




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Development

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (2.46 pm): Brisbane and Queensland are growing, and development—be it residential, commercial or state driven infrastructure—is inevitable. Nobody disputes this, and the Greens are certainly not anti-development as some might have misapprehended. Densification of inner urban areas like my electorate of Maiwar is not only inevitable but also necessary to prevent the endless urban sprawl from Brisbane’s outer suburbs.

It is in this context that governments regulate development through urban planning regulation with the primary goals of balancing inevitable growth with community expectation and to maintain neighbourhoods that meet our needs, offer amenity and improve quality of life. Success or failure in striking the right balance is evident not just in how many people we live near and call our neighbours or what their houses look like but also in the adequacy of transport infrastructure—for example, how much time we spend in traffic as opposed to walking, riding or using public transport.

It is reflected in the availability and accessibility of vital community services and support facilities such as education and child care, aged care, green space and the list goes on. It has been made abundantly clear in my time campaigning as an MP and as a resident of Taringa that our current system does not adequately strike this balance. This issue, more than any other, is the one that Maiwar locals bring to me in meetings, phone calls and emails, and I am receiving these daily.

The pervasive sentiment is not simply that development is not meeting community expectation. The community sees that corporate interests, particularly the profits of property developers, are what our current planning system values above all else. The buck-passing on this issue between state and local governments is almost unrivalled by any other policy issue. The state can, quite correctly, point to virtually any planning decision and say that is a council decision. I have heard from countless local residents that when they take their concerns to our local councillor, currently Councillor Julian Simmonds—at least for the time being—his response is that these decisions are not made by him. They are delegated to council officers and made in accordance with the state Planning Act, which is also true. There is an inevitability about state and local governments each playing a role on these issues, but local government is fundamentally a creature of state government legislation, so ultimately the buck stops with this parliament.

In the time I was working as a planning and environment lawyer, the planning legislation changed names three times at the hands of governments of both persuasions, but the effect of each major change in the law was to weaken the rights of the community in the planning decisions that affect them and strip away protections against inappropriate development. Corporate profits won out every time. Now development at a ludicrous scale can be allowed in suburban streets with no more than code assessment, giving communities no formal opportunity to have a say. Even where communities are successful in lobbying council to refuse inappropriate development, developers almost always get their

way in court. That is not to disparage in any way the independent decisions made by our judges, but it reinforces that state planning law, even when applied in the absence of any political considerations, works for developers at the expense of communities.

I have also spoken to a number of experts on this issue—professors in planning, lawyers and academics, council officers, even representatives of the LGAQ. Everyone working in this space recognises that the planning system is inherently permissive, and we are expected to simply continue to accept this.

We are told that the housing market will work best if left unencumbered by so-called red tape, but it is clearly not working for most of us. We are supposed to believe that lax planning regulation is necessary to improve housing affordability, yet housing is less affordable than ever before. We are increasingly unable to afford a house in suburbs where our quality of life is declining and developers are the ultimate winners. This is the outcome of so-called planning reform, where the reform has been bought by property developer donations.

Government now accepts that a legislative response is required to prevent actual or perceived risks of corruption at the local and state level. The necessary next step is to undertake a root-and-branch reform of the Planning Act once developer donations are taken out of the picture. There can be little doubt that the balance should, and will, be reset in favour of the community.

The Greens were the only party that brought a policy of planning reform to the 2017 election, and it remains the highest priority for an enormous number of Queenslanders. We brought a proposal to better fund public infrastructure by making developers pay their fair share out of windfall profits they get as a consequence of council rezoning decisions. If the government is interested in the concerns of the community in Maiwar and elsewhere across the state, it should adopt these policies as its own and ensure planning is for people, not profit.