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TURNER ACT 2612

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Ms Nicola Derrigo
Secretary
Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and TAMS
ACT Legislative Assembly
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Re: Submission to the Inquiry into Inner North Residential Redevelopment Policies

We would like to make the following submission for the Committee's consideration. We make the submission hoping that the Committee will perceive its role as being greater than achieving an increase in the population density in the inner north. Our Assembly has a responsibility to ensure that viable communities are sustained and that the infrastructure of suburbs bearing the brunt of re-development is adequate and that the general amenity of those suburbs is preserved. In looking at these issues the Committee cannot ignore that the pace of development in Civic is putting enormous strain on those suburbs. The Turner suburb in particular has suffered because of the failure of the Government to take an integrated approach to planning and traffic control issues.

Background to Our Submission

We declare we have a vested interest in the outcome of the Committee's deliberations in respect of the zoning of the Turner area. We live in section 47 which is specifically referred to in the terms of reference for the inquiry into RZ3 and RZ4 residential development policies for inner north Canberra. Accordingly, although our submission is primarily focused on section 47 specifically, many of our comments have application generally to the inner north area. For the sake of the residents in that section and surrounding areas, and particularly for the older and very young who live in those areas we want to preserve some of the social fabric of our community so that it remains a peaceful and safe place to live.

We purchased our home in late 2003. One of the things that greatly attracted us to the area was the unique mix of housing and the fact that, although at the time the block was

zoned to allow for 2 storey housing, there was a complete prohibition on re-development. In fact, we would not have purchased our home if what is commonly referred to as "the moratorium" was not present.

This is yet another review of zoning in the Turner area. The Discussion Paper details some of the policy re-writes that have occurred almost continuously for the best part of two decades.

The prohibition of re-development of any sort on section 47 was put in place because it was the wish of the residents. At the time, there was no set date for the prohibition to be lifted or reviewed – although it was indicated that it would be revisited when the Territory Plan was reviewed (rumored to be not before 6 years). The Discussion Paper confirms this.

Recently, when planning laws were overhauled, the TRA made submissions to the Government relating to the incorporation of the section master plans into the new Territory Plan. The TRA made the submission that, in section 47, redevelopment continue to be prohibited in perpetuity or that the section be rezoned so as not to allow multi-unit development.

As part of that planning law review the Government developed Precinct Codes. The Precinct Code that relates to section 47 is 3.4, Inner North Precinct Code. At part c(4), - Turner, Element 1: Restrictions on Use R44 it states that "Redevelopment is not permitted on Turner section 47.....".

Following the Precinct Code enactment, local residents examined the status of the prohibition on development. Residents took comfort in the fact that there was no mention or discussion of any further review and that it appeared that the wishes of the TRA had been adopted – that is, a complete prohibition on redevelopment of section 47 was to continue –without qualification. It was disappointing to learn that the issue was, yet again, going to be ventilated and that the lack of certainty was to continue.

At the outset, we should say that we do not oppose development, nor re-development outright. The goal of increasing population density close to Civic is a desirable one. Northbourne Avenue itself must inevitably be a focus of this re-development. All we ask is just a little bit of imagination in achieving this goal. We do, however, oppose such development in Section 47, and generally any further large multi storey development significantly west of Northbourne Avenue and north of Haig Park.

Community

In any area, for a productive, socially supportive and working community there is a need to strike an appropriate balance of the types of housing in any particular area. Areas that have, for example, seen almost complete communities of public housing have created social difficulties. Different groups of residents want different types of accommodation. It is well established that the most diverse communities are the most functional.

If the community allows for a mix between students, retirees, public housing, families and working couples then a sense of community and a contributive and functional neighbourhood can be achieved.

Turner has seen large amounts of high density developments over the last 10 years. Many of these developments have been one and two bedroom units attracting more transient residents. There is a very high proportion of units that are not owner occupied and a very low number are designed in such a way as to make them attractive as an accommodation option for families (however comprised). Most of these tenancies allow for 1 or 2 people to reside on the premises. This is not conducive to a sense of community. The "Space" development on Northbourne Avenue is one of the few to encourage owner occupiers. Many of the current unit developments are subject to tenancies. Many of the re-developed areas of the suburb have the atmosphere of a barrack suburb. People stay for the moment in the units. They have no need to integrate themselves into the community and they do not. The streets are empty but for many motor vehicles parked on the street.

Section 47 is contained completely of single dwellings ranging in size from original 2 bedroom Canberra cottages, to cottages extended with up to 6 bedrooms. Some of the original residents still reside within the section. They have brought their families up in the area; children have attended local schools, and eventually left home, leaving their parents to ultimately retire. For the cottages that have been sold, many have been renovated and extended and a fresh influx of families has moved in.

We believe that for a sense of community to be retained, in any suburb, and in each area of a suburb, some single dwelling housing should be retained to achieve the appropriate balance. We believe that areas around section 47 have been sufficiently developed and that section 47 should be retained with its current prohibition on redevelopment. We would not be opposed to allowing extensions and renovations, even with provision for dual-occupancy, provided that no multi unit developments are allowed.

