



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT
AND TERRITORY AND MUNICIPAL SERVICES**

(Reference: [Draft variation to the territory plan No 308:
Cooyong Street urban renewal area](#))

Members:

**MR M GENTLEMAN (Chair)
MR A COE (Deputy Chair)
MR A WALL
DR C BOURKE**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 21 MAY 2013

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms V Strkalj (Ph: 620 50435)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Amended 9 August 2011

The committee met at 4 pm.

BRUDENALL, MRS SUE, private capacity

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this afternoon's second public hearing of the Standing Committee on Planning, Environment and Territory and Municipal Services into draft variation to the territory plan 308: Cooyong Street urban renewal area. We would like to advise that, to provide a record, the hearing will be transcribed by Hansard. In addition, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly (Broadcasting) Act 2001, the proceedings of public hearings are broadcast to government offices and the media and are webstreamed.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome our first witness to the table, Mrs Sue Brudenall. I would like to draw your attention to the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege, which are outlined on the blue-coloured privilege statement that is before you on the table. Could you please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Mrs Brudenall: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. The committee has your submission, No 25. Do you wish to make any changes to your submission?

Mrs Brudenall: No.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make a short opening statement?

Mrs Brudenall: Yes. I am here as an Argyle Square, Reid resident since 1985. Except for three years in Melbourne, my husband and I have lived at Argyle Square very happily. I have prepared a statement which will take me about five to seven minutes to read, if that is all right.

THE CHAIR: Certainly.

Mrs Brudenall: The submission we provided, and what I am about to say, relates mainly to our concern about the 15-storey high-rise blocks proposed for both the Reid and Braddon sections of this redevelopment. Although the overwhelming majority of submissions from the public do not support this proposed height, the recent draft variation 308 report on consultation responses does not supply a justification for the planning, except to say that the precinct code allows it and that the territory plan encourages taller building heights across the city centre, consistent with its role as the primary commercial centre for Canberra. That is on page 15 of the report.

However, Reid at present is certainly not part of the city centre. There are no commercial operations, apart from perhaps a dentist and an art gallery. There is already a cluster of high rises in the city and the New Acton area, which are largely expensive residential apartments. It is hard to see that the Reid and Braddon development, with the majority of proposed units being studio and one-bedroom units under 45 metres squared, which is what is stated on page 22 of the report, is going to be popular with anyone apart from transient young people or furnished apartment

schemes. The Monterey apartments in Reid have only 10 units out of 139 which are less than 52 metres squared. Argyle Square apartments and townhouses are all larger than 70 metres squared. What is proposed in this redevelopment appear to be little boxes.

The redevelopment along Constitution Avenue, including the Jamieson apartments, is noted in the report, on page 15, as a justification for the proposed building heights. However, the Jamieson apartments will offer commercial and retail premises on the ground floor, with an additional eight levels of residential apartments above. If this is seen to be appropriate for the Constitution Avenue corridor, why are 15 storeys planned for the Braddon and Reid sites?

Similarly, the redevelopment proposal for the Northbourne flats on Northbourne Avenue has plans for six, three and two-storey blocks and terrace housing. We have been told that gardens, high quality open spaces and a range of sustainability outcomes will feature prominently. That was reported in the *Canberra Times* on 22 July 2012. Again, this is on a major transport corridor but there are no plans for 15 storeys here either.

The report on consultation responses tells us also that the existing development on the site already exceeds the RZ4 medium density zone, but that it is considered that a higher density zoning is appropriate for redevelopment of this site. We have to ask: why is this appropriate? No justification is given. Or is it perhaps because developers like high rises precisely because they command high prices per square foot?

Recent studies have shown that a reasonable density may be achieved with six-storey-high buildings, while preserving the solar rights of neighbouring buildings as well as open spaces among them. I will quote a few lines from an article from *Better! Cities and Towns* online, February 2011, entitled “More lowdown on tall buildings”:

... research shows that the benefits of density are not linear, but taper off as density increases. In other words, there is an optimum density, above which the negative effects of density start to increase over the positive ones. That ‘sweet spot’ seems to be in the neighbourhood of about 50 people per acre. And many cities around the world achieve this density without tall buildings, and while creating a very appealing, livable environment (e.g., Paris and London ...

... an evidence-based approach would caution us to put the burden of proof on the proponents, not the opponents, of tall buildings, to prove their overriding benefits in a given situation.

