

15 August 2010

Submission to the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services in relations to building height and density restrictions in

Turner, O'Connor and Dickson

By Alexander Bozic and Mary Sertich, TURNER, ACT

1. We firmly believe that the Turner Residents Association does not represent the views of the majority of householders in Turner, particularly in relation to their opposition to the development of multi-storey units in this suburb as recently reported in *The Canberra Times*. Most householders in Turner, like ourselves:

- Support the view of the ACT Government and ACT Planning Department in relation to lifting the density and height restrictions on blocks already identified for 3 or 2 storey development;
- Welcome the opportunities that denser building ratios provide to facilitate a larger volume of more affordable housing close to Canberra's main traffic corridor, Northbourne Avenue and Civic;
- Recognize that urban infill provides a better, more environmentally sustainable and cheaper housing solution to Canberra's growing population; and
- Understand that Australia-wide trends suggest that more of our population want to live close to city centers where they are close to the amenities offered by high density living (shops, schools, restaurants, entertainment, etc) and that Australian's choice to marry and have children later means that there is and will be more demand for this kind of residential option.

2. We believe that the majority of householders in Turner understand that increases in building density will bring greater financial returns to them when they sell their block and that they welcome the opportunity to cash in their property at a higher price. While some (like TRA) may like to downplay the financial motivation in this view, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence which shows that there is a strong incentive to take the money, purchase newer and less costly properties to maintain elsewhere and have plenty of money left over. There are many old houses in Turner which simply are not very practical or particularly nice or suitable for its elderly and other residents and are overdue to be upgraded or redeveloped. For example, some are still using wood-fired heaters with well known consequences and most have old fashioned European style gardens which (given their large size) simply use horrendous amounts of water to maintain.

3. Having lived in O'Connor and Turner for more than 20 years, it is also our view that redevelopment and greater density living in these areas of Canberra are inevitable and that what is left to be redeveloped will need to be redeveloped wisely and best possible use made of the available space. We believe that redevelopment results in more winners than losers and that there will be more happy than

unhappy people as a result. Once multi-unit development in a block begins, as it has on our block, people are generally unhappy and unwilling to live in a street which will look like a busy and noisy construction site for the next few years and usually decide to make the best out of it i.e. take the money and run. This is especially true of the older residents who, in fact, are not heavy users of the inner city amenities. For example, they generally don't have kids at the local school or don't have a job in Civic, have completed their ANU courses many years ago, don't go to the Civic restaurants and entertainment venues, don't ride bikes etc but in fact frequently appear to drive everywhere including to Civic and local O'Connor shops. Older residents in Turner oppose redevelopment because they want things to stay as they are - that is out of habit rather than because of the need. We have talked to some who have moved away to newer and better accommodation elsewhere and have yet to talk to anyone who was unhappy with the change.

4. The quality of redevelopment is a critical issue in winning greater support for urban infill and multi-storey developments in the inner city – and other locations for that matter. For example, much of the redevelopment in Forbes Street, Turner, is plainly ugly and doesn't look like it is particularly environmentally sustainable. It doesn't match the street appeal of the 50-year old 2-storey duplexes it has largely replaced. The city end of MacLeay Street is a hodge podge of 2 and 3 block developments with not a lot to commend them from a visual perspective. Yet there are also notable exceptions such as the Space complex and the development on the city side of Gould Street. However, much of what is on offer in this area is lacking in imagination, innovation or environmental friendliness – gardens can co-exist and thrive within multi-unit developments! What is needed is more leadership to be shown by the Government, through planning incentives and regulations, to encourage innovative, attractive and sustainable urban design. This has been possible in many of Australia's larger cities and there is no reason why it should not happen here in Canberra – where the population is more highly educated and more affluent than anywhere else in Australia.

4. In this context we offer two suggestions which may be useful

A. Once a block or an area is earmarked for redevelopment then the main game should be redevelopment and pleasing and helping planners and redevelopers and future residents rather than old residents. In other words eliminate objections from the neighbors who do not want change. The emphasis should be on good planning, attractive and environmentally friendly and sustainable buildings rather than what the objectors think is good for them which is often wrong anyway. There is no point in planning and designing something and paying for it and then allowing objectors to change it if they don't like it. The objectors thus become the planners and architects etc. If the ACT Government has the planners let them plan; they should be the experts and authorities and not some ignorant long time residents with god knows what motives. In one instance we are aware of one property owner in this area (who happens to live in Deakin) who has built over every possible inch over her large block and rents rooms and flats to poor people but who then went on to become a professional objector by objecting to everything and anything whenever she could. We know that at least two larger redevelopments were held up for many months on account of her objections. There are a few things with which we are not happy in this story but one of them is that we as taxpayers are paying public servants to deal with her frivolous behavior.

B. The second suggestion is that the government can and should take more active and leadership role in the process of redevelopment. The government flats along Northbourne avenue are overdue for redevelopment and the Government should show the way by some best practice redevelopments perhaps in partnership with private sector. The planners talk about this that and the other but everyone seems to have a different idea of what they mean by sustainable, appealing, environmentally friendly, how to make accommodation more energy efficient etc. Why not make some buildings to show to all (including buyers) how it is done or at least point out to some existing developments where, say, a Croatian developer who is not a trained town planner or an architect and for whom the climate change and sustainability are really not big issues, can go and see for themselves what the buildings should be. Similarly, the buyers are not very discerning either and they need to be informed if they are to insist on better quality accommodation. We feel that the buildings we are getting now are mostly the result of real estate agents/developer thinking (both of whom have very short term interest in any given redevelopment) and that not enough attention is given to the interest of the most significant stakeholders ie future residents.

5. In conclusion, we support the continued redevelopment around the inner city, an increase in density, increase in height restrictions and encourage the ACT Government to do more to lift the quality and variety of design, construction and as well as greater environmental sustainability of new buildings. We think these views are shared by many thinking residents of Turner, O'Connor and Dickson.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input.

Yours sincerely,

Alexander Bozic and Mary Sertich