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Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services
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Dear Committee Members,

**Reference Rz3 and Rz4 Residential Redevelopment Policies—Inner North
Canberra Plus other issues**

In reference to your study of development policies as they relate to the RZ3 and RZ4 zones of North Canberra along the Northbourne Ave corridor and other transport corridors, I wish to offer my further thoughts to these as well as other matters, on top of those I offered on 24th October 2009.

The policies do not affect me that directly, except for the excessive height planned for some developments at Belconnen (18 storeys) and Lawson (6 storeys). However, I wouldn't like to see the whole of central Canberra end up like the centre of Sydney or Melbourne or parts of the Gold Coast. I think you share that reservation.

As to North Canberra, but especially along the Northbourne corridor, there needs to be a sensible compromise between anything goes and a mixture of RZ4 and RZ5 type development. Thus I think a lot of the old restrictions you mention need to be removed and replaced with newer more flexible arrangements. Obviously based on what has already occurred, the strip along Northbourne is suitable for higher density and levels in accord with its CZ category. The land behind may be suitable for lesser density and heights as commensurate with RZ4 and maybe in these cases allowing buildings of 4-6 storeys, with RZ3 further out from Northbourne and with lower density again but with heights limited to 2-3 storeys.

Of course this is subject to residents agreeing. If they strongly disagree there needs to be a sensible compromise as has happened in the past.

Densification and High Density Policies

It's clear from all the research, various statements from the Planning Minister and the general theme of various plans that the Government wants higher densities in at least certain areas. You seem under pressure to deliver this.

Higher densities in urban areas along Northbourne Ave, should not be seen as a way of encouraging the same to occur further out. However, this has already happened to some extent with 6-8 storey buildings around the edge of Belconnen town centre and 3 storey structures along roads into Gungahlin and even along the lake near Amaroo. And of course we have the Lyons example.

You see in ACTPLA's planning for new suburbs a quite deliberate policy of having a mixture of detached, multi level development and even some 4-6 storey stuff. The problem is that families will not wish to live that close to the high level structures due to the issues of aesthetics and noise.

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I believe any high level structures should be more concentrated in the inner suburbs and around town centres, with only 10-18 storeys in central Civic.

I agree that more single person and couple accommodation may be more appropriate in Canberra. However this can be tastefully done in lower height structures with appropriate small private garden areas.

The concepts articulated that people in North Canberra will walk to work more is partially flawed as many will need to travel to Woden, Fyshwick, Queanbeyan, Belconnen, Brindabella Park or other similar places. There has been a large development in such places in recent years with less development in Civic. I myself had to travel from Belconnen to Fairbairn for a year or so – not the best journey!

One significant problem with planning is the lack of contribution by most citizens to something that affects their lives and future well being. ACTPLA goes through the processes by placing notices in the paper and some signs around affected areas. However, most people don't read the paper that much and many are so busy they do not get to see the signs. And when you make a submission to ACTPLA they tend to ignore you as they have already done their planning and your just making a submission right at the end of the process. Maybe ACTPLA needs a citizen council so that more community input can be made before they start planning. Maybe ACTPLA having a brief to serve the community's wishes rather than maximising the yield of an area would help.

Some of the discussion paper draws upon popular thoughts that a more dense city saves the environment, saves on infrastructure and minimises transport costs. There is no doubt some truth in these statements, but they are largely only half the story.

If I had lived in a flat I would never have got solar panels, a heat pump nor a water tank. I would not have a vegetable garden either. There is a lot to be said for humans being more self sustained in that way. There is a key conflict here between the high density fraternity and the low density more self sustained concepts. The concepts I articulated are what makes Canberra a nice place to live. Living in an apartment complex might be good for a busy worker, but it is not a life enhancing experience. You can get the latter in Melbourne, Sydney, or New York.

There are problems with high density you have completely ignored. For example:

1. High density places will usually requires lifts which use a lot of energy and require continual maintenance;
2. High density structures and locations concentrate power and create a change to the overall outside ambient temperature. I have seen some say that high density cities are responsible for altering the climate of significant areas such as large cities;
3. High density, but mainly high structures are very expensive per sq m compared to low height structures. I have seen figures of \$10,000 per sq m for the really high places (inner city apartments Melb Nov 2009)

Urban Sprawl and Sustainability

The argument that greenfield developments are more expensive may be true but we have paid for most of the basic infrastructure is already, and the extra costs to place more suburbs at Gungahlin or Molonglo is more incremental than compared with starting from scratch. The

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major roads, water and sewerage are already close by, as are major educational, health and other services. It is not really starting a new city, just adding bits around the edges.