The density in Reid is 17.7 people per hectare, and for Braddon, 29.5. That is from the ABS figures of March 2010. This equates to 43.8 per acre for Reid and 73 per acre for Braddon.

In the literature there appears to be a considerable shift worldwide, where space permits, to designing walkable urban places with low rise but high density living with vibrant streetscapes. Further, the report on consultation responses indicates that there has been no social impact assessment of DV308. We are told that it is likely to be attractive to people who wish to live closer to work and to the existing services and facilities of the city. However, there are already multiple choices in apartments for the

single person and professional couples near the city—for example, along Northbourne Avenue and the inner city New Acton precinct, as well as in Braddon and Reid.

If apartment blocks are designed so that the residents drive into an underground car park and then shoot up to the 15th floor in a lift, there is little likelihood that they will get to know their neighbours. There is risk of social isolation and a lack of connection with their surroundings.

The University of Sydney in 2007 invited Robert Gifford, from the Department of Psychology and School of Environmental Studies, University of Victoria, British Columbia, to submit a review paper on “The consequences of living in high-rise buildings”. He stated:

... the literature suggests that high-rises are less satisfactory than other housing forms for most people, that they are not optimal for children, that social relations are more impersonal and helping behaviour is less than in other housing forms, that crime and fear of crime are greater, and that they may independently account for some suicides.

Why not encourage seniors, families with children or the multigenerational extended household to live close to the city by building suitable housing for them in this redevelopment? The number of multigenerational households in Australia increased by 27 per cent in the 1990s. The proposal appears to be largely lacking in family accommodation. There should be at least a 10 per cent requirement for three or more bedrooms.

Other cities such as Vancouver are designed for families in the downtown area. They say that a neighbourhood that is designed to work for kids works for everyone. As a result, they have seen a huge increase in the downtown population, with over seven per cent now being children.

In short, we suggest that the proposed 15-storey blocks should be abandoned for this redevelopment as there appears to be no real justification for them and they will appeal to such a limited range of people. Instead, substitute buildings similar to the Jamieson-style proposal with a height of eight to nine storeys, which would be much more acceptable to nearby residents and to those who might wish to live in them.

The area could also include elements of a development such as the Malmo BoOI in Sweden with its diverse architectural styles for buildings of two to five storeys high with varying open spaces. This was built in 2001 and is an exemplar of a low carbon footprint and highly sustainable living type of area. This proposal could be most attractive to a wide range of people from seniors to singles and families while still achieving high density living. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs Brudenall. I will ask members if they have questions for you.

DR BOURKE: Thank you, Mrs Brudenall. In your submission, you did not address the proposal for mixed use—having shops and other businesses on the ground floor of the development. Do you have an opinion on that?

Mrs Brudenall: The shops and—

DR BOURKE: The shops and other businesses on the ground floor.

Mrs Brudenall: Yes. It probably could be marginal given that it is quite a way from the main city centre and that there will not be a lot of parking in the area for people to come to those shops. If people are prepared to walk, if they come into the city centre now to park and are prepared to walk across the busy roads, it may be fine. But I would slightly struggle to think that they would be a real success. It would depend probably on the business.

THE CHAIR: You discussed the interaction with people in the suburb in the future if these buildings went ahead, especially the 15-storey towers and people catching the elevator up. Do you currently interact much with the residents of Allawah, Currong or Bega flats?

Mrs Brudenall: Not so much Allawah and Bega but certainly Argyle Square, which as you probably know is a fairly big development of quite a few stages. We lived originally in a townhouse in stage 3, which is closer to Civic. We sold that and went to Melbourne. We came back and downsized to a smaller apartment in stage 1. It is very nice to be able to go out because of the garden environment. You regularly meet other residents. There is a real mix of residents living there, from seniors to students to young professional couples. So it is a very good example of a mixed development which seems to appeal to a wide range of people.

Apartments are seldom empty for long. They are very closely held in terms of real estate. The one we bought was about the only one that was on sale that year in that stage. I think there may have been one last year, and that was it.

THE CHAIR: You are reflecting on Argyle Square, not Currong flats or—

Mrs Brudenall: No, I guess we are at the other end of Argyle Square. So we walk past them. There is no real interaction and that has tended to be perhaps a slightly transient population. I am not sure how long people stay there.

MR COE: Has the density of the area as it is at the moment ever caused any noticeable issues such as traffic, crime or anything of a sort that you can recall?

