

SUBMISSION TO ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY PLANNING COMMITTEE

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

INTRODUCTION

This submission from the undersigned residents of Dickson addresses concerns about particular current development applications in the suburb of Dickson, and then turns to Terms of Reference 4 and 5.

We thank the Committee for agreeing to accept a late submission, and seek also the opportunity to appear as a group when the Committee holds its hearings.

BACKGROUND

Dickson is one of the surviving remnant suburbs of the near-Northern developments of the mid-1950s, comprising mainly modest single-storey, free-standing, red-brick, tiled-roof dwellings, with some duplex houses, apart from the Northbourne public-housing complex. Consistent with the social policies and prevailing value systems of the times, there is provision in most houses for at best one or perhaps two cars, the quiet tree-lined streets are designed for mainly pedestrian traffic, and there is virtually nil availability of parking on street, off the individual private properties.

Most of the internal streets are very narrow, just able to manage two lanes of traffic. There is a very high proportion of publicly owned housing in the suburb, apart from the Northbourne complex, some still occupied by individual householders remnant of the original tenant residents from the '50s and '60s. Many of the first residents of the tenanted properties took an opportunity to purchase their homes from the original public-housing authority in the late '50s and early '60s.

There has been a degree of gentrification and redevelopment of older houses in the past 10 years or so, with some rebuilding of privately owned two-storey dwellings, and other general upgrading of resident-owner properties. As well, as older original residents have died, many formerly privately owned houses have been purchased by developers, and are currently tenanted.

Traffic congestion has been mounting over the past decade, with many non-resident car drivers using Dickson residential streets as 'rat-runs' to escape traffic on Limestone and Northbourne Avenues. Dickson residents have a long-documented history of discussions with ACT Roads and Traffic authorities about the need to control this and to protect the amenity of the suburb.

Recent manifestations have been the installation of traffic lights at the intersection of Dooring Street with Wakefield Avenue, and the current works in Dooring Street near the northern-most corner with Karuah Street to minimize problems of rat-run cars failing to take the unexpectedly sharp right-angle turn.

HIGHER DENSITY REDEVELOPMENT IN THE INNER NORTH

Current owner-residents who have lived in Dickson since the 1980s and before are well aware of the Government's planning policies to increase residential density in the inner North. The signatories to this submission are not opposed to this policy per se.

However, we are concerned about the manner in which the ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA) is allowing piecemeal development to occur, seemingly with a total absence of planning to maintain residential amenity. We need to ensure some consistency of approach that respects the overall historical character of the suburb and has regard to the impact on existing residents of major redevelopment of their suburb.

So far as ACTPLA has consulted with Dickson residents concerning planning for redevelopment this has been entirely contained by discussions on the redevelopment of the retail and commercial area around the current shopping centre and the spaces adjoining Antill Street where the sporting fields and other amenities are located. To establish an agreed development plan for those areas has been worthwhile and praiseworthy.

In addition to the effect on residential amenity, we are concerned that the type and rate of some developments already approved, and some still in application, will have the effect of adversely impacting on the asset value of owner-residents wishing to maintain that status, and to age-in-place.

Current and proposed developments also ignore the limitations placed by existing infrastructure and road systems. In addition, they are apparently completely hostile to contemporary thinking on the need to adopt 'universal design' principles in the face of the need for affordable and accessible housing suitable for an ageing population and people with a disability.

We seek the intervention of the Committee so as to require the Minister for Planning, and the ACT Planning and Land Authority to:

1. Immediately establish a process of consultation and development of an overall plan for the residential areas of Dickson.
2. Immediately apply prospectively to all development applications bearing on residential buildings, and retrospectively to all current developments under construction, the existing policy of guaranteeing that at least 25% of all residential developments will meet 'universal design' criteria so that people with a disability and ageing Canberrans with some mobility limitations are able to obtain affordable but accessible and appropriate residences, if need be in place of their existing housing in Dickson.
3. Adopt mandatory design elements to ensure environmentally friendly and solar energy standards are met, respecting the need for access to winter sunlight both in new developments and adjacent existing housing.

SOME SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS – COMMENTS

We turn now to our concerns as individuals with particular development applications currently under consideration.

1. 77 Dooring Street, Dickson. This application is to demolish an existing monocrete single-storey home and construct on the block a two-storey development with six units. The application would mean that on a corner already recognised by Roads and Traffic as having potential for traffic accidents, with current access to Dooring Street from Karuah St, and numbers 73, 74a, and 75b, and 77, all on the dangerous right-angle corner, would very likely more than double the numbers of cars accessing Dooring Street. Leaving aside considerations of loss of winter sunlight, the proposal is unsupportable in its present form on the grounds alone of traffic safety. Moreover, current site plans ignore some existing large trees, and the construction/demolition process outlined shows no recognition of, or intention to provide for, the need for off-street parking for building and construction workers which will not cause a traffic hazard and impeded access for existing residents to their homes.

We very much doubt there is any compliance with the universal design requirements - none are apparent from the published documentation.

