

## PLANNING

### *Statement*

**HON DR BRAD PETTITT (South Metropolitan)** [5.40 pm]: I rise to briefly speak about planning, of all things! I want to talk about my concern about two shifts we have seen from the Minister for Planning this week; they have a common theme. The first one came out yesterday: an indefinite deferral of the long-awaited medium density housing code. For members who do not know what that is, it obviously falls between low-density single residential, such as we see in our suburbs, and high-density four-storey-plus apartments. It is what is known as the “missing middle”, otherwise known as gentle density. It is really important. In fact, it is the type of housing density we are most likely to do if we are to meet our infill targets.

These codes were meant to be put in place on 1 September—three weeks away; they have now been deferred indefinitely, and on my reading of it, the R30 and R40 components of those codes are potentially to be scrapped altogether. That is of real concern, because the density that currently sits in that space is, frankly, awful. In fact, the state government’s own documents that led to this new medium density code being put together showed how awful it is. We are getting standard triplex and quadruplex blocks with no trees and lots of roofs, driveways and hard surfaces, creating urban heat islands and a completely unliveable future environment. For some reason, instead of realising that we have to move on from that, we are now apparently accepting that we will have to live with it, under the guise of housing supply.

However, it is really important to point out that the government’s own research revealed that every one of those triplex houses we build costs the community \$29 200—that is the cost borne by the wider community, not only those who are living in those houses with their increased air-conditioning costs and the like. That cost is borne by the wider community. If we extrapolate those costs out to a WA-wide level, business-as-usual medium-density housing will cost this state \$117 million a year, or \$1.17 billion over the next decade. We have walked away from good planning reform indefinitely, but we have nothing to replace it with and no time line for replacing it. That was the first announcement that came out this week.

The second announcement from the minister’s office was rather different; it talked about opening up a whole lot of new land for a school development. This is around the last two planning investigation areas, and will open up 835 hectares for a suburban development of 9 000 dwellings in an area that can pretty much only be described as a combination of high bushfire risk, low amenity and low service provision. Why? This is my great frustration. This state has the lowest infill rate, with the last figure being 29 per cent. We have a target of 47 per cent. Our current rate of 29 per cent is nowhere near that target. Seventy-one per cent of all our dwellings end up on the fringe. The government is opening up even more land, so we will have even more dwellings on the fringe whilst providing less good density. We are not leaving a legacy. The government has to get these things in place so we leave the right legacy going forward instead of doing what we are doing, which is enabling more sprawl and more housing in the wrong location. That housing will be car dependent and a long way from services, jobs and schools—all the things we should not be doing. It is bizarre. Our new infill development will be of a lower standard.

Announcing these two plans relating to housing and new land within the last 24 hours should raise great concern and people should question where we are at. This is on the back of other things that have happened in the last year, including WA being one of the few states that did not sign on to higher provisions to ensure that our houses are sustainable and energy efficient. We entirely walked away from a vision to ensure housing is accessible to people in wheelchairs and the like. I do not know what is going on but there is a great frustration that we are lagging behind and creating a legacy of housing through our planning system that is frankly failing. We should be embarrassed about that. I appreciate that both of these things have been announced under the guise that we have a housing crunch and we need to do everything we can to bring on supply. In order to do that, the government is willing to bring on supply no matter how terrible. I remind members that there are plenty of houses in WA. As we all know, on census night there were 118 000 empty houses. There is also a whole bunch of Airbnbs and short-term accommodation—around 20 000 of them around the state, including 5 000 in Perth.

There are ways to make sure that people are in the right houses and we make those houses homes. We do not need to create a whole legacy of new poor development and poor housing in the wrong location in a desperate catch-up to try to deal with this crisis. I think alarm bells should be going off. I raise these things because they do not get much visibility. I think the Parliament is a really important way of shining a light on decisions that often go through as mega statements. When we start to connect some of the dots, we see that we are travelling in the wrong direction. Again, we are travelling in a direction that is entirely inconsistent with the state’s own strategies and planning documents—the things that it publicly says it wants to achieve. The things we publicly want to say and what we are actually doing are really different. I raise these two in an attempt to raise alarm bells that there are better and smarter solutions and we should not create a legacy of low quality, poor housing in the wrong location.