Mrs Brudenall: The current Argyle Square area?

MR COE: Yes.

Mrs Brudenall: I cannot recall any instances of break-ins or anything like that in recent years. But, again, they would not necessarily be notified to everyone in the area. I mean, we would not necessarily know if there had been. Certainly, it is very quiet at night. There are no problems with disruptions of one sort or another. I think it is a fairly quiet residential suburban area.

MR COE: Does the fact that it is a housing or Community Services Directorate development concern any residents that you are aware of?

Mrs Brudenall: Could you repeat the question, please?

MR COE: The fact that the proposed development is being done by the government rather than a private developer, does that concern any residents, do you think?

Mrs Brudenall: I do not think so, no. It is just that our concern is about what is going to be there. That is the real concern, and that it fits in with the rest of the area. I think that is the problem from many people's point of view, that what is being proposed, particularly the 15-storey buildings, don't fit in and will cause other problems such as the shading, traffic and these sorts of things. It seems to be too much for the area.

MR WALL: You just touched on traffic. Are there any pre-existing issues from your experience around the area regarding traffic? What impact do you think this development might have on traffic flows and parking?

Mrs Brudenall: I think that traffic will become an issue if we have this sort of building and increased density in the area that has been proposed. It certainly will be. We personally have given up our car. We do not need a car. So we have given up our car because we can walk in to Civic. We can get public transport and so on. It is one of the huge benefits from our point of view—being able to walk everywhere. We just use public transport.

I do not know that there are many other people who have done that, but they may plan to, I suppose, if they are not working. I do not think there are traffic problems at the moment. Certainly, the surrounding streets are heavily used for short-term parking at the back of Argyle Square. I think that probably is the case in Reid. I would not think there would be a lot of room for a lot more parking in the streets in that immediate area. It is going to become a problem if there is an increased volume of traffic.

Unfortunately, we find that even in Argyle Square, some of the residents expect to bring into the complex two or three cars, whereas strictly speaking, it should be one car per unit, which does cause some problems. If that was to flow through to new development there would be a real problem, because I do not know exactly how many parking spots are planned for each unit in the development.

THE CHAIR: Any more questions, colleagues? There being no further questions, I thank you, Mrs Brudenall, for appearing before us this afternoon. A copy of today's transcript will be available on the committee's webpage in the next few days and a copy will be sent to you as well to check for any typographical or transcription errors.

Short suspension.

KIRK, MR ADAM, private capacity

THE CHAIR: I welcome Mr Adam Kirk to the public hearing of the Standing Committee on Planning, Environment and Territory and Municipal Services inquiry into draft variation to the territory plan 308. Mr Kirk, could I draw your attention to the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege. They are outlined in the blue-coloured privilege statement before you on the table. Could you please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Mr Kirk: Yes, I do.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We have your submission, No 8. Do you wish to make any changes to that submission?

Mr Kirk: No.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Kirk: Yes. Firstly, I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to appear before it on the matter of draft variation 308, the proposed Cooyong Street urban renewal area. As a local Braddon resident, I have taken a longstanding interest in this proposed development and have also attended a number of the public consultation forums held over the last few years. I appear before you today as a local resident.

As reflected in my written submission to this committee, I support the broad principles of the proposed redevelopment. Considering the close proximity of this area to the city area and a major transport hub, it is an appropriate site for the high density accommodation proposed. In this regard, I agree with Pedal Power ACT that the proposed development is an important step to a more sustainable transport future and a more people-friendly urban environment.

The development, it is important to note, is also consistent with one of the key principles of the Canberra spatial plan—namely, the consolidation of a more compact city so that future urban growth is located closer to existing major employment areas and existing services and facilities.

I also believe that if we are to achieve a more compact city while also maintaining our low density residential suburbs some high-rise developments are inevitable in the city and its immediate surrounds. It probably will not be a popular view but unless we plan to radically transform our low density suburbs, I cannot see how our city can avoid some high-rise developments. As someone who has the privilege of living very close to the city and all the services it offers, I think we need to be realistic about this fact.

Furthermore, it is clear that this area is long overdue for redevelopment. The existing buildings are in a poor state of repair. The area is inadequately lit and it interacts very poorly with the city centre as a pedestrian access to the city. Considering these facts, it is no great surprise that I often feel unsafe when walking in this area after dark, as have my family and friends.

