

Experience, dedication are the keys

Working through the maze and quirks of development approvals requires an expert.

Development is a hot-button topic as governments across all tiers grapple with ensuring there is affordable housing for a growing population. The processes governing development across the CBD, the suburbs and rural NSW can be contentious and complicated, often ending in a trip to the Land and Environment Court.

It takes an experienced hand to guide developers through the potentially exhausting journey from site purchase to development consent to ensure it is as smooth and, importantly, as short as possible.

Vasili Conomos is the principal of Conomos Legal, a boutique law firm located next door to the Land and Environment Court in Macquarie Street, Sydney. He has practised exclusively in planning and development law since becoming a lawyer over 20 years ago.

He believes it is his specialisation in this area of the law that sets him apart from others. "A law degree doesn't necessarily assist you in understanding everything that's required to be a good practitioner in the Land and Environment Court and it takes a large number of years to build up the experience required."



Lawyer Vasili Conomos has more than 20 years' experience in planning and development.

After working his way up to become an equity partner in a mid-sized law firm, Conomos struck out on his own to set up Conomos Legal, with the aim of providing a specialised and personalised service to clients he says were tired of having their matters fobbed off to people "down the food chain" in larger firms.

With more than 50 matters in the judgments list of the Land and Environment Court last year, Conomos says his firm handles a high volume of work for its size, but that

the close, personal contact with his clients is very important to them.

Acting mostly for developers, Conomos says he aims to get a timely result for his clients that allows them to get on with their business, which is why many of his clients choose to launch a deemed refusal appeal, which they can do about 40 days after lodging a development application (DA) with the relevant council, if they haven't had a determination.

Conomos says "this allows us to get a de-

termination from the consent authority in a very timely manner, instead of waiting over 11 or 12 months for a council to decide, for whatever reason, to refuse it".

It is not uncommon for developers to engage Conomos Legal at an early stage in the project to try to spot the icebergs before there is a collision. Conomos says there is a lot of strategy involved in guiding matters through the Land and Environment Court.

"Often the developers with experience know when they retain an architect for a project they will be wanting to go to a deemed

'We'll sit down as a team and decide what we can and can't do with the site.'

Vasili Conomos, principal of Conomos Legal

refusal appeal and they get me on board virtually from the start so we can formulate the plans for the DA in the knowledge that it will go through the court system," he says.

"We'll sit down as a team and decide what we can and can't do with the site, the strategy for what is to occur in the lodgement of the DA and where we want to be when we get to a mediation or a final court hearing."

Many of the matters that come to Conomos Legal are resolved in mediation, instead of having to go to a full blown Land and Environment Court hearing.

Conomos says that the court's s34 conciliation/mediation phase has been a "fantastic mechanism" for resolving appeals.

"The outcomes tend to be a win-win because the ones I have been involved in have resolved in a very satisfactory way for the applicant and obviously the council was willing to enter into those agreements, as well," Conomos says. "That's when experience really counts."

Prompt, personalised and quality legal services

Based in the Sydney CBD, Conomos Legal, Development & Planning Lawyers practise primarily in the areas of development, local government, planning and environmental law.



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