

Inquiry to Evaluate the RZ3 and RZ4 Residential Redevelopment Policies In North Canberra

Submission from owners of Blocks 14-17 & 19, Section 63, Turner

Overview

We, the leaseholders of Blocks 14 -17 and 19, Section 63, Turner (refer to Attachment A), welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services Inquiry into RZ3 and RZ4 Residential Redevelopment Policies – Inner North, announced on 25 June 2009.

We also welcome the opportunity to contribute our experience and observations as residents of Canberra's inner north to the exploration of policy approaches for urban planning in this area. It is clear that achieving the sustainable urban aspirations of *The Territory Plan 2008* is a complex process that requires an equally sophisticated and integrated policy approach. Currently there is an over reliance on a simplistic policy of increasing housing densities along transport corridors in established areas without ensuring that development is meeting the needs of all residents now and into the future.

Current redevelopment in the inner north under the *Multi Unit Housing Development Code* consists of primarily one- and two-bedroom apartments, which are largely rented. We draw the Committee's attention to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) report on *Housing Mobility and Conditions 2007-2008* (#413.0.55.002) that highlights that the Australian rental community is primarily transient. We consider that a sustainable urban community must be based on the provision of a variety of accommodation options, the utilisation of existing infrastructure and community services, such as Turner School, and an appealing urban environment. These are the ingredients needed to meet the expectations of, and attract, a diverse population of long-term and transient residents comprising of singles, couples and families at various stages of life. We consider this is necessary to build the strong communities that care about the area in which they live, as an essential foundation to a truly sustainable urban environment.

This submission firstly provides broad discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of, and an alternative to, the moratorium referred to in Part (1) (b) of the Terms of Reference, "*merits of maintaining: the moratorium on redevelopment in Turner Section 47 and Parts of 63*". Specific comment on the impact of high density redevelopment in the local area is provided in the discussion relevant to Part (4) of the Terms of Reference. There is no specific discussion on Parts (1) (a), (2), (3) and (5) of the Terms of Reference although these issues may be briefly referred to in the submission.

Addressing Terms of Reference Part (1): "*the merits of maintaining: (b) the moratorium on redevelopment in Turner Section 47 and Part 63;*"

The Moratorium

Section 47 and Blocks 12 to 21 in Section 63, are currently zoned as RZ3 however there is an overlying moratorium on redevelopment. Blocks 12 to 21 in Section 63 are located on the eastern side of Hartley St across the road from Turner School.

The moratorium was put in place in 1999 to reflect the desire of residents at the time to remain living in existing houses and preserve the character of Turner's 1940-50s garden city streetscapes. The attractive features of the local environment are the mature tree canopy and gardens, the network of open green space and older style cottage homes. Only the leaseholders of Blocks 13, 16, 17 and 20 remain of the original ten leaseholders who supported the moratorium in 1999.

The moratorium is referred to in *10.3 Inner North Precinct Code* as follows:

- Rule R44 “*Redevelopment is not permitted on Turner Section 47 and Section 63 Blocks 12-21*”.
- Criteria C44 “*Minor additions or alternations, which do not result in a significant change to scale and/or character of the dwelling may be permitted.*”

Advantages of the Moratorium

Under the current RZ3 *Building and Site Control* policies, it is highly likely that - without the moratorium - the multi-unit development seen in the RZ3 and RZ4 zoned areas in Forbes, Condamine and Macleay Sts would have encroached further into the residential areas around Turner School. Much of this redevelopment is disappointing in design, and the modular appearance of the buildings not complementary to the Turner streetscape or in keeping with *Objective a) of the Inner North Precinct Code*, “*Conserve the Garden City character of the area*”.

Redevelopment in our local area appears to be largely driven by the investor market, with a focus on maximising the number of units per block. The result has been the provision of predominantly one and two bedroom apartments in redevelopments within walking distance to Turner School. This trend is continuing with recent ACTPLA approval for developments in Macleay St and Forbes St (Section 46), with eight and ten one bedroom units respectively. This has implications for both the nature of the community, and for the school in terms of primary school age children within its immediate catchment.

Thus, the moratorium has preserved many unattached older style cottage homes in the Turner School precinct, which has brought a number of benefits.