Again I agree with Pedal Power ACT that the introduction of laneways here will greatly improve pedestrian and cycling access between the city and the residential suburbs. In this regard I also support the extension of Petrie Street into Batman Street on the basis that appropriate traffic calming measures are also introduced to avoid rat running.

I also support the proposal to incorporate some commercial development in mixed-use buildings along Cooyong Street, which I think will encourage greater pedestrian activity and amenity in this area. The existing footpaths along Cooyong Street are a disgrace and hopefully the creation of an active, more people-friendly street frontage in this area will encourage greater pedestrian use of this part of the city.

I note the recent developments in New Acton, the ANU city west precinct, as well as the extension of Lonsdale Street into the city as good examples where mixed-use buildings have been well employed to create a more attractive, people-friendly ambience. If we want our city to remain an attractive place for the young or those looking for a more urban lifestyle, we need to encourage the development of these precincts, which require a critical mass of population and more street activity.

I also support the proposal to retain 10 per cent of the units to be constructed on the site for public housing. A mix of public and private housing seems sensible to avoid some of the problems that have been associated with some public housing estates in the past.

Finally, with the indulgence of the committee, I would like to comment on those submissions before you which seem to suggest that it is undesirable to have more one and two-bedroom apartments in the area as this will encourage “transients”, who are “unlikely to be a community proud of its place in Canberra” or “have little or no interest in the medium or long term”.

As someone who has lived in my Braddon apartment for nearly seven years, I resent this characterisation. Just because I live in a relatively small apartment does not mean I do not value my community or its amenity. However, even “transients” want a pleasant and safe urban environment to work and live in. Who knows—if, as a city, we develop a more exciting urban environment, we might even encourage some of these transients to remain in our community and become proud Canberra citizens.

These views about apartment living are outdated and reminiscent of the views of a certain politician who once observed that you could pick rented houses by their unspoken laws. It also overlooks the fact that, according to the ABS, lone-person households are projected to increase to 3.1 million, 30.2 per cent of all households, in 2026. This represents the fastest projected increase of all household types over the period 2001 to 2026.

Again, according to the ABS, the ageing of the population, coupled with the longer life expectancy of women over men, increases in separation and divorce and the delay of marriage are some of the factors contributing to the growth in lone-person households. The mix of the housing stock in the city needs to reflect this demographic change in our population and the move to smaller households. We should not

encourage prejudiced and ill-informed views against those members of our community who, for a variety of reasons, choose to live in one or two-person households.

Finally, again I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to appear. I am happy to answer any questions.

THE CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Kirk. Questions, colleagues?

MR COE: Yes. Firstly, Mr Kirk, thank you for providing a view which we have not heard a great deal of in the inquiry to date. May I ask, if you do not mind, about your motivation for coming and sharing your thoughts with us?

Mr Kirk: Sure. I am a local resident. Perhaps a little bit unusually for the area, I live in an apartment, so perhaps I do not have the aversion that some members of the community have to apartment living. I live in the Braddon area. I regularly traverse between Braddon and the city via Currong flats. It is not a very pleasant place to walk as a pedestrian. You have to walk down a very narrow laneway in the dark between the Catholic Church and Currong flats. It does not encourage easy access for pedestrians and cyclists between the city and an important residential area.

I have lived there for seven years and I have seen the properties deteriorate. They were not in an exactly fantastic state to start off with. I guess my emphasis has been on Currong flats because those are the flats that I pass more regularly. I feel quite strongly that the area does need to be redeveloped. It is a rather unattractive window to the city. It is not a very friendly window to the city. As I have mentioned in my submission, I have had friends and family often feeling quite unsafe walking around the area at night. I see this as an important opportunity to redevelop the area and bring a bit more life and activity at a street level.

I can see that other residents have different views. Maybe those who are opposed to this development are more motivated than others. I thought it was important, perhaps as someone from a slightly younger demographic who lives in an apartment, to bring a different perspective to this issue.

MR COE: Are you confident that what you have seen by way of the preliminary designs is actually going to achieve the outcomes that are stated?

Mr Kirk: I am a local resident; I am not a town planner. I have read most of the documentation, not all. What I quite like about the development is the proposal to increase laneways through that area. I think that is a positive development and it will encourage pedestrian access. I think Cooyong Street is a disgrace, as anyone who has walked along Cooyong Street would know. You cannot ride a bike; you can barely walk. I cannot see how the development can be worse than what is there, to be perfectly honest.

