Higher fines for illegal removal of a canopy tree, directed to enforcement and replanting.**
- **Require enough deep soil for new trees to grow to full size, in both the planning codes and the building regulations.**
- **Prohibit removal of registered significant trees unless an independent arborist confirms they are dead or dangerous.**

4. Deliver more affordable and social housing

Tens of thousands of Victorians are waiting for social housing, and our current approach is too slow. Victoria relies on voluntary inclusionary zoning, negotiated project by project with developers. It hasn't worked: affordable homes keep falling short of what's needed because delivery depends on developer goodwill rather than clear rules.

Additionally, developers currently have no obligation to deliver on their 10% affordable housing requirement. Too often, a developer opts out of delivering affordable housing and instead pays a fee to the state government. Currently, this payment goes into a fund with no guarantee it will ever be used for affordable housing in the local area. The government should be forced to spend that money in the LGA where the development is built on social and affordable housing, within 5 years.

My policy on affordable housing is to:

- **Make inclusionary zoning mandatory. Set a consistent affordable housing requirement for new developments across Victoria, so everyone knows the rules upfront, with no case-by-case negotiation and less land banking.**
- **Fix the definition of affordable housing. Tie it to household income, not a discount on market rent, and target it to low and moderate income households, with rent set at no more than 30% of income.**
- **Where on site affordable housing genuinely can't be delivered, a payment in lieu goes into a dedicated social housing fund for those in the greatest need and the Government must expend this fund within the LGA of the development every 5 years**

5. Unlock the potential of modern methods of construction

Modern methods of construction refers to prefabricated buildings where a house or certain building components are built offsite and then later transported to the construction site. This is a cheaper, faster method of construction that can reduce building costs by 20% and complete construction up to 50% faster than traditional methods.[5]

Given Australia's current housing and rental affordability crisis, this is an opportunity that Victoria must urgently seize; but unfortunately, we are falling behind. NSW passed an MMC bill through Parliament in August this year[6], and they are well ahead of Victoria, which is still at the policy development stage.

My policy is to fast-track MMC legislation in Victoria so we can deliver more homes quickly and at a lower cost