Human Rights Considerations

Section 12 of the *Human Rights Act 2004* provides that everyone has the right not to have his or her privacy, family home or correspondence interfered with unlawfully or arbitrarily. Current development approvals that allow for variations of the Territory Plan that have seen a move away from the principal that all entry doors to units should face the street, and an eroding away of the green zones (rear site coverage) at the rear of properties, have meant that where a multi unit development has been constructed amongst single dwellings, as well as issues relating to shade and outlook, there has been a loss of privacy of the homes and backyards of these houses. We believe that in some cases there is at least an argument that section 12 is being impinged.

Inconsistent and ill thought out Government Policies

We support policies that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and encourage people to walk to work. It would seem logical that higher density in the inner city area would help achieve this.

However, this policy fails to achieve this objective in so many ways – many of these multi-unit developments are occupied by single residents and who may not even work in the City given the decentralisation of business centres throughout the ACT (another Government policy). This would mean for single block developments whilst greater number of dwellings may be achieved, the actual number of residents living in each dwelling site may even reduce. For example, a 5 bedroom home on a single block may have had 5 residents. That single block would need to be redeveloped to allow for a minimum of 6 two bedroom units before it could be argued that higher occupancies will occur.

Multi-unit residents are more likely to be greater consumer of energy. We had our home “energy audited” recently. The person doing the audit made the point that the poor design of the units being constructed in the area meant that the expected energy savings were not being realized because, for example, no allowance was being made for outside drying space for laundry, and with building and common areas requiring 24 hour lighting.

Heritage Considerations

Sections 46, 47 and 48 of Turner have been the subject of a Streetscape Study done by the National Trust and the *Turner Residents Association* (TRA). This formed the basis of a joint application by the Trust and TRA to have those sections included on the ACT Heritage Register. That application was rejected only on the basis that a historical background was needed before the application could be properly considered as warranting heritage listing. Two applications for funding to complete this further study through the Heritage Fund have, to date, been unsuccessful.

At the annual general meetings of the TRA over the past 3 years it has been unanimously resolved that Sections 46, 47 and 48 should be preserved for bungalow style residents in perpetuity (that is, single storey dwellings) due to the heritage value of the woodland style of design in the area that have, for the main part (excepting a small area in section 48) preserved their heritage character,

The heritage area of Turner (which consists of Section 46, 47, 48, 49 and 50) largely contains single storey architecture and the wide streetscapes of these sections represent one of the last surviving, largely intact, examples of the “Garden City” style of urban planning in the immediate post-war years.

Residents in the suburb have a strong sense of community and recognize the heritage value of those sections, regardless of whether they actually reside in those sections and

this was evidenced by the unanimous resolution of those present at the AGM who are most concerned to keep the present character of Turner intact.

Infrastructure

Most of the re-development in Turner over recent years has failed to make adequate provision for infrastructure. Some examples of this include:

- Poor water pressure;
- Dirty household water from broken pipes;
- Flooding of streets (when it does rain) caused by no ground for the water to be absorbed into - large concrete areas cannot cope with even moderate rainfall;
- Insufficient lighting and maintenance of footpaths;
- Insufficient parking (particularly at local shops);
- Poor integration of licensing policy that has allowed the shopping precinct to be dominated by a single bar;
- Poor road maintenance (roads are discussed more fully under safety);
- Insufficient green space and recreational area;
- Insufficient public and community amenities – Haig Park has, for example, seen the removal of bins and public BBQ areas and seating rather than an increase.

Haig Park

This icon of the Civic area is being neglected and is effectively moribund as a recreational area. Trees are being cut down and not replaced. There are few facilities that attract people to its use. There are no defined paths or lighting. No attempt is being made by Government or its agencies for the Park to be a focus for community activity. It barely rates a mention on the National Capital Authority website; it is, after all, close to where poor people live! Heroin dealing is the only human activity that is a consistently observed within its precincts.

The promised development of Sullivan Creek which runs through the Park has not materialized despite funding commitments that were given prior to the last Federal election.

Achieving objectives

As your recently published *Discussion Paper* points out on page 23 the demographic of the area have changed considerably in recent years. If the objective in allowing increased development is to encourage people to live and work close to the city then it is questionable that allowing two storey development in the area will achieve this when viewed against the large number of single person households that will exist, particularly when coupled with the encouragement of decentralization of large Government Departments across the ACT.

We note that the ACT Government has recently released the draft *Greater Canberra City Area Coordinated Action Plan 2010-2016* for public consultation. It states as a target that

by 2016 the number of people living in the Greater City Area doubles to about 10,400. It plans to achieve this increase through "covenants on land sales requiring development for residential uses, conversion of under utilized office sites to residential, addition of student housing at ANU and Reid CIT, and redeveloping and upgrading existing Territory owned housing stocks".