What I have seen offers the potential to really revitalise that area. This is just a territory plan variation and any subsequent development applications will have to be rigorous and of a high standard, but I cannot see any alternative. I do not think we can leave the area as it is. People who think that the area just needs a bit of paint are in

denial. I know it is not an expressed criterion, but I note that in some of the submissions they say they are concerned about their property values. I think if the area remains as it is, it will have an adverse affect on people's property values in that area anyway.

MR COE: Do you have a hunch, just from your travels past it on a regular basis, as to what the occupancy would be? Do you see vacant houses or vacant dwellings?

Mr Kirk: I am most familiar with the Currong flats, which I now understand are mostly used for student accommodation. I occasionally see students leaving and entering. I have no issue with the occupants; it is just that the area—

MR COE: What I am getting at is this: is it being mothballed, in effect?

Mr Kirk: As far as I can tell, there are still students using Currong flats. I must admit, because it feels like a private area, I generally do not go through the Allawah and Bega flats. Obviously there is some activity there. I have not had the feeling that it has been mothballed. I just have the feeling that these are buildings that have outlived their use-by date.

DR BOURKE: What sorts of benefits do you think will come to you as a resident from the proposal for ground floor mixed use, such as commercial and other venues?

Mr Kirk: It depends what nature the development takes. I think it would be good if we could encourage more pedestrian use in that area. I can see Cooyong as a busy street. If this proposal goes ahead, there will be an extra, I think, 2½ thousand people living in that area. It may encourage some cafes, some retail outlets. Hopefully, if it is done, it will become a much more people-friendly environment.

At the moment Cooyong is basically just designed for the motor vehicle and, as a pedestrian, you just want to get out of there as quickly as possible. I think from a safety perspective too, if you encourage people to use that area, it will feel safer. At the moment, as a pedestrian, you just want to get through that area. If we want to encourage cyclists and pedestrian activity, it is an important way of doing that.

DR BOURKE: It is interesting that you are probably the only person who lives in Braddon that has given evidence, which is where the bulk of this development is, rather than in Reid.

Mr Kirk: I think it is unfortunate. I cannot comment on the consultations. The consultations with respect to the Braddon area have gone on for a number of years. I have certainly been to a few community forums. I know there have been adjustments in terms of the height of the buildings and so forth. I know there has been a bit of anxiety from members of the community that have a relationship to the Catholic Church, but generally with the Braddon development there has been a reasonable level of consultation.

It is an unfortunate fact that it seems that, for whatever reason, a lot of residents in Reid, particularly around the Argyle apartments, are very anxious about the development. One of the reasons I decided to put a submission in was that I wanted to

give a Braddon perspective because I was a bit concerned that the issues with the Reid development, which is the small aspect of the development, are overshadowing the positives that would come to Braddon through this development.

MR WALL: Obviously, Mr Kirk, you are quite in favour of the site being redeveloped. Regarding the scale of what is being proposed at the moment, 15-storey towers and 10-storey buildings, do you think that is in keeping and in tune with the existing neighbourhood or do you think it might be pushing the boundaries of what could be determined as reasonable?

Mr Kirk: It is a difficult one, and I do understand some people are anxious about a 15-storey building going up in their neighbourhood. I do like the way that the development is tiered. At least on the Braddon side you have the taller buildings on Cooyong Street, which I think is appropriate, with the three-storeys facing the Braddon area where you have the single-storey dwellings. I can see there might be an issue with the Reid development just because that area is smaller and Kogarah Lane is much smaller.

As I have mentioned in my submission, I think we have to be realistic. We live in a low density city. No-one is proposing that we knock down our residential suburbs and create medium density. I do not know how we are going to create a more compact city centre without some high-rise developments. It seems to me this area is immediately next door to the city and if you are not going to put these developments here, I do not know how you can justify putting them anywhere else.

I guess I take a realistic view. Maybe in an ideal world we would have more medium density throughout the city, but we have inherited a fairly low density suburban city. I think if we want a more compact city in the next 20 years we have to tolerate some high-rise developments and hopefully they can be done in a way which does not alienate everyone in the community.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Kirk, for your time and your submission this afternoon. We will get a copy of the transcript of today's proceedings to you—and it will go up on the webpage in a few days time—so you can check the transcript and make sure there are no typographical or transcription errors.

The committee adjourned at 4.37 pm.