



# The New Planning System

## *Simplifying residential development*

### **Making it easier to get housing built**

New Zealand's new planning system will make it easier to build the houses and infrastructure our country needs, let farmers and growers get on with doing what they do best, and boost our primary sector while protecting the environment.

The Government is building a modern planning system to make it easier to build homes and develop land, while respecting environmental limits and what's most important to communities.

### **Two new Bills with clear roles**

The new planning system is set out in two new Bills. Once passed, these will replace the current Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA):

- **The Planning Bill** lays out the framework for how land can be used and developed.
- **The Natural Environment Bill** is focused on managing the use of natural resources and protecting the environment.

**The new planning system is made up of more than just new Bills.** National instruments – including national policy directions and standards – will provide specific requirements for councils to develop their plans and make consenting decisions. The new planning system will include helpful changes made under recent changes to the RMA.

This will mean it is easier for developers to operate across the country with more standardised rules and requirements. Less developments will need consents, but when they do the process will be more certain.

## Faster, simpler housing development

The new planning system aims to streamline planning and building, reduce costs and delays, and make rules clearer for everyone. For both developers and homeowners, this means more flexibility to use, build and subdivide your own land. Changes include:

- **Clear national priorities**  
The Government will set housing priorities and growth targets for councils through national instruments, with clear expectations for releasing land in both greenfield and urban areas.
- **Councils will have to ensure there's enough land and infrastructure**  
for new housing and business growth and respond when housing supply is not keeping up with demand.
- **Land can be zoned in advance,**  
with development triggered once certain conditions are met – without needing another plan change. This will speed up development, reduce uncertainty, and help councils meet housing targets, especially in areas where infrastructure is lacking.
- **Councils will also need to respond more quickly**  
to private plan change requests, making it easier to unlock new areas for growth.

A digital platform will make it easier to access information, apply for consents and track progress. For developers, this means clearer rules, faster council processes, and better information about where land is ready to build.

## More certainty for investors and developers

Regional spatial plans will guide future development and infrastructure over the next 30 years helping developers plan with confidence. These plans will also consider areas at risk from natural hazards.

- By providing a clear, long-term picture, spatial plans will help make development more predictable and efficient. They will ensure communities have room to grow, with more choice about where people can live close to jobs, services and opportunity. This is designed to reduce costs and risks and give developers greater confidence about where and when to invest.

The new planning system is all about certainty. Decision-making works like a funnel with big decisions and goals set early, and less ability for these to be relitigated later:

- Front loading decisions – national instruments and regional spatial strategies set the goals and resolve conflicts upfront.
- Plans and consents can't revisit those calls – once higher-level choices are made, they flow down to councils and stay fixed.
- This means clear rules and fewer surprises, so people know what applies and projects don't get bogged down in relitigating later.

## Less need for consents

More residential development will be allowed without needing a resource consent provided certain standards are met. Analysis shows that up to 46 percent of consent and permit applications currently required under the RMA could become unnecessary under the new planning system:

- Councils will only be able to consider effects that have a minor, or more than minor impact on others or the environment. Effects are things like noise and shading that are caused by building and development. Barely noticeable effects will no longer be considered unless they add up to something significant.
- Design details that only affect the site itself, such as building layout, balconies or private views, won't be regulated, except in areas with outstanding natural landscapes and heritage features.
- If a consent is still needed, there will be fewer categories and faster, more consistent processes.

## Standardisation will make building easier

Standardised zones and overlays will make planning rules simpler and more consistent across the country. It will also ensure more activities do not need a consent. A smaller set of more flexible zones will allow a wider range of housing types and mixed-use development, making land easier to use and develop. For residential developers, this means:

- fewer local rule changes to navigate
- lower compliance costs
- you'll be able to use the same house designs in multiple locations without needing to adjust for different council rules.

## Easier subdivision

Subdivision will generally be allowed unless a national standard or local rule restricts it. Safeguards will manage risks from natural hazards and to ensure infrastructure is in place.

## More certainty and support

- A digital platform will make it easier for you to access information, apply for consents, and track progress.
- A new Planning Tribunal will offer you a low-cost way to resolve disputes, with limited council appeal rights.

## What happens next?

Before they become law, the public gets to have a say about the new Bills through select committee hearings in early 2026 – this is an opportunity to make improvements.

Once the Bills are in place, the next step is to confirm the national instruments needed to guide spatial planning. People will also get a chance to submit on this. There will be transitional arrangements for existing resource consent holders:

1. All consents under the RMA will be extended until at least mid-2031.
2. You can obtain a new consent under the transitional system from mid-2026.
3. A new National Policy Statement – Freshwater, will be introduced by mid-2026, which will assist anyone who wishes to obtain a new consent early.

The first spatial plans are expected within a set period after the law is enacted. Government hopes to have the transitional system up and running in the middle of 2026, and the full system working by 2029.

For more information, visit [environment.govt.nz](https://environment.govt.nz).

