

LIVEABLE APARTMENTS

THE GREENS' PLAN FOR SUSTAINABLE APARTMENTS WITHIN LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES



More and more people and families are moving into apartments in Melbourne. The Greens' plan for Liveable Apartments will make sure all apartment buildings are high quality, sustainable and safe, and that apartment buildings are thriving communities.

As Melbourne's population increases, the shape of our city is changing. More and more people and families are moving into apartments. Apartments can offer new opportunities, including closer proximity to work, access to public transport and the attractions of bustling city life. For others, apartments are a lower maintenance and more affordable home.

But right now in Victoria, Labor and the Liberals allow developers to build huge and poor-quality apartment towers just to make a quick profit - with no thought for the quality of life of the people who are going to live there.

Our government should be focussed on delivering high quality affordable and sustainable housing for thriving communities. With minimum apartment sizes, access to cheap and clean solar energy, regulating the out-of-control short-stay industry and capping rent increases, the Greens have a plan to make sure everyone who lives in apartments has their quality of life protected.

OUR PLAN

The Greens have a plan to build sustainable apartment homes and communities for people, not profit.

The Greens' plan includes:

- Changing the rules to give people in apartments access to solar energy
- Mandated green roofs or solar panels for all new apartment buildings.

- Mandating minimum apartment sizes and distances between apartment buildings
- Regulating apartments that are let out full-time only as short-stays, to make sure apartment towers don't just become de facto hotels which push up rent prices
- Requiring the state Government to immediately intervene to pay to fix flammable cladding and then reclaim the costs from developers or builders, rather than leaving it to owners to fix the mess
- Providing a third weekly bin collection - for kitchen waste - for all Victorian residents to reduce waste going to landfill, which is especially important for apartments where on-site composting is difficult
- Capping rent rises at inflation so housing stays affordable, especially in the inner city

SOLAR FOR APARTMENTS

For too long, people in apartments have missed out on the benefits of solar energy. The Greens have a four-point plan to finally unlock solar for people in apartments, to save on power bills and contribute to clean, renewable energy.

Solar Gardens

Under the Greens' innovative Solar Gardens solution, people who live in an apartment can buy solar panels on a nearby building, such as a train station, and the energy is credited to

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their bill. If they move, they still own the panel and the credit moves with them. The Greens will provide \$1000 grants to help people buy into Solar Gardens, matching the subsidy that homeowners get through the Victorian Government's owner occupier solar announcement. More information about our plan for Solar Gardens is available at:
<https://greens.org.au/vic/solar>

Fix Body Corporate Barriers

Many apartment owners want to see solar panels installed by their owners corporation, but there are too many barriers preventing this from happening. For example, installing solar can require a 75% majority vote of owners. The Greens would fix this by including decisions about solar and other environmental upgrades within the owners' corporation maintenance plan, which only requires a 50% majority. We would also investigate and address further regulatory barriers to putting solar panels on existing apartment buildings.

Apartment Solar Rebates

Some existing owners corporations are ready and excited to install solar panels, but have been left out of the Victorian Government's rebate scheme. We would address this by providing grants for 50% of the cost of retrofitting apartment buildings to include solar panels. These would power common areas and individual apartments. Like owner-occupiers, owners corporations would be able to access discounted loans for the remaining cost of installing solar.

Solar for New Apartments

The Greens will also require that all new apartment buildings of three storeys and above include solar. Many large towers are already adding solar, but there is a huge untapped opportunity for low to medium rise apartments to be powered by solar energy from the outset.

PLANNING FOR THE PEOPLE

The design of the Victorian planning system as a 'performance' based system versus a 'control' based system has resulted in discretionary planning controls becoming the default type of planning rule used for most decisions.

We acknowledge that a number of situations arise where some flexibility and variability is required to achieve a better outcome. However, the problem is that more often than not it is developers who exploit the discretionary controls to increase their yields and profits.

There needs to be a balance of certainty and flexibility and the planning system needs to be reviewed holistically in order to deliver this. The Victorian planning system needs to introduce controls that mean what they say. The Greens will review and reform the Victorian Planning Provisions (VPP) and local planning schemes to include consistent controls that achieve the outcomes that are intended across the various layers of the scheme.

Mandatory height controls

Mandatory height controls will apply for areas that have completed and submitted strategic justification through a planning scheme amendment process. For areas where mandatory height controls are considered less suitable, mandatory maximum density ratios can be applied for. Placing height and ratio controls on areas that are nominated for more intense urban development will reduce speculation, put downward pressure on land prices and deliver a built environment that has been agreed to by the community.

Minimum apartment sizes for all new apartments:

Bedrooms	Size in square metres
Studio	37
1 bedroom	50
2 bedroom	65
3 bedroom	90

Mandatory minimum building separations

All activity centres, mixed use and residential growth zone precincts need to provide 20% green open space and a minimum number of canopy trees.

For more information, please see the Greens' full Planning for the People initiative at
<https://victoria.greens.org.au/planning>



REGULATING SHORT-STAYS

The skyrocketing popularity of “sharing economy” accommodation services like AirBnB and Stayz shows that there is a demand for these services and that they are here to stay. Regulation is required to balance the rights and needs of residents, their neighbours, and the community.

