**Quiet streets to be a no-go zone for towers**

Domain Victoria Property

Date July 1, 2013

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Matthew Guy. *Photo: Luis Enrique Ascui*

Leafy neighbourhoods in Stonnington and Boroondara will be the first to come under new eight-metre height limits and stricter rules for subdividing backyards.

Planning Minister Matthew Guy began the rollout of new planning zones for all Victorian councils on Monday. The changes are aimed at giving certainty to residents and developers about what can be built where.

Councils, residents and developers will have 12 months to fight it out over which streets will fall into the new ''neighbourhood'', ''general'' and ''growth'' zones, with differing impacts for property values and development potential in each.

Quiet residential streets deemed neighbourhood zones will be restricted to single and double-storey homes, with tighter rules for extensions on small blocks. There will also be rules to make sure new building design is in keeping with the streetscape, with no more than two dwellings per block of land.

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Councils have a year to identify these protected areas, as well as growth zones near public transport that are suitable for medium-density development of about four storeys (13.5 metres). Remaining areas will be classified as general zones, where new buildings will be up to about eight metres unless a council asks to set a higher limit for a particular area.

The new system comes too late for more than 100 residents who fought to save a historic house in Hawthorn East that is to be demolished to make way for a four-storey apartment block. The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal on Monday granted a demolition permit for the heritage-listed house, built in 1906, to make way for 33 apartments.

Resident Terry Dear said while the house, called Arden, fronted busy Burke Road, it also overlooked a smaller road at the side and ''an entire heritage precinct that is now effectively ruined.

''It's a beautiful old house with the highest heritage rating and is in amazing condition,'' he said. ''Mr Guy is big on quoting he is against inappropriate development, yet things like this are being approved consistently.''

Mr Guy acknowledged the reforms would be controversial in some inner-city suburbs while the streets to be included and excluded from protection are decided. Councils that fail to meet the timeline for the new zones will have their suburbs made general zones by default.

The minister said the changes would reduce planning red tape and tribunal appeals by providing certainty about what can be built where. ''It's about providing the right development in the right location to protect what we love about our city,'' he said.

The Municipal Association of Victoria said some looming planning disputes would be brought forward by the changes but ultimately the new residential zones would ''reduce the backyard battles about overdevelopment''.

Association president Bill McArthur said the new system incorporated many things councils had been lobbying for, including greater weight afforded to neighbourhood character and restrictions on small businesses opening in residential streets and taking up parking.

The City of Boroondara said all its residential areas would be covered by neighbourhood and general zones.

Mr Guy also announced that Victoria's builders, plumbers and architects would come under a single government regulator, the Victorian Building Authority, in a move to crack down on dodgy operators.

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/business/property/quiet-streets-to-be-a-nogo-zone-for-towers-20130701-2p6gg.html#ixzz35KgDochv>