

State of confusion over planning call

By LOUISE THROWER

MAYOR Paul Stephenson clearly recalls advice that the State Planning Minister once imparted to him.

"If someone comes to you with a development proposal, and it's a dog, tell them it's a dog and to go away," Frank Sartor had said.

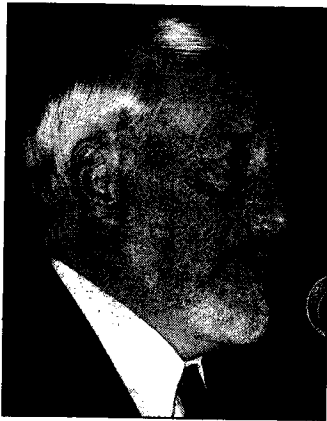
Now Cr Stephenson is wondering why the State Government didn't share the same advice with a company that for the past six years has been planning a 1000-lot residential estate at Marulan.

State planners have just excluded the ambitious Medway Estate from Goulburn Mulwaree's new planning laws, expected to be released for public exhibition this week.

Instead, the director general approved a 600-lot residential estate, proposed by Tailored Property, as the staged land release in Marulan.

"If I was the developer, I'd be asking for an explanation," Cr Stephenson said.

Sydney company, Xcel Properties, first came to the former Mulwaree Shire Council with the Medway Estate plan in 2001.



• Mayor Stephenson is eagerly awaiting the release of the LEP.

The council approved it in principle, included it in a draft settlement strategy and the company subsequently spent millions on preliminary studies.

But only recently the State Government told the company's director, Kim Clarke that it didn't want development on the eastern side of the Hume Highway, where Medway was planned.

"If there was always a problem with having development on that side, then they should have told him. If anything, that's where the unfairness is," Cr Stephenson said.

The decision also contradicts previous council consultant and government statements that existing vacant lots at Marulan can absorb population growth up until 2020. Cr Stephenson said the director general had issued a directive for the Marulan estate's inclusion in the LEP.

The Mayor said local planners estimated that Goulburn Mulwaree would need 2500 new homes by the year 2020, and acknowledged not all of that could go to Marulan.

Xcel Properties director Kim Clarke told the *Post* that State planners had never given him "a real reason" as to why development shouldn't occur on the highway's eastern side at Marulan.

"I'm making approaches to the State Government (about Medway's exclusion from the LEP)," he said.

"I'm disappointed when the government consistently talks about job creation, that the 150 jobs in this development are not taken into consideration. Nor are they considering that this a different type of residential development, appealing to a different market."

The Department of Planning had not responded to questions

about its reasons by the time of going to press.

The draft planning laws' imminent release comes after a year-long wait. The director general has signed off on allowing their public exhibition, but has not issued formal advice to the council.

Even in the finishing stages, the council and government clashed over which authority should approve large land releases.

"In the wording put to us, the director general (DG) would authorise them," Cr Stephenson said.

"It meant we'd be caught in a terrible financial bind, because if they didn't give us enough warning, we'd be stuck with half the cost of supplying the infrastructure. We're saying that council should do the land releases and the DG can approve them."

The hiccup has since been ironed out, with initial approval placed firmly back with council.

Cr Stephenson said the LEP was likely to be placed on public exhibition in mid December for five months, extending the planned three-month timeline, due to the Christmas break.

Eight public forums, starting on January 31, are planned.