However we can make newer suburbs much more sustainable by clustering them around a group core, where more Government, health and education facilities would be provided, and making it easier to cycle and walk to such facilities. We have a similar concept already it's just that we didn't pursue it to its logical conclusion.

To argue that there is no land in Canberra for more housing is a bit incomprehensible. When we put more than 70% of the total land in nature reserves and parks you don't need a maths degree to work out that there isn't much left for the humans. If one looks at a map of Gungahlin and see the massive grassland reserves, you just have to stop and wonder what is going on. In some respects we have too many reserves in the ACT.

To argue that we don't have enough land is very insular. True the ACT does not on its own. But like Washington DC, the ACT will need to expand into NSW. It's already happened to an extent, with Queanbeyan, Jerrabomberra, Googong, Bungendore and even people living more and more in Yass. I know of people commuting from Cooma and Boorowa. This will continue because of the restrictive policies in Canberra and the high costs of land and housing. More apartments will not help this only create more profits for the developers. There is clearly adequate land around Canberra.

We have wonderful open areas. I have cycled around the lake and back home through O'Connor and the AIS recently. It's just great you can do this without being overlooked by much high rise, except the ugly stuff at Acton. Unfortunately some in ACTPLA without any understanding of such issues are planning rows of 6 story blocks along the edge of Lake Ginninderra. I would hope committee members would do the right things and oppose such irresponsibility.

We should be increasing the park and ride parking facilities at Belconnen, Tuggeranong and Gungahlin and other appropriate places. But it doesn't seem to happen much with the current Belconnen facility rezoned for high density development. To some extent Government greed destroys other good policies.

Densification along Main Transport Corridors and In Town Centres

There is a case for some densification along major transport corridors but I feel it should be limited to 2-4 storey, except in certain locations like Town Centres which could accommodate 4-6 storey and some 8-10 storey structures where appropriate. I cannot see any justification for 18 storeys or similar.

In all such situations there needs to be some understanding of the features of the area and some limitation based on Relative Levels and tree heights. The original theme of the National Capital Plan wherein structures should not rise above the tree line is something worth remembering and worth retaining as much as possible.

The NCA showed their professionalism in redevelopment of the Cameron Building site in Belconnen where they limited development to the existing height along Cameron St Belconnen, which allowed 8-9 storeys at Benjamin St side and 2-3 storeys less at the Cameron St side, maintaining a standard building height.

Conclusions

Of all the countries on earth Australia has the land. We don't need massive high density. The impact of Canberra on the overall world environment is minuscule.

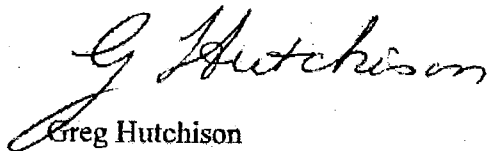
There is a clear need for normal, low cost and elderly style accommodation. There is some need for apartments closer to the City Centre, but overall the vast majority of residents clearly want to live in normal detached houses in the 1-2 storey category.

The Variation to the Territory Plan No. 288 allowed for higher densities to 6 stories in areas where this is appropriate. This should only occur in parts of North Canberra and around Town Centre, not in places like Lawson or Molonglo.

In summary:

1. there seems scope to densify the areas adjacent to Northbourne Ave;
2. in Canberra we need a mixture of normal 1 and 2 storey detached housing on reasonable blocks (500-600 sq metres minimum);
3. we also need low height low cost housing for those who can not afford larger places as well as older people;
4. we need some low height medium density housing, for those who do not require much in the way of gardens;
5. we can accommodate higher density around town centres such as the 4-6 and 8-10 storey type of construction located appropriately and matched to the terrain; and
6. we can accommodate some 2-4 storey type construction along transport corridors.

Regards,



Greg Hutchison

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23rd February 2010