2. 32 Stockdale Street, Dickson. A proposed 18-unit building on the corner of Stockdale Street and Dooring Street represents a large-scale development entirely out of character with the streetscape, and – in a street undergoing major and rapid transformation – comes on top of a new, somewhat overbearing, multi-dwelling building (also in Stockdale Street) and an adjacent similarly large, unsympathetic 12-unit development now starting construction. In addition to these developments, residents in McGowan Street (off Stockdale Street) also have to their rear (in Dooring Street) new multi-unit developments. The net effect of the bulldozing of houses around residents and their replacement with large, domineering buildings is a sense of dismay at the destruction of their neighbourhood.
3. 8 Hope Street, Dickson. A singularly out-of-character six-unit dwelling is proposed at this address, which runs off Dooring Street. With its bronze-coloured aluminium cladding and squat design, it evinces little concern for its surroundings, and even less for its southern neighbour on whom it will cast a large winter shadow. Instead its focus appears to be on maximising occupation of the block on which it will be built, without regard to the effect on existing residents of intrusion, loss of privacy and unsympathetic design. In addition to its eye-sore potential, the fact that the bulk of the block will be under concrete – taking into account the paving of driveways -- attention will need to be paid to stormwater provisions, given that the street is prone to flooding and that the development will increase substantially the amount of run-off.

IN SUMMARY

We are concerned that residential redevelopment in Dickson is proceeding rapidly, haphazardly and without regard to residential amenity. We are particularly concerned about

the scale of these developments, which are apparently being driven by those wishing to maximise profit and therefore to maximise occupancy, when smaller-scale multi-dwellings are more appropriate to the distinctive character of Dickson and to its existing infrastructure.

We do not believe that either long-term owner residents and tenants or the increasing number of young families moving into the area who choose to live in free-standing housing should be adversely affected by large multi-unit dwellings that intrude on the privacy of their backyards, deprive them of sunlight, increase traffic in their streets and have little in common with the existing housing stock of their neighbourhood.

DICKSON RESIDENTS

Marie Coleman

Virginia Metherell

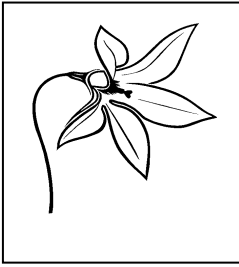
James Grieve

Sally Pryor

Peter Stanley

Claire Cruickshank

Felix MacNeil



Women with Disabilities (ACT)

ATTACHMENT 1

19 June 2010

ACT Legislative Assembly Planning Committee

Dear Planning Committee Members,

I write on behalf of Women With Disabilities ACT. We are becoming increasingly concerned about the lack of universal design housing being built in the private sector in the ACT. This compounds a serious lack of universal design, accessible public housing currently available.

Women with disabilities need to have housing choices, both in public and private markets, and for both sale and rental. We fully support the ACT Greens' stipulation that 25% of public housing should conform to universal design principles, but regard it as a minimum requirement. However, it appears that even this minimum percentage is not being adhered to in the approvals that are being granted through the ACT Planning and Land Authority.

Whilst we support moves which would increase the availability of fully accessible housing in close proximity to shopping and other amenities, WWDACT is particularly concerned that some inner city developments currently under planning permit consideration, put large numbers of units on single blocks with consequent parking congestion in streets. This has serious consequences for people with mobility impairments:

1. Within the complex there is insufficient space for wheelchair taxis to manoeuvre, insufficient space for larger wheelchair carrying vehicles to park or manoeuvre, and insufficient space for car doors to open sufficiently wide for a person with mobility impairment to get in or out;
2. Outside the complex, parking on verges becomes more likely and this impedes access and makes access dangerous for pedestrians with mobility aids, wheelchair users, and those who are blind.
3. The increased traffic brought about by the increased housing density decreases road safety for all with mobility impairments, including the above mentioned groups plus those with hearing impairment or who are Deaf.

Both outcomes are unacceptable. Both problems can be exacerbated during a construction phase when construction vehicles further impede footpaths.

WWDACT is further concerned that in-fill developments are STILL being approved without requirement for orientation and design to take into account the ability to use roof space for the generation of solar power, and without requirement for other environmentally sustainable features. A voluntary code of attention to these matters is being studiously ignored. Women with disabilities are more likely to have higher than average heating and cooling costs than non-disabled women because many disabling conditions carry an inability to regulate body temperature. For all ACT citizens, it now verges on immoral that environmental sustainability is not being enforced in public and private housing.

In both sustainability and accessibility public and private housing matters, the ACT has the opportunity to be a leader amongst Australian jurisdictions. At present, the ACT is paying lip-service only to both matters.

As a first step to addressing both issues, there must be the immediate instigation of the formulation of an overall development plan for the older, inner suburbs, such as Dickson. Piecemeal development is causing the amenity of these suburbs to be irreparably devalued, and will lead to discrimination and further exclusion of women with disabilities from our community. These matters need your urgent consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Susan Salthouse". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Sue Salthouse

Convenor, WWDACT