



 A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE	
SUBMISSION NUMBER	29
DATE AUTH'D FOR PUBLICATION	5/3/10

**SUBMISSION TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, PUBLIC WORKS
AND TERRITORY AND MUNICIPAL SERVICES**

Inquiry Into RZ3 and RZ4 Residential Development Policies – Inner North Canberra

Attention: Committee Secretary, Ms Nicola Derigo, committees@parliament.act.gov.au

Submission by David and Margaret Brett,

25 Feb 2010

We are the owners (lease-holders) of _____, one of the blocks in Section 63 Turner, which is currently subject to a re-development moratorium (Rule 44, Part C(4) Turner, of the Inner North Precinct Code).

We have not prepared a detailed submission addressing all the various “issues” identified by the inquiry’s Terms of Reference or raised in the Discussion Paper published by the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services in February 2010. Rather, we are focusing on those aspects of the inquiry which relate to the moratorium.

We have lived at _____ by St since October 1995 and signed the letter sent to ACT Planning in 1999, which sought the moratorium on re-development. We sought the moratorium as we had not long moved into the street and had no immediate intention of moving from or in re-developing the block. However, ten years on, our circumstances and intentions have changed.

We would not like to see the moratorium continue.

The ten-year moratorium has been something of a double-edged sword. While it has ensured that none of the houses in Hartley Street has been replaced with an apartment block, the moratorium has created considerable uncertainty about the future options for lease-holders in the street. Therefore, to provide us (and other lease-holders) with the same choice as others in the RZ3 zone, our preference is for Hartley Street to revert to the RZ3 guidelines – not to have it sequestered from the standard Development Application processes. That said, we consider that there is much merit in amending the RZ3 guidelines and the Inner North Precinct Code to ensure a better mix of dwellings in the inner north’s re-developments. It may be appropriate to consider specific covenants, but these should apply to more sections, not just to Hartley Street and Section 47.

To give our views some context... We are convinced by the argument that the long-term approach to housing for a future Canberra of some 500,000 or more, must embrace greater housing density. The environmental and economic imperatives are stark and real. Canberra in the future will need fuel-efficient public transport, and cost-effective water, sewage and energy infrastructure. Greater housing density will improve those efficiencies. But, the merit of having a more densely populated area close to Civic extends beyond the rationale of improved public transport and related environmental and economic benefits. If it is appropriately managed, greater density – particularly near the city heart – will also bring social benefits. Streets busy with pedestrians of all ages are safer and more vibrant.

Our support for the principle of an increased housing density means that we must accept that many of the red brick cottages like ours on “quarter acre blocks” in Turner, fifteen minutes walk from Garema Place, will need to be replaced. But what should replace the cottages? And who should decide what replaces them? Is it good enough to leave it solely to the market? It is our view that, to date, the market hasn’t delivered the housing mix sought by the objectives set out in the RZ3 and RZ4 planning guidelines.

It is instructive to take a short walk from our house to see the type and quality of dwellings which have been replacing the red brick cottages. In general, the market-driven re-development has been dominated by apartment blocks of one- and two-bedroom units with underground parking. Most of these blocks have dubious architectural merit. Few are oriented to make the most of passive solar heating. Most do not have clothes lines but rely on electric clothes driers. Few are built with any shared communal spaces which could lead to the development of positive community interactions. And almost none of the apartment blocks provide any street-level opportunity for commercial uses, such as shops, cafes or other small businesses, which would add some vibrancy to the area through a more active "street scene".

It is difficult to see how ten years of developments in the RZ3 and RZ4 zones near our house have contributed to meeting the principles of the zones' objectives. Although the developments have extended the "range of affordable and sustainable housing choices" by providing one- and two-bedroom apartments in what was, hitherto, a suburb dominated by 3-bedroom detached houses, none of the other objectives has been met. Collectively, the apartments do not "ensure development respects and contributes to the neighbourhood and landscape character of residential areas". The developments do not have a "high standard of residential amenity". They do not "provide for a limited range of small-scale facilities to meet local needs". And they do not "promote energy efficiency and conservation...".