Many residents were sold apartments in the CBD, Southbank and Docklands with the vision that they would get to live in a lively high-rise community with their neighbours close by, as well as being close to the city.

Many residents are shocked when they discover that up to 50 per cent of the apartments in their buildings, and sometimes more, are being leased out on short-stay platforms each week. Without long-term neighbours many people who live in apartments lose their sense of community and safety.

Common areas in blocks that were designed for domestic use only end up being worn faster and replaced sooner because they were not actually designed for the extra traffic associated with constant short-stay guests. Ultimately, it's owners corporations and permanent residents that bear the cost of any damage or replacements.

Short-stay letting can impact on housing affordability as some people specifically buy apartments to lease out to short-term guests full-time, meaning fewer properties are available to renters or owner-occupiers. This pushes up the price of housing for people who need to live in our city, like essential workers, and those on lower incomes.

This problem is not unique to Melbourne, but unfortunately Melbourne has not had a government willing to deal with the issue.

Sydney has grappled with the same problem. In New South Wales, empty properties in the Greater Sydney area can only be let for a maximum of 180 days per year. Local councils outside of Greater Sydney are able to set their own short-stay rules and limits provided they are no lower than 180 days a year.

The Greens will regulate short-stay rentals with a similar model to the one operating in New South Wales. The maximum days permissible will be set in consultation with communities that live in apartment buildings.

We also plan to implement a mandatory code of conduct for all short-stay rentals to crack down on bad behaviour by guests and to limit adverse impacts on communities due to noise or damage to common areas.

People who genuinely live in a house or apartment and want to rent out a spare room or their house when they go on holidays should be allowed to do so, but businesses shouldn't be allowed to buy up large swathes of apartments just to rent out as short-stays and turn our apartment buildings into unregulated hotels.

FIXING FLAMMABLE CLADDING

Thousands of buildings in Victoria have been found to contain the same flammable cladding that led to the deaths of 71 people in the London Grenfell Tower fire in June 2017. In November 2014, a similar fire in the Docklands' Lacrosse building spread rapidly due to flammable cladding. The City of Melbourne says at least 17 residential buildings are unsafe, and that's just the tip of the iceberg.

The Labor Government's solution has been to push the responsibility of fixing flammable cladding onto apartment owners, who purchased their apartments in good faith. Labor have set up 'Cladding Rectification Agreements'. Through these agreements, apartment owners can get a loan to fix the cladding on their buildings, which is then paid off on their council rates. It is then up to owners to pursue developers in the courts to recoup these costs. This is despite the Government's own taskforce finding that the danger has arisen because of a systematic failure of regulation, compliance and enforcement.

The Government should urgently step in and fix these buildings, and recoup the cost from the developers who cut corners or refused to act.

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The Greens plan to establish a Cladding Safety Fund to help owners cover initial costs of making dangerous buildings safe and pursue damages.

The Government's financial outlay will be offset once damages have been recouped from those responsible. An initial amount in the fund of \$50 million would cover at least 800 dwellings.

COMPOST NOT LANDFILL

When household food waste goes to landfill, it produces methane and leachate and poisons our environment. We need a statewide system that takes Victoria's household food waste, recycles it into compost, and returns it to the environment to grow and replenish community gardens, farms, sportsgrounds and parklands.

Our Compost Not Landfill plan will ensure that all Victorians will have a consistent and convenient way to recycle food and green waste, including people who live in apartments.

We would implement a standardised three-bin kerbside collection FOGO system. In addition to the standard recycling and general waste bins, this system includes a bin for household food and green waste. Councils will then be responsible for collecting this waste and taking it to a local organics recycling plant to be turned into compost.

Victoria already has 16 councils running food and green organics (FOGO) recycling services. In order to extend these services to every Victorian household, apartment blocks will be supported to have shared organic bins or other infrastructure to ensure garden and good waste can be collected and recycled.

For more information, please see the Greens' full Compost Not Landfill initiative.

RENT CAPS

According to research by Anglicare Victoria, in 2018 only 1 per cent of private rentals in Melbourne, and 3 per cent statewide, are affordable for people receiving income support. More than three quarters of homes are out of reach for households on a minimum wage.

The rental market is not working for all Victorians. People who rent have little power to dispute unaffordable rent increases. People on low fixed incomes, such as pensioners and other people who receive income support, are particularly disadvantaged because they generally cannot increase their income to cover higher rents. As a result, they forego other basic goods and services to cover housing costs.

The Greens have a plan to make sure that all Victorians can afford to rent their home.

We will amend the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (VIC) to cap annual residential rent increases at 2.5 per cent, which is in line with the Reserve Bank's 2-3 per cent inflation target. Inflation over the last decade has averaged 2.4 per cent. Tying rent increases to inflation will help stop people who rent from being priced out of the homes and communities in which they may have grown up, or lived in for many years

Landlords will be able to apply to increase rents above the cap where it is warranted; for example, if they have completed a major renovation to the home. A tenant will be able to dispute an above-cap increase, and the landlord will have the burden of proof to justify any rent increase above the rate of inflation.

If rent caps had been introduced in metropolitan Melbourne a decade ago, the average weekly median rent would currently be \$350, instead of \$400. A \$50 difference in rent equates to a \$2600 saving per year.