

TASMANIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW

Preface to comments – I was an elected member in local government for 14 years and had much to do with the planning and planning schemes overlooking several reviews in that time. Although I can see that there is merit in an overall review, if it is made too complicated, it will never work or be accepted by the disparate communities. Planning laws must be clear, simple and understood by all the individuals who seek to use it.

A State Appeals body should not override Councils who do not approve a development because it does not comply with the Council's vision statement.

Dee Alty, Longford


REFORM OPTIONS

Option 1

Local Government Charter

Isn't it time once again to consider giving local government a constitutional role and making local government an autonomous creature rather than one under State Governments?

Councillors are elected to develop policy, listen and present views from their constituents and to ensure the vision for their area is being developed with and by the community. Much of the legislation and by laws are preventing this occurring. Any charter should ensure the communities can talk and act as communities through their local representatives.

Wellbeing considerations in key planning

There are a lot of words that seem to be used for wellbeing of the individual, but it is the community that ends up looking after the individuals that fall through the cracks, especially in health and housing. Often this is down to where people live, how people live and what their aspirations are. Local government plays a crucial role in ensuring that planning covers the best environment for wellbeing. This includes cost of services, protection against fire and flood, access to health and welfare assistance, activities in the community to keep people's minds healthy. Places to develop children both in mind and body to be the communities in the future. It also means plenty of open space round dwellings, to allow sunlight and privacy and the option for garden and greenery.

Community Impact Statements for new services or infrastructure

Who develops these and how is the community involved – they are usually a fait accompli when the community is “allowed” to see the statements. Also there is a very real need not to obliterate the historic background of heritage towns.

Option 2

Develop improved Councillor training – pre election and ongoing.

Review number of Councillors and their allowances

Statutory sanctions and dismissal powers

Systems to support equitable representation of communities

Review the local government act election legislation so that it fairly represents the communities’ choice of candidates. At the moment only have to vote for 5, negating the Hare Clark system. Need to ensure that there is only one vote one value. Candidates should be Australian citizens similar to State and Federal Systems.

Option 3

Require consistent, contemporary community engagement strategies

These must mean something, not just to gauge community support and then do nothing to follow the advice. District committees or advisory committees to council are ignored.

Establish a public facing performance reporting, monitoring and management framework

Establish clear performance based benchmarks

Options 4

Implement a shared state and local government workforce development strategy

Target key skills shortages, planners etc

Establish virtual regional teams of regulatory staff

Options 5

Deconflict the role of Councillors and the role of planning authorities

This could be overcome by having an agreed vision statement for the town that has the power to set the standard for a town. Eg if elements of the town are heritage or historic, there should be provisions to give these precedent. Use the Desired Future Characteristics clause in each development application and see if the proposal fits.

Refer complex planning development application to independent assessment appointed by Tas Govt.

Planning in rural and regional areas should not be complex – the planning scheme should be much clearer and concise. Permitted, prohibited and discretionary – with the discretion also with strict boundaries that can only be used in extraordinary circumstances. Too much is left to the discretion on how someone might read a complex planning scheme!

Develop guidelines for the consistent delegation of development applications to council staff.

Delegation can only be used if there are no discretions involved.

Greater transparency and consistency of council's resourcing and implementation of regulatory functions

Increase support for the implementation of regulatory processes, including support provided by state government

Strengthen connections between council's strategic planning and strategic land-use planning by working with State and Federal Governments

Have a strong local direction worked out before working with any other level of government.

Options 6

Require Councils to collaborate with others in their region and with State Government on regional strategies for specific agreed issues.

Establish stronger formalized partnership between State and local government on long-term regional place based wellbeing and economic development programs

Support increased integration including colocation of front desk services between local and state at the community level.

Options 7

Explore how councils are utilizing sound taxation principles in the distribution of the overall rating requirement across their communities.

Enhance public transparency of rating policy changes

Examine opportunities for improving councils use of cost based user charges to reduce the incidence of ratepayers subsidizing services available to all ratepayers, but not used by them all

Consider options for increasing awareness and understanding of the methodology and impacts of the state grants commission's distribution of federal assistance grants

Investigate possible alternative approaches to current rating models which might better support councils to respond to Tasmania's demographic profile

Options 8

Standardise asset life ranges for major asset classes and increase transparency and oversight of changes to asset lives

Introduce requirements for councils to undertake and publish full life-cycle cost estimates of new infrastructure projects

Introduce a requirement for councils to undertake regular service for existing services

Support councils to standardise core asset management system, processes and software.