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Experts say townhouses should stay in Brisbane's low density suburbs

Brisbane's proposal to ban townhouses in low density areas is "a backwards step" and "pandering to the outer suburbs" based on the city's struggle with change, experts and advocates warn.

Ellen-Maree Elliot, Quest Newspapers



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BANNING townhouses in Brisbane's low density suburbs is poor planning in response to the community's fear of change, experts and advocates have warned.

The State Government has given Brisbane City Council the green light to consult on its proposal to amend the City Plan to ban townhouses in low density zones.

Banning townhouses in low density areas was an outcome from the council's Plan Your Brisbane consultation and is [supported by the LNP administration](#) and [Labor opposition](#).

The property industry peak body, a community planning academic and a youth-focused pro-development movement all say townhouses have their place in low density areas.

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\$10m units for those downsizing

Brisbane City Council City Planning chair Matthew Bourke said it was “really exciting” that it could now engage with Brisbane residents on the townhouse ban in low-density areas.

He said more than 100,000 residents participated in the engagement.

“It (the ban) was an important piece of feedback from the residents of Brisbane as part of our Plan Your Brisbane engagement, and [our commitment to the residents was to see this change implemented,](#)” he said.

“Their feedback was clear – no more cookie-cutter townhouses on properties that are intended for single homes.”





 An aerial view of Brisbane looking towards the CBD.

Yes In My Backyard Queensland (YIMBY) is a pro-development non-profit that provides a voice for young people who want more diverse housing in the city to promote affordability.

YIMBY Queensland co-founder and town planner at Wolter Consulting Group Natalie Rayment said somehow “townhouse” had become dirty word in Brisbane.

“It’s literally three or more dwellings on one allotment,” she said.

Ms Rayment said townhouses were good for young first-home buyers and for older people looking to downsize but stay in the suburbs where they grew up or raised families.

“It’s so important to young people and older people and there’s this number of people in the middle who are quite comfortable



 Natalie Rayment, co-founder of YIMBY Australia

where they are and they're defending their territory," she said.

"They need to think about where their kids are going to live, and where they're going to live when they're older."

She well-integrated townhouse provided an alternative housing type and "invisible density" and therefore the "real conversation" should be about design, not a ban.

Building townhouses in medium density areas, which were more well-located with transport and services, would be a waste of resources compared to multistorey units.

"We have to find somewhere to put them and I would have thought exactly where they were (in low density areas) was the right place," she said.



 QUT associate professor in community planning Phil Heywood.

QUT associate professor in community planning Phil Heywood said the ban was "a kind of pandering to the outer suburbs".

He said townhouses provided extra density at low cost, small backyards for young families and kept residents' lives on the street level, connected to their neighbours.

He said preventing densification of Brisbane's middle and outer suburbs would lead to "extreme densification" of the inner suburbs.

"We're getting two extremes. We're going to preserve those existing low density areas, which is unrealistic, and we're allowing vast high-rises, which is undesirable," he said.

"We need a complete cross-section of dwellings. From tiny houses, which are sometimes less than 50 sqm, right up to the large family dwellings that are 1000 sqm.



Bernard Salt discusses what the future holds for South East Queensland in regards to population...

"We have market-driven housing policies which pay scant attention to the needs of the unestablished and low income.

"If you take into account construction costs and site costs, townhouses represent the lowest cost approach to shelter."

Property Council Queensland executive director Christ Mountford said banning townhouses in low density suburbs was "a backwards step".

"It's (townhouses) a really important part of the housing



mix, so this is a bit of a backwards steps in terms of providing different housing at different price points across the city,” he said.



Property Council executive director Chris Mountford. Picture: Mark Calleja

“My point would be that they’re quite reasonable and appropriate in low density areas. They’re not something you’re going to build in the inner city CBD.”

Mr Mountford said the backlash against townhouses was because “humans struggle with change”.

“From a community point of view it’s hard to understand why an area you’ve lived in a long time where townhouses are now forming part of the mix,” he said.

“Our building codes change, the way we want to live changes and therefore our housing needs to change over time.”

He said the challenge was to work with communities about how that change could happen, and provide reasonable housing outcomes across the city.



The council must consult on the ban for 20 business days, with strict instructions from the State Government to demonstrate how the proposed amendment will affect “ongoing housing and supply and diversity”.

Cr Bourke said the council would be meeting its requirements and would engage with residents through information sessions.

“We have to undertake the engagement, the public consultation, assess the submissions that we get and then go back to the state as part of the statutory process,” he said.

“This is not about blanket-banning townhouses, which can provide opportunities for residents entering the housing market or empty nesters who may be downsizing.

“This is about taking a balanced approach to city planning.”

He said the council would progress as fast as it could to give certainty to Brisbane residents.

Cr Bourke said the further the amendment progressed, the more weight independent council officers assessing development applications could give to the intents of the amendment.

BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL TOWNHOUSE BAN TIMELINE

JUNE 8, 2018: Graham Quirk first announces [the council would ban townhouses in low density areas](#) as part of the release of Brisbane’s Future Blueprint

SEPTEMBER 4, 2018: Brisbane City Council [votes to prepare the an amendment to enshrine the townhouse ban in the Brisbane City Plan](#), which needs State Government approvals to progress

OCTOBER 23, 2018: The council's Labor opposition [makes an urgency motion that the council implement a TLPI to ban townhouses until the amendment is law](#), which the LNP votes against

FEBRUARY 4, 2019: The LNP council administration [backflips and introduces its own TLPI to ban townhouses](#), sends it to the State Government for approval

FEBRUARY 19, 2019: City Planning chair Matthew Bourke [accuses the State Government of holding up both amendment to the city plan and the emergency ban on townhouses](#)

MAY 14, 2019: City Planning chair Matthew Bourke says [it is "appalling" that a response on the council's TLPI is officially four days overdue](#)

MAY 29, 2019: State Government gives Brisbane City Council permission to consult on townhouse ban amendment



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