- Preservation of the attractive Turner streetscape and character.
- Maintenance of diversity and longer-term residents in the community.
- Provision of viable accommodation alternatives to the increasing dominance of one or two bedroom multi-unit apartments in the area. Current redevelopments do not fulfil the accommodation needs of those who find apartment living unsuitable in terms of bedroom numbers, living areas, security, privacy or green/garden spaces.

Irrespective of the moratorium, it is clear that there is a need to encourage mixed housing options in the inner city to fully utilise important local community facilities, such as the Turner School, and to maintain streetscapes that provide an attractive place to live – all contributing to building strong, diverse and sustainable communities who care about the place they live. We contend that a more diverse urban community in these terms will be more sustainable than one based almost entirely on one form of housing.

Disadvantages of the moratorium

The moratorium is restrictive as owner-occupiers do not have the flexibility to knock-down and rebuild homes. The text of criteria C44 can also be interpreted to mean that only limited renovation can occur, although a number of homes in Hartley St and Section 47 have been extended and renovated. Inconsistency of interpretation, and advice provided, has deterred some potential home buyers.

The moratorium on redevelopment is seen as being a temporary measure that maybe lifted at any time after review, creating uncertainty among residents. As a result, some residents have delayed further work on their homes, not wanting to invest in case the area is opened to high density development and loses its current attractiveness.

Consequently, there is some concern that a continued moratorium in Hartley St may see the same deterioration of housing witnessed in the RZ3 and RZ4 zoned areas north of Macarthur and Wakefield Aves. These areas are subject to development restrictions under *Rule 21, Multi Unit Housing Code* however the reasons for a moratorium in each area are different. The moratorium

covering the area north of Macarthur and Wakefield Aves is awaiting a trigger for development, while in Hartley St and Section 47 the purpose was to preserve homes and the local streetscape. We suggest that the moratorium in Hartley St and Section 47 has been successful in achieving this purpose but we also acknowledge that owners in Hartley St should have the opportunity to redevelop their properties in ways that are consistent with the objectives of the current moratorium.

Preferred alternative

While the uncertainty and restrictive nature of the moratorium are of concern, simply removing the moratorium on Section 47 and Section 63 (Blocks 12 to 21) would mean that the area around Turner School will revert to unconstrained RZ3 zoning. We do not want the continued development of multi-unit blocks containing predominantly one or two bedroom apartments to encroach into the currently protected residential areas and around the Turner School precinct.

This type of development is not appropriate for an area around a school and does not provide diverse housing options to meet community needs and expectations. Simply lifting the moratorium would have an adverse impact on the amenity of residents and diminish the diversity and longer-term sustainability of the neighbourhood community. Parents and children also require safe access to Turner School (the impacts of development are discussed in the next section). We note also that such development does not meet a number of the RZ3 zone objectives that include development of a wide range of housing choices and respecting neighbourhood and landscape character of residential areas.

We recognise that residents in Hartley St (Blocks 12 to 21) hold a range of views on how best to move forward. We suggest that planning allow a level of development around school precincts that is at an intermediate level of development between the existing moratorium and unconstrained RZ3. This would provide a transition zone between the school and higher density housing in the surrounding area, which we suggest is a more general principle that should apply to other schools in the inner north that could be negatively impacted by unconstrained RZ3 and RZ4 development.

We have a strong preference for allowing houses to be knocked down and rebuilt as single or dual occupancies. Other submissions to the Inquiry have suggested that townhouses of at least 110m² should also be permitted. This could be explored further if townhouses were suitable for families and respected the streetscape and character of the neighbourhood, for example, no more than two-levels, and containing at least three bedrooms, good sized living areas, and small garden spaces. However, we share the concerns expressed in submissions from others in Sections 47 and 63 that there is no mechanism to restrict development to being consistent with these principles under current RZ3 zoning.

We consider these measures would maintain accommodation diversity and the character of the Turner streetscape as gardens spaces would allow for maintenance of a tree canopy. This is a feature that has attracted both long-standing and new residents to the area, and was an important aspect of the original design for Canberra as the garden capital.

