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Donation sparks questions about legislation to allow proposed Stony Rise shopping centre in Devonport

By state political reporter [Adam Langenberg](#)

State and Territory Government

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The Stony Rise developer posted on social media "all of this started from our premier Jeremy Rockliff saying the [planning commission] decision wasn't good enough". (Supplied: Stony Rise Village)

In short:

Legislation paving the way for the \$40 million Stony Rise shopping centre to go ahead has passed state parliament, after its rezoning application was earlier rejected by the state's Planning Commission.

Upper House MPs say the developer, Tipalea Partners, revealed it made political donations to Liberal candidates.

What's next?

The Greens say the donation raises questions over the legislation, and has reiterated calls for a ban on donations from property developers

Donations to the Liberal Party from the developer behind a Devonport shopping centre are "a bit stinky", opponents say, and raise questions about the motivations behind legislation to allow it to go ahead.

An application to rezone land at Devonport to allow for a \$40 million Stony Rise shopping centre, including a major supermarket and other retail chains, was rejected by the Tasmanian Planning Commission earlier this year, which ruled it had poor public transport and could diminish nearby town centres.



On Tipalea's social media, Mr Spanton addressed the question of donations by saying "until it's illegal to do so, we will continue to provide support for our political system". (Supplied: Stony Rise Village)

The state government introduced legislation to rezone the land and allow the development to go ahead earlier this month, following developer Tipalea Partners taking out full page newspaper advertisements.

In announcing the legislation, Premier Jeremy Rockliff said the planning commission's decision "wasn't good enough".

"I made a promise to the people of the north-west coast that we wouldn't allow decisions like this to stand in the way of economic growth, of jobs, and of progress," he said earlier this month.

That legislation passed both houses of parliament this week, but was criticised by multiple independent MPs and the Greens for [undermining the planning commission](#).

The state's Property Council also expressed concerns, with chief executive Rebecca Ellston stating the legislation "opens up a Pandora's box and muddies the waters when it comes to what is decided and what is approved by the Tasmanian Planning Commission".

She said it contradicted the government's promise to "take the politics out of planning".

That criticism from political opponents grew louder when Mr Rockliff declined to answer questions about whether Tipalea was a Liberal Party donor.

And louder still when Tipalea's chief executive Scott Spanton appeared to brief Upper House MPs about the legislation.

"So I asked Mr Spanton in the briefing today. Did he pay, or provide donations to the Liberal Party, and he said yes they do," Independent Murchison MP Ruth Forrest told the Upper House.

"I asked him how much, he couldn't tell me. He wouldn't name the figure".



Developer Scott Spanton says he has "never met or even talked to" Premier Jeremy Rockliff. (Supplied: Stony Rise Village)

Independent Nelson MP Meg Webb said later in the debate she'd heard Mr Spanton say Tipalea did not provide political donations to parties, but to individual candidates.

"Political donations are made by that proponent. We do not know to who. We do not know whether they were made to candidates from parties who are currently supporting this legislation. We just do not know," she said.

"That should give us all pause in a democracy where people with the deepest pockets should not have the most influence on policy outcomes. That is not how it is supposed to work. That is not a clean democracy."

Mr Spanton did not respond to requests for comment.



Scott Spanton did not respond to requests for comment, but posted on social media that the "small donations we have made over time" were "not the story". (*LinkedIn*)

Ms Forrest said the donation raised questions.

"I acknowledge the desire of the Devonport community to have a new retail facility like this. But where we've got developers directly engaging through the parliamentary process to get an approval for their project, particularly when they have by their admission, made donations to Liberal Party members in this state, it raises questions about that," she said.

"We don't know much was given or when and I think when we start seeing bespoke legislation like this for any development, particularly when there's been political donations made, it

raises questions about the transparency and the appropriateness of such bespoke legislation."

Rockliff rejects inference 'parliament is corrupt'

Under questioning from the Greens in state parliament on Thursday, Mr Rockliff denied he'd brought forward the legislation because Tipalea was a Liberal Party donor.

"We will fight for issues and bring issues to this parliament based on their merit," he told state parliament.

"Quite clearly the depth of concern in the local community about this project not going ahead, that would have employed many hundreds of tradies and provided services to the community, was like no other I've felt before.

"These are matters for the organisation to work through and they are arms length from members of parliament and I reject the inference you are making.

"Just because you didn't get your way, it doesn't mean the rest of the parliament is corrupt."

In a Facebook post, Mr Spanton said he couldn't believe the project had been approved.

"Greens and some others think I am the devil incarnate controlling the Tassy (sic) planning system for pursuing this project but at the end of the day we all get Stony Rise Village!" a post on the company's Stony Rise Village Facebook page said.

"I'm looking forward to meeting the premier at next week's Devonport Mayor's Xmas party. The really strange part of this process is that I have never met or even talked to the premier!"



Premier Jeremy Rockliff declined to answer questions about whether Tipalea was a Liberal Party donor. (Supplied: Stony Rise Village)

Calls for ban on property developer donations

Greens leader Rosalie Woodruff said the situation was "very stinky", and showed the risks of allowing property developers to make political donations.

"In other states they wouldn't be allowed to do this. We should be banning donations to political parties from property developers, it's obviously a recipe for corruption," she said.

"We don't know what's happened here but it looks really smelly."

Ms Forrest agreed property developers shouldn't be able to make donations.

"If they start plying political parties with political donations they do that because they seek to influence the change, that's the reality," she said.

"So we need strengthening in those laws, particularly with property development, who have a lot of money, a lot of resources."

The Liberal Party has repeatedly rejected pushes to limit who can make political donations.

Labor leader Dean Winter said the party believed a Greens bill that would require political parties to disclose all donations above \$1,000 was a better way forward than banning certain types of donations.

The ABC sent questions to the Liberal Party about whether Tipalea was a party donor, and how much it had donated, but did not receive a response.

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