There are 2 points to be made from this:

- the area referred to as the Greater Canberra City Area stretches from the city side of Haig Park to Lake Burley Griffin. This is a sensible boundary relying on green space for division. Most of the development of Braddon and Turner has occurred within this area. It makes sense to concentrate on that area for increase residential development and capacity.
- there are a number of public housing sites within that area and along the Northbourne Avenue defined transport corridor. It would be sensible to concentrate on redevelopment of those sites (acknowledging of course the heritage listing of the Northbourne Flats!). Much could be achieved by way of allowing multi-storey significant developments along that corridor and greater house stocks and capacity could be achieved from the sums that would be fetched from such sales.

Safety Issues

Traffic congestion, parking and the ability for the roads in area to cope with the influx of residents and people driving through the area are creating significant safety issues. There are numerous examples of this and we are aware that many letters have been written to the Government on the issue. Forbes Street behind the Space development and Hartley Street are good examples of streets that have essentially been reduced to single way streets but still purport to be two way streets. This is particularly alarming for Hartley Street given the school is on this street. It is likely that the traffic arrangements in these streets will cause death or serious injury in the near future.

The Government has, we believe, plans to use the green space on Watson Street as a parking area and plans to encourage the use of the suburb as a highway by putting lights at the intersection of Watson Street and Barry Drive to allow through traffic to have the flexibility of turning right as well as left. Restrictions on car parking in the Streets adjoining Barry Drive are routinely not enforced and a church on Macleay Street is being allowed to abuse its lease purpose clause by turning itself into a paid car park.

The suburb is being used by motorists to avoid the Northbourne Avenue traffic jam. In peak hour it is now a daily occurrence for traffic to be banked up solidly along Macpherson and McCaughey Streets between Barry Drive and Macarthur Avenue, through the shopping precinct and past four schools/ child care facilities.

Access to the Turner Primary School from McCaughey Street between Condamine Street and the O'Connor Shops is particularly dangerous. It is extremely dangerous for children trying to get to school. There have been significant increases in peak hour traffic throughout the area and it is disturbing to note that the draft *Greater Canberra Plan* refers to significant increases in delays for vehicles further increasing the incentive to use Turner and O'Connor as a by pass. Further development in the area will only contribute to the congestion. Even if you accept that all these people will work in the city area (on current trends the majority of them will not), most households will still have cars and most will still use these cars for purposes other than getting to and from work but which may include getting to and from work for the sake of convenience, childcare, recreational and other commitments.

The large number of construction sites in the area also contributes significantly to safety issues. Footpaths are often unavailable, vehicles are parked anywhere and everywhere and much heavier classes or both vehicle and machinery are on sites at all hours.

A Grand Vision

The recommendations of the Committee will influence decisions to be made about a residential area that will help to define what it means to live in and around Civic for the next 50 years. We invite the Committee to come with us on any given day and walk some streets in the suburb and see if they are comfortable with what has been achieved so far. There are some highlights. The "Space" development might be a blue print for development on Northbourne Avenue. The precinct near the corners of Macleay, Moore and Gould Streets is a very pleasant area and also could be used a model for improving the quality and diversity of multi unit development. But there are some terrible failures – Macleay and Forbes Streets north of Condamine Street, for example, are at best characterless barrack streets and at worse a slum area of the future. Much of Braddon immediately on the eastern side of Northbourne Avenue is of a similar character. These areas will be what inner city living will represent over the next generation. That is a sad thing to contemplate.

We invite the Committee to be imaginative. It is just not about numbers. If green spaces are to be sacrificed why not recommend the consideration of Glebe Park type developments which involve more inspiring interactions between public and private spaces. Look at spaces along Watson Street and that adjoin the North Oval at the ANU and see what might be achieved. The ANU inadequately caters for the accommodation of its students. Are there partnerships that can be fostered to address that issue in the McKay Gardens/Watson Street precinct? What will the NCA permit in relation to public and private partnerships to develop Haig Park? Are the public housing areas of Northbourne Avenue opportunities for high rise developments that might better showcase the entrance to Civic whilst achieving very significant increasing in dwelling density on this important transport route.

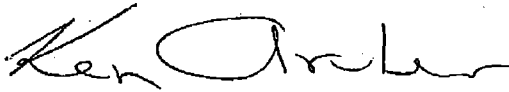
Conclusions

We acknowledge and openly admit we have an interest in preserving the integrity of our neighbourhood. We acknowledge the inevitability of changes in the suburb as a whole. We welcome that change but we want some social value out of that change for the people who actually live here on a permanent basis. We have a young family. We want other young families to be attracted to the area. We want to feel safe. We don't want our suburb to be reduced to a barrack and a car park.

We would welcome the opportunity to appear before the committee to provide further information and elaborate on any queries the Committee Members may have. We can be contacted on the above telephone numbers.

If we are afforded the opportunity to appear before the Committee we intend to produce some video footage, or at the very least photographs, of this unique area in case the Committee Members are unable to visit the area which presents a compelling case for preservation. A visit to the area is a must for any committee member wanting to appreciate the stress that this community is under.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken Archer', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ken Archer and Nicole Mayo