

'McMansions in the sky': ministers clash over north-west Sydney development push

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The push to build hundreds of thousands of apartments across Sydney in the next 20 years has ignited fresh tensions in state cabinet, with planning minister Anthony Roberts accused by a colleague of signing off on 8,000 extra units in his area before considering the need for new schools and parks.



Sydney Metro testing to begin next year
Sydney Metro program director Rodd Staples explains the new Sydney metro rail line project with testing of the line near Rouse Hill to begin next year.

Disability services minister Ray Williams says he was "surprised" to learn Mr Roberts signed off on the plan in his seat of Castle Hill in north-west Sydney almost three months ago, but invited him to discuss infrastructure requirements in recent weeks.

But Mr Roberts argues the dispute is about his desire for smaller, more affordable apartments in the area and fewer large units he described as "McMansions in the sky".

Fairfax Media has obtained a letter written by Mr Roberts on September 21 advising the Hills Shire Council that land around the Showground station on the Sydney Metro Northwest rail line has been rezoned to facilitate the extra apartments.



Planning Minister Anthony Roberts is being accused of failing to ensure adequate local infrastructure. Photo: Daniel Munoz

The Showground Station precinct sits within the Sydney Metro Northwest urban renewal corridor identified as a priority for development to help cope with the city's anticipated population growth.

It is understood the Showground Station rezoning was approved by the NSW Governor David Hurley at an executive council meeting last Wednesday.

But when contacted on Sunday, Mr Williams said: "I was very surprised to learn that the minister had signed off on this three months ago".

"The minister has invited me, together with the council and the Department of Planning, to numerous meetings in the past weeks to discuss matters in the Showground precinct, especially regarding parks and schools of which there still appears to be an omission," he said.

"It poses the question: why did he bother asking us to these meetings?"

In a column published in a local newspaper last week Hills Shire mayor Michelle Byrne said of the Showground Station precinct: "Currently the numbers planned for are not being accompanied by the infrastructure needed to support them".

However, Mr Roberts said it was "vital that development meets community expectations around local character, but also, provides housing stock that is affordable".

He said negotiations had focused on a planning instrument, SEPP 65, "which provides for standards around housing stock sizes that are feasible for development and importantly, affordable for first home buyers."

It is understood planners are concerned about the relative lack of residents aged between 25 and 39 in the Hills shire, known for its large mass produced homes derided by some as "McMansions".

"What we don't want is councils anywhere forcing developers into unfeasible lot sizes that will price first home owners out of the market," Mr Roberts said.

"We don't want an overabundance of apartments that are just McMansions in the sky. The Hills council and relevant stakeholders have engaged in meaningful negotiations to avoid such an outcome and the final precinct plans will be announced shortly."

The clash follows a falling out between Mr Roberts and Corrections Minister David Elliott, the member for neighbouring Baulkham Hills, over similar development concerns and [polling that shows two thirds of Sydneysiders believe the city is "full"](#).

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