These measures will also allow for relatively more affordable dwellings close to Turner School, its playgrounds and nearby park land that, in particular, better suit families. There are also benefits for other members of the community who enjoy the companionship of pets and/or enjoy garden activities. Restricting multi-unit redevelopment will encourage residents to stay in the area for the long-term, promoting the sustainability of the local school and community. It should be noted that over \$3 million of Federal Government funding has been invested in infrastructure to support the recent expansion of Turner School.

A move to this type of constrained development would contribute to addressing the adverse impact of traffic congestion and loss of amenities in the area. If this change were made in conjunction with allowing the areas north of Macarthur and Wakefield Aves to be redeveloped (*ie* revoke *Rule 21*) in ways which also provided a diversity of housing stock and occupancy (Terms of Reference 1a), we believe it would better support the sustainability goals of *The Territory Plan 2008*.

Conclusion

We propose that rules governing development in Section 63 (Blocks 12 to 21) be revised to allow houses to be renovated, knocked-down and rebuilt as single dwellings or dual occupancies. Consideration could be given (with appropriate control measures) to two-level townhouses of at least three bedrooms and of 110m², but multi-unit developments of one or two bedroom apartments should be excluded. We urge the Inquiry Committee to consider planning options that are appropriate for development around community facilities such as schools that are located in Canberra's inner north, which could be applied to Section 63 (12 to 21) and more broadly. We also welcome an outcome where planning rules provide long-term surety and consistency for residents.

We suggest *Rule 21* should be revoked, but measures developed to ensure that a diversity of housing options and the garden city character are retained north of Macarthur and Wakefield Aves.

We contend that these measures will better support the sustainability goals of *The Territory Plan 2008*, support maintenance of a diverse and sustainable community in the Turner School precinct as well as areas north of Macarthur and Wakefield Aves.

Addressing Terms of Reference Part (4): “*the inquiry should consider factors such as demand for higher density development, the infrastructure capacity of transport and hydraulic networks to absorb additional development, the implications for housing affordability, the extent to which redevelopment policies reduce overall travel, the potential impacts of the policies on the amenity enjoyed by residents of the areas affected and how such impacts could be ameliorated;*”

Demand for Higher Density Housing

Development in the local area appears to be driven by a demand for investment properties and caters for a particular subsection of the community who tend to be transient and unlikely to utilise the nearby Turner School. To support this, we have investigated ABS census information which is presented in tables in the Attachment B to this submission. In particular, we draw the Committee's attention to the following analysis.

- The number of households in Turner has doubled (increasing 103%) from 1996 to 2006, while Canberra household numbers increased about 15%. The biggest increase was in number of apartments/units, which accounted for 69% of total households in Turner in 2006. Townhouses and separate houses accounted for 6% and 25% of Turner households, respectively, compared to 13.5% and 75% for Canberra.
- In 2006, 35.7% of units in Turner were one bedroom, 52.0% two bedroom and 12.4% had three or more bedrooms. In contrast, figures for Canberra show that 30.5% of units were one bedroom, 54.6% two bedroom and 14.9% three or more.
- Turner has more than twice the proportion of rented dwellings (69%) compared to Canberra as a whole (29.4%). The ABS study *Housing Mobility and Conditions 2007-2008* (#4130.0.55.002), indicates that in Australia, only 15% of private renters had spent more than five years in their current dwelling, with 58% having spent less than two years. Given the high proportion of rental properties in Turner, it would be reasonable to assume that this population is largely transient.
- Over the ten-year period 1996-2006, the proportion of families with children, and particularly single parent families, are decreasing more rapidly in Turner than in the rest of Canberra. The proportion of couples with no children or lone person households is trending upwards both in Turner and Canberra as a whole. The proportion of group households in Turner is trending upwards unlike the rest of Canberra.

Together these statistics indicate that development in Turner has not been consistent with the *RZ3 and RZ4 Code Objective a) “Create a wide range of affordable and sustainable housing choices to accommodate population growth”*. Maintaining some areas of lower density housing, as outlined in the previous section, would address the demand for a mix of housing options to cater for both short and long-term households of singles, couples and families at all stages of life.

Infrastructure - Transport

A number of factors have contributed to the increased traffic congestion seen in Hartley St and surrounding streets, raising concerns regarding the safety of children walking/riding to and from Turner School.

