

Griffith/Narrabundah Community Association Inc.

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Mr Andrew Barr, MLA

Chief Minister

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cc Mr Mick Gentleman, MLA

Minister for Planning

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Ms Yvette Berry

Minister for Housing

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Dear Chief Minister

ZONING OF GOWRIE COURT AND STUART FLATS

As you will be aware, the Government plans to redevelop the public housing at Gowrie Court in Narrabundah and the Stuart Flats opposite Manuka shops in Griffith. As part of these redevelopment initiatives the Government has rezoned both sites from their previous low level zoning of RZ1 (Gowrie Court) and RZ2 (Stuart Flats) to RZ5 high density residential zoning. I am writing on behalf of the Griffith/Narrabundah Community Association (GNCA) to request amendments to these zonings to something less intense and more suitable for each site, and a review of the Precinct Codes for both sites, particularly now that the unsolicited proposal to redevelop Manuka Oval has been rejected by the Government and that a Master Plan for the Manuka area is now to be developed.

We are aware that the Government's plan to redevelop both sites is a consequence of the age of the current housing complexes and the need to renew the ACT's stock of public housing. We understand that the Government also wishes to maintain a suitable salt and pepper mix of public and private residents throughout Canberra, which may mean that some of the current residents of these public housing sites might have the opportunity to move to other suburbs, possibly locating them closer to their children and other relatives.

We recognise that the Government feels the need to maximise yield on any redevelopment of these sites, and has consequently sought a zoning that permits the densest redevelopment permitted for these sites. This approach appears to be based on the belief that developers will pay more for sites on which they can build the most apartments, irrespective of size or quality.

However, you will no doubt also be aware that many market analysts now think that the demand for apartments in Canberra has peaked, and that the apartment segment of the housing market will suffer a significant oversupply, and consequent price weakness, over the next several years. This is not arcane insider knowledge; there have been numerous articles to this effect in the press over the past several months. No doubt your departments could give you a folder of relevant articles were you to request this.

The relevance of this observation is that as a consequence of this glut of apartments, a high density apartment redevelopment would no longer be the most profitable way to redevelop the Gowrie Court and Stuart Flats sites. It seems likely that as developers recognise that the market for apartments has peaked they will redirect their efforts into areas of unfilled demand. A sector which has long suffered from market failure is downsizers, particularly aging baby boomers, who want something smaller than their current suburban house and garden, but want something larger and more convenient to access than an apartment in a multi storey block. This group is looking for larger town houses with access to a garage at level, so the shopping does not have to be hauled up stairs. And this group has been generally ignored by developers in Canberra for some time.

A townhouse redevelopment would be particularly suitable for Gowrie Court, which lacks the vibe of Braddon, or Kingston, and which is, in reality, located in the heart of suburbia, relatively far from any shops and nightlife. A downgrading of the zoning to RZ3 for this site would be appropriate and desirable.

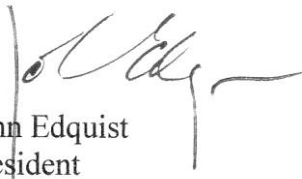
In relation to the Stuart Flats, you have recently announced that a master plan for the Manuka area is to be developed as a consequence of proposals to redevelop Manuka Oval. Any redevelopment of Stuart Flats must be part of this Master Plan (as what happens here will surely impact on Manuka, and the Manuka Oval precinct, and vice versa). Any consideration of the redevelopment of the Stuart Flats site should consider whether there is scope for some apartment development of this site, but also give consideration to the development of townhouses or possible two story terrace houses on at least part of this site. Consequently consideration should also be given to reducing the zoning of this site from its current RZ5 to RZ4 or even RZ3.

The recent action by your Government to modify some of the planning requirements relating to the redevelopment of the Red Hill Flats by way of a Technical Amendment indicates that there is still considerable flexibility on the best approach to these redevelopments of currently public housing.

We realise that the Government is now in caretaker mode, but an indication of the approach your Government would take if re-elected would be completely appropriate.

The GNCA looks forward to your advice on this issue.

Yours sincerely



John Edquist
President

9 October 2016