




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Maiwar Electorate, Planning Laws

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (2.49 pm): Today I would like to talk about an issue in Toowong in my electorate that has highlighted a major problem with our planning system. The old Woolworths site, as it is known, in the middle of Toowong is long overdue for redevelopment to revitalise this centre, and interest has been growing for years about what would be built to replace it.

The most recent proposal that has been announced just this year is a massive and really significant project apparently inspired by a shopping complex in LA. It is worth \$450 million and stands at 25 storeys, but locals do not have any rights to have a say in the final outcome and they will have no rights to appeal any council decision on it.

Like so much other development across our suburbs in our state, this project is code assessable, not impact assessable, which means it does not require any community consultation under Queensland's Planning Act. To put it simply, our planning laws allow this \$450 million development to be treated as a tick-and-flick job.

Before it starts, I want to make it abundantly clear that the Greens and I are not simply anti development and that this is not an exercise in nimbyism. It makes sense for growth to happen around this area. It is a growing transport and business hub. We have room for new neighbours, and I know that my community overwhelmingly recognises this. That does not change the fact that residents deserve a voice in decisions about their community.

In a residents' survey I conducted last year, only 21 per cent of respondents said they feel like they get enough of a say in decisions about their city—which I would say is a pretty damning indictment of the planning system as it stands. In relation to this development in Toowong, despite the systemic barriers, I am doing the best I can to make sure that local voices are heard.

I recently launched a local survey just to give people a chance to have their say on this redevelopment, and the response has been really quite overwhelming. So far we have received 560 detailed written responses and there are more coming in daily. It is clear that locals want to have their say on development like this.

The biggest issue that residents have consistently raised about the proposal is the need for proper traffic management, and the community has emphatically restated its support for a public park at the old ABC site down the road. People are also concerned about the height of these two towers, protecting Toowong's historical character and car parking.

I will be taking these responses—many hundreds of them—and using them as the basis to advocate directly to council about what the community wants to see in this development, but it is clear that beyond this we need systemic change for residents to really have a say. The Greens and I are pushing for reforms to our planning system that would make all major developments like this impact assessable. I am the only one in parliament who is making the case for this reform.

The last time the LNP had the chance under Campbell Newman they tipped the balance even further in favour of developers, and this government still has not bothered to fix all of the changes the LNP made before 2015. In fact, while I am calling for communities to have a greater say in these proposals, the government appears to be resolute in its view that the current system is good enough. Well, it is not.

Across Queensland, residents have lost the ability to have a say in how their neighbourhoods should grow and change. We know it is possible to create well-designed, medium density developments with adequate new public infrastructure, but to do that our planning system needs to value the voice of the community more than the profits of the development industry.

I have seen the failures of our planning system time and again in Maiwar. When over 3,500 residents formally objected to the Mount Coot-tha Zipline, Brisbane's lord mayor could blithely dismiss these submissions and effectively rule them out of council's assessment of the development application. Despite widespread support and a growing need for greenspace on the west side, the Brisbane City Council is refusing to use its powers to buy back the former ABC site and plan for adequate new public space in Toowong. The grossly inappropriate TriCare high-rise development in Taringa is still going ahead despite having been initially refused by council and a local community group challenging the developer in court. The planning system does not even allow council to defend its decisions on the rare occasion that it does listen to the community.

Community consultation on 'infrastructure designations' for really important infrastructure like local schools is rushed, opaque and inadequate and countless apartment blocks and commercial spaces are routinely approved with little or no meaningful consultation with the community.

Although I no longer work as a planning and environment lawyer, I spend a lot of my time as Maiwar's local representative advocating on the community's behalf about development matters. The Planning Act needs an overhaul. Our planning system needs to work for people, not profit. Ensuring that major developments like this are impact assessable, not just waved through code assessment, would be a really good start.

The people of Maiwar, my electorate, are ready to be involved in decisions about their own suburbs, and the huge response to the project proposed for central Toowong has shown that. We desperately need reform to make space for the community's voice in our planning system.