- New developments often do not provide adequate parking to support shared apartments or visitors. For example, at the development ‘*True North*’ on the corner of Hartley and David Sts (Section 64) cars often park on the north end of Hartley St even during no parking times in front of the entrances to this development. This situation creates a single lane bottleneck during school times and on weekends.
- Turner School has grown substantially in the last three years with many parents driving their children to the School. Parents’ park cars along the whole length of the western side of Hartley St. Turner School also has a special needs program and uses a fleet of buses to transport children with special needs through Hartley St.
- There has been a significant increase in ‘through traffic’ in Hartley St due to the increased number of local residents as well as contractors and trucks associated with local building developments.
- Hartley St is about 7.3 metres wide (and the nature strip about 5.4 metres wide). Both Forbes and Macleay Streets, east of and parallel to Hartley Street, have seen considerable redevelopment and have similar dimensions.

The roadway infrastructure in the Turner School precinct and nearby streets will be unable to support traffic congestion arising from further increases in housing density. Parents require safe access to the school during drop-off and pick-up times as well as during other various activities that occur outside of standard school hours. These constraints pose particular challenges to redevelopment in Hartley St.

Travel Time

The reduction of travel distances to work, shops, arts precincts and places of study, and the resulting reduction in car use, is of benefit to all sections of the community and not only to those who can live in one or two bedroom apartments. Many of the residents in Hartley Street walk or ride to places of work or study, particularly Civic, the ANU and local schools (Turner School and Lyneham High). Attracting families into the local area through the provision of suitable housing would also reduce the travel time commuting to and from school, and the ability to walk or ride to school would provide obvious health advantages.

Amenities

The extensive multi-unit redevelopment in Turner has had a negative impact on amenities for Turner residents including loss of privacy and solar access, increased local traffic and congestion due to increased on-street parking, and aesthetically due to the poor design of developments. According to Ken Maher, Gold Medal for Architecture 2009, “*Design becomes an increasingly important as densities increase and as cities mature*”, (*Canberra Times*, 7 September 2009).

The loss of green space and mature trees associated with high density development has a direct impact on the amenity of residents, as it limits large trees being grown, compromising the garden city character of Turner. The health benefits from living near green spaces are well documented (for example, *Green spaces improve health*. BBC News, 15 October 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/8307024.stm>).

These factors have had a substantial adverse impact on the nature and sustainability of the communities of the neighbourhood and suburb. Consequently, retaining areas that are not subject to widespread multi-unit development is beneficial for all residents of the suburb, not just those living in the less-developed areas.

Conclusion

Current development in Turner is not meeting demand for a range of housing options in the inner city and is straining current road infrastructure. Increased housing density has provided opportunity for some new residents to reduce car use but may have led to increased car use for families attending the Turner School. Loss of amenities has adversely affected the local community and compromises sustainability. Allowing a more limited form of redevelopment in Section 63 (Blocks 12 to 21), and around school precincts more broadly, would minimise these negative impacts and contribute to the realisation of *The Territory Plan 2008*. We also encourage the Inquiry Committee to explore measures taken both in Australia, and internationally, to address the design quality of buildings, materials and environmental landscaping.

Attachment A: Leaseholders of Blocks 14, 15, 16, 17 and 19, Section 63 Turner

We, the signatories of this submission, are all lessees who live in Hartley St. We comprise four households with children of various ages, and one household of a couple. We value the character and diversity of our street and neighbourhood, and seek outcomes from the Inquiry which respect both the interests of our fellow lessees who wish to redevelop, consistent with the principles we have suggested, and our own interests as lessees who wish to remain living in our properties without undue prejudice to our amenity.

Lisa Robins and Peter Kanowski Lessees, Block 14	Ian and Courtney Macintosh Lessees, Block 15
Sanie Ymer and William Tucker Lessees, Block 16	Robert and Felicity Williams Lessees, Block 17
Mark Palu Lessees, Block 19	

Attachment B: Analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics Information

Table 1: Dwelling structure (numbers of households)

	Turner ¹			Canberra ²		
	1996	2006	% Change	1996	2006	% Change
Separate houses	408	398	↓2.5	82,368	92,069	↑11.8
Townhouses/Terrace Houses <i>etc</i>	35	90	↑157	13,444	16,622	↑23.6
Apartments/Units <i>etc</i>	328	1,096	↑234	9,497	13,824	↑45.6
*Total	780	1,584	↑103	106,573	122,820	↑15.3

*Note: This total includes “other dwellings” and “dwelling noted stated” which are not listed separately in this table.

