

13 July 2010

The Chair  
Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works  
and Territory and Municipal Services  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
GPO Box 1020  
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Mrs Porter,

**Submission to the Inquiry into RZ3 and RZ4 Development Policies –  
Inner North Canberra**

I understand that the Committee is still accepting submissions for this inquiry and, as the full awfulness of the effects of the current “development policy” has become apparent around Dickson only in 2010, it is timely to raise some of the issues so that Committee members can come and see for themselves.

Around Dickson, in place of houses, little square two-storey boxes, each containing between six and eight usually one-bedroom units are being shoe-horned, wall to wall along the streets, on to single or, at most, double blocks of land, almost all intended for dormitory rental. Existing trees and gardens have been sacrificed to get the maximum financial return from each site. They are coloured uniformly, mostly either white or a combination of grey and white, and it is quite clear from watching their construction and anticipating the effects on them of rental use, that most structures will be dilapidated to the level of slums within 15 or so years, requiring another round of “development” and the waste of more money.

To build their current monuments to mediocrity, developers are buying up Dickson properties which, for the most part, have been allowed to run down over a decade or more and rented, often as group houses. That has had the effect not only of making their land relatively cheap to buy for redevelopment, but also of capping the prices of those houses that have been maintained as residents’ homes because they are being sold and purchased as just potential building sites. That, in turn, means that even if we are prepared to move, Dickson residents can have difficulty finding the funds to purchase equivalent accommodation with equivalent amenities.

Developers tell my wife and me that they cannot afford to pay more than \$1,000 per square metre for land on which to erect their little boxes made of ticky-tacky. They are very limited in the prices they can ask for the small number of units they can build on any one block, so they are under pressure to keep the cost of the land relatively

low. I don't believe all of what they say but I appreciate the logic of what they say and I believe that this problem occurs, at least in some measure, because the RZ3 and RZ4 requirements are totally inappropriate to redevelopment within three kilometres, ie walking and cycling distance, of Civic and the ANU.

Rather than lining Dickson streets with a solid wall of drab two storey blocks of shoddily constructed units, ready to start falling apart by 2030, it would make a lot more sense to allow larger, ie taller, tower blocks to be constructed, thus housing more people per square kilometre but still with a reasonable amount of surrounding open space/gardens and in a greater variety of dwelling configurations. Effecting greater population densities and a mix of demographics in that way would also provide environmental benefits, reducing the need for the city, and all the associated urban services, to sprawl into the surrounding countryside. It would also mean that developers would be better able to pay the higher prices needed by we Dickson residents to move to make our land available for consolidation and redevelopment.

If it has time, the Committee could also usefully look at what constitutes a "major transport corridor" as mentioned in the inquiry's Terms of Reference. The ACT's road and transport planning has been so appalling that almost every road in North Canberra has become a "transport corridor". Certainly Cowper Street, Majura Avenue south of Cowper Street and all of Limestone Avenue warrant treatment as a "major transport corridors" if the Committee is looking to determine where major residential developments, as described above, should be located.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I urge the Committee not to pussyfoot around changing RZ3 to RZ4 in Dickson, but to recommend changing the ACT planning laws to allow for much more substantial redevelopment in what remains of Inner North Canberra.

Yours sincerely

Richard Griffiths