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Architect in the running for upcoming state election

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The Tasmanian architect and founder of Architects Assist believes there's "a dire need for fresh ideas and innovation" when it comes to housing, planning and building control.



1/4

Lev's progression into politics builds upon experiences including his founding of Architects Assist. Image:

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Architect Jiri Lev's candidacy as an independent MP for Lyons in the upcoming Tasmanian state election on 19 July is founded on the core tenet that housing needs must be not only environmentally responsible but accessible to all.

Key to his campaign is establishing a pathway for Tasmanians, including public housing tenants and applicants, to build their own homes under builder's supervision, enabling them to gain both significant equity in their new rent-to-own houses, as well as skills and income potential.

"Like in the '50s, neighbours lending each other a hand would again build streets, suburbs, villages and strong, cohesive, long-term communities," Lev said. "I want houses to be homes again."

To facilitate this shift, the architect is targeting first home owner grants and support for owner-builders, with his ultimate aim being "to create a simple-to-use, step-by-step online portal to guide them through the complete process, from conception through permits to completion."

Where renters are concerned, Lev is looking to enact policy that guarantees affordable lifetime rental housing to provide security and a sense of ownership to tenants.



The architect is targeting support for owner-builders, with his aim being to create a simple-to-use, step-by-step online portal. Image: Supplied

At a broader scale, Lev's proposed policy is structured around limiting urban sprawl and designing new developments according to New Urbanism principles, echoing successful international examples of mixed-use, low- to medium-rise developments that feature dense urban greenery and diverse public spaces. In addition, Lev has stated his explicit support for co-housing, cooperative housing and land-sharing models in the planning scheme.

According to the architect, "The planning and building process in Tasmania is extremely stringent, yet inefficient and probably the worst in the country. It needs a serious clean-up."

"I want to plan urban villages and communities, not more isolated suburbs," Lev said.

Part of his campaign to improve housing and planning is founded on establishing guidelines for a minimum aesthetic standard that champions local character and craft, "without unduly increase[ing] building costs or regulatory burden."

"Beauty is not subjective. We all know where tourists like to take photos and it is not the Australian suburbs. Evidence overseas shows that building ugly is not an economic necessity and that beauty pays. We also know that local traditions and strong, unique character draw both tourists and new residents. But none can tell the country nor even the continent from looking at our new inner-city buildings," he said.

According to Lev, this development of aesthetic guidelines “must be done professionally through a collaborative process and with much public consultation. It won’t happen overnight, but we must make a start before we lose even the last remnants of our uniquely Australian building culture to globalised anonymity.”



Lev’s campaign to improve housing and planning includes establishing guidelines for a minimum aesthetic standard that champions local character and craft. Image: Supplied

Lev’s progression into politics builds upon the humanitarian focus of his architectural career. While in Sydney in 2020, he founded [Architects Assist](#), an online registration platform allowing architects to register to provide pro bono services to people affected by the 2019–20 bushfires. For Lev, the experience “touring affected communities [...] through the burnt landscapes, abandoned and empty in the midst of COVID-19 lockdowns” bore him firsthand witness to “the results of poor environmental management and urban planning.”

After settling in Tasmania, Lev built his own home from local plastic- and paint-free materials – making the plans freely downloadable online. Since then, he has constructed two larger, low-cost houses with “plans free for anyone to use again and they have been downloaded by well over 20,000 people in just the last 12 months,” Lev said.



After building his own home, Lev constructed Tasmanian House 2 – a low-cost house whose plans are freely downloadable from online. Image: Supplied

“I’ve been working towards solutions to the housing crisis for years, be it with my own projects, establishing housing cooperatives, giving talks or harassing politicians. [...] While they seem interested, they are not interested enough,” Lev said. “Nothing has changed and meanwhile we’ve been seeing just more of the same. There is a dire need for fresh ideas and innovation and my candidacy is the logical next step to take.”

He added, “Good architects balance the boldness of their ideas with the humility of their conduct. The same should apply to politicians. I certainly hope that my candidacy and policies will inspire and encourage other architects to stand.”

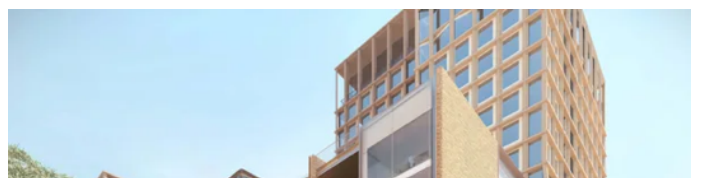
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