

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO RZ3 AND RZ4 RESIDENTIAL REDEVELOPMENT POLICIES—INNER NORTH CANBERRA

I am writing in support of removing the restrictions on increased density in the inner north, for reasons detailed in the Heart Foundation's submission: a denser city allows us to combat urban sprawl, promote healthy living and create a more sustainable community.

I also support increased density being allowed throughout the inner north, not just the RZ3 and RZ4 zones, under appropriate planning controls (for example, site-specific controls on the building envelope).

It is often suggested that higher density redevelopment is accompanied by a loss in urban amenity. I argue that careful planning and reinvestment can mean an improvement in urban amenity.

Specifically, I support the repeal of the limit on development north of Wakefield/Macarthur.

Nature of redevelopment.

Small-scale redevelopment--- dual and triple occupancies and small unit developments (for example, that on Allport Street, Downer, outside the RZ3/4 zone) may be inevitable but seems to be the worst of all worlds--- a very small increase in density, at a great loss in amenity, gardens, and green space. For this reason, amalgamation of existing blocks and multi-storey (3-5 storey) buildings should be encouraged in the RZ3 and RZ4 areas.

I consider it desirable that redevelopment should not just compromise small 1-2 bedroom flats (a practise adversely commented on by several other submissions) but also have dwellings where families can comfortably live. This could mean: apartment blocks with a shared garden area; terrace houses each with a small garden; larger flats suitable for families. Policies to encourage this are welcomed.

Public open spaces.

Currently the inner north enjoys a large amount of open space, including playgrounds, playing fields, wide street verges (nature strips), and minimally-maintained open space. However it does suffer under a lack of investment in these spaces: playgrounds are run-down and underutilised, with faulty equipment often removed rather than replaced; open space is lacking in vegetation and shade trees; nature strips have overgrown footpaths or are lacking footpaths altogether.

Redevelopment of these suburbs should be accompanied by an up-grading of the quality of the public spaces. Particular attention should be paid to the nature strips adjoining redevelopment sites--- a street filled with 3-4 storey apartments can be enjoyably green if there are wide nature strips with large, mature trees. (An example of such a street is Gould Street, Turner.) The aim should be to make the streets attractive places for residents and pedestrians, and for cyclists. A narrowing of some overwide streets may help to tame increased traffic.

While I believe that the overall amount of open space is ample, it does tend to be concentrated in large parks. In areas of high density, there may be scope for provision of new pocket parks--- very small parks with some play equipment, seating and shade.

Mixed use.

A key aim of increasing density is to reduce the amount of travel needed. Increasing density in the inner north will reduce the travel time of residents working nearby, who would otherwise be housed in outer suburbs. However we should further aim to reduce travel by providing services locally.

I support removing restrictions on mixed use in the RZ3 and RZ4 areas. There are some uses that are clearly incompatible with residential areas: nightclubs, noisy industries and so on. However some uses are not only compatible, they would increase urban amenity for the residents: small offices, corner shops, small cafes, small childcare centres. Such uses can be sensitively incorporated into redevelopment--- for example, a large apartment block could include a small cafe, a shop and an accountant's office on the ground floor.

Such active frontages would provide extra safety and street life, as well as providing services to local residents.

I acknowledge that this is a radical departure from current Canberra practice, and thus likely to be unpopular. Perhaps such a policy could be introduced first in areas of high redevelopment (for example, in streets which are already 60% redeveloped).

Traffic, parking.

An increase in density demands careful traffic planning. The most efficient ways to cope with extra traffic are to increase patronage of public transport, increase walking rates, and to increase cycling rates. I support the light rail proposed for Northbourne Avenue. I also support a network of physically separated cycle lanes along major roads.

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