In short, the market has followed the money, as markets are supposed to do. But town planning outcomes should not be swayed unduly by economic imperatives driven by investors. The current Inner North Inquiry is an opportunity for the government to initiate some bolder and more creative planning and development guidelines, which will shape how the inner north will look in fifty years. For example, by making modifications to some of the relevant codes it would be possible to mandate that a portion of the re-development in the inner north will be for three-bedroom, energy efficient dwellings. This would enable more families to live in the area, and provide other benefits. The alternative is to see a gradual demographic change with fewer children living in the inner north. ABS data clearly show that building mostly one- and two-bedroom dwellings is gradually skewing the inner north's demographic away from families, as not many families with children choose to live in apartments.

At the time of writing, we note that some 25 submissions have been posted on the ACT Government website. As one would expect, they represent a wide range of views. Some of the submissions offer constructive suggestions. We were particularly engaged by the submissions of Mr Emil Bulum (Holder St) and Mr Anthony Crook (corner of Hartley St and Condamine St).

Mr Bulum argues cogently for building covenants to be applied on top of the existing RZ3 requirements in Section 47, with a view to encouraging the building of three-bedroom townhouses (or two bedrooms and a study) with a floor area no less than 110 m². He points out that this type of accommodation is in short supply in the area. The construction of modestly priced, three-bedroom town houses, he argues, would enable more families to live in the area, and have long-term benefits for local institutions like the Turner School. Mr Crook also advocates that town houses may well be a desirable outcome to replace his single detached house.

We support the principle of Mr Bulum's and Mr Crook's suggestions, as they concur largely with our views. Well-designed two-storey brick town houses (perhaps like the Victorian-era terrace houses of Sydney's Paddington mentioned by Mr Bulum) would mesh aesthetically with existing detached cottages while allowing a three- to four-fold increase in density.

To facilitate the practical application of maintaining dwellings for families in the inner north, we note that some relevant guidelines and rules are already in place. For example, the mandatory requirement of Rule 22 of the Inner North Precinct Code says that “dwellings with three bedrooms or more [must] have direct access to ground floor private open space” – something which would obviously apply to 3-bedroom terrace housing. However, some changes to the relevant control plans would be needed in the RZ3 guidelines. This could possibly include mandating that any multi-unit re-development within some of the sections in the zone should be two-storey three-bedroom terrace (or town) housing with above-ground parking. It would be appropriate for Hartley Street to be included in such a grouping of sections.

Overall, some of the development outcomes of terrace housing would be:

- a three- to four-fold increase in housing density
- a much greater sympathy to the existing residential amenity
- a greatly improved architectural aesthetic, compared with blocks of apartments
- more families encouraged to the area, with obvious benefits to institutions like the Turner School
- greater community interaction through a busier street scene of a cross-section of ages
- no environmental disturbance from the construction of basement parking
- greater opportunity to retain more trees
- improved energy efficiency of dwellings through such things as solar passive heating, and the opportunity to forego electric clothes driers for clothes lines in gardens.

We wish to comment on two other submissions, which are pertinent to us. The Turner Residents Association says that it supports the submission of the Turner School Board, because of the Board’s “special needs of transport”. Both submissions say that, while they have no objection to lifting the moratorium on re-development in Hartley St for the purposes of a single dwelling or dual occupancy, they oppose any further increase in residential development near the school. Their argument focuses mainly on their concerns about increased traffic activity which, the School Board alleges, impacts on the safety of Turner School Children and others.

The School Board’s argument about the connection between residential development and safety does not hold up to any objective scrutiny. We live directly opposite the entrance to the Turner Pre-School and have watched and experienced Turner School traffic for 15 years. Hartley Street is full of vehicles between 8:50 and 9:05 AM and between 2:50 and 3:05 PM. The vehicles are driven by parents either dropping or collecting their children from school. Neither of those times coincides with the times when people living in True North (the apartments at the northern end of Hartley Street) leave for work or return in the evening.

Contrary to the assertion of the School Board, it is our view that the few cars belonging to the residents of True North (or their guests), who legally park their vehicles at the northerly end of Hartley Street, are actually doing the Turner School community a valuable service by providing an additional traffic calming mechanism for the cars being driven by parents.

Finally, we would like to thank the ACT government for the opportunity to make a submission to this important inquiry. Among other outcomes of the inquiry we look forward to a timely decision on the future of the Hartley Street moratorium. Thank you.