- From 1996 to 2006, the number of households in Turner approximately doubled, increasing 103%. In comparison, Canberra household numbers increased about 15% for the same period.
- Higher density development in Turner over the ten-year period outpaced that for Canberra, with the largest increase seen in apartments/units. There has also been a small drop in households in separate houses in Turner.

Table 2: Dwelling structure (percentage of households)

	Turner ¹		Canberra ²	
	1996	2006	1996	2006
Separate houses	52	25	77.3	75
Townhouses/Terrace Houses <i>etc</i>	4.5	6	12.6	13.5
Apartments/Units <i>etc</i>	42	69	8.9	11.3

- The proportion of household dwelling types in Turner is not consistent with Canberra more broadly.
 - In 2006, apartment/unit households dominate at 69% of total households in Turner, compared to 11.3% for Canberra.
 - Townhouses and separate houses account for 6% and 25% of Turner households, respectively, compared to Canberra with 13.5% and 75%.

Table 3: Types of households (percentage of total households)

	Turner ¹		Canberra ²	
	1996	2006	1996	2006
Couple family with no children	21.7	24.4	21.6	24.4
Couple family with children	16.7	10.0	37.6	32.2
One parent family	9.4	3.7	10.7	10.2
*Total family	49.0	39.5	71.1	67.9
Lone person household	35.4	36.6	21.0	22.1
Group household	11.7	13.8	5.6	5.2

*Note: This total includes ‘other family’ which is not listed separately in this table.

- The proportion of families with children and, particularly single parent families, are decreasing more rapidly in Turner than in the rest of Canberra.
- The proportion of couples with no children or lone person households is trending upwards both in Turner and Canberra as a whole.
- The proportion of group households in Turner is trending upwards unlike the rest of Canberra.

Table 4: Unit/apartment type

Number of bedrooms in unit/apartment	Turner ³		Canberra ⁴	
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
One or none	335	35.7	3,510	30.5
Two	448	52.0	6,274	54.6
Three or more	116	12.4	1,715	14.9
Total*	939		11,504	

*Note: This total excludes 'number of bedrooms not stated'.

Table 5: Tenure type (percentage of dwellings)

	Turner (2006) ⁵	Canberra (2006) ⁶
Owned or being purchased	35.6	68.5
Rented	62.1	29.4

- Turner has twice the proportion of rented dwellings when compared to Canberra as a whole.

References

- ¹ Figures derived from data in the AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2006 Census of Population and Housing, Turner (SLA 805058289). T14 DWELLING STRUCTURE BY HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION AND FAMILY FOR TIME SERIES - Count of occupied private dwellings
- ² Figures derived from data in the AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2006 Census of Population and Housing, Canberra (SD 805). T14 DWELLING STRUCTURE BY HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION AND FAMILY FOR TIME SERIES - Count of occupied private dwellings
- ³ Figures derived from data in the AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2006 Census of Population and Housing, Turner (SLA 805058289) – X29, X30 and X31 DWELLING STRUCTURE AND NUMBER OF BEDROOMS BY NUMBER OF PERSONS USUALLY RESIDENT SERIES FOR FAMILY, LONE AND GROUP- Count of occupied private dwellings
- ⁴ Figures derived from data in the AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2006 Census of Population and Housing, Canberra (SD 805) – X29, X30 and X31 DWELLING STRUCTURE AND NUMBER OF BEDROOMS BY NUMBER OF PERSONS USUALLY RESIDENT SERIES FOR FAMILY, LONE AND GROUP- Count of occupied private dwellings
- ⁵ Figures derived from data in the AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2006 Census of Population and Housing, Turner (SLA 805058289) - B32 TENURE TYPE AND LANDLORD TYPE BY DWELLING STRUCTURE - Count of occupied private dwellings
- ⁶ Figures derived from data in the AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2006 Census of Population and Housing, Canberra (SD 805) - B32 TENURE TYPE AND LANDLORD TYPE BY DWELLING STRUCTURE.