

**Submission regarding: Planning and Development (Draft Variation No 310) Consultation Notice 2011**

**Removal of specified restrictions on use at Turner section 47 and part 63 and North of Macarthur and Wakefield Avenues (RZ4 Medium Density Residential Zone)**

We would like to make a submission as to why, from a resident's perspective we feel *there are strong and compelling reasons to maintain the moratorium on building high-density housing in Holder Street and Hartley Street*. These reasons are in the interests of the community and have implications beyond the residents of these streets.

Turner school is different to most schools in Canberra, as we will describe, and we feel that by ringing the school in housing not attractive to contemporary families, we will have the dominant public infrastructure - the school - surrounded by people who do not use it.

We are concerned that the proposed zoning changes will compound, not reduce, the use of cars and traffic congestion in North Canberra and that the mix of housing types in the area will cater to a smaller, not wider demographic and particularly not to the very families who are the target of the big local infrastructure - it's school.

We could write about why apartments are not as popular with Australian families in North Canberra in detail and it would be a submission on its own. Our experiences renting in the area for two years and recently purchasing our own home illustrate the current situation well.

Our experience living in the area has been:

(1) Families with children at the school have bought the last few houses available in these streets and the reason for this was that they would be close to the school.

(2) In the apartments in Macleay street nearby, there were always a lot of people and traffic but almost no children. The only children present were in the last three houses in the street, and even these are quite possibly destined to be converted into more apartments themselves.

**(1) Turner school**

Turner primary school is on Condamine street, running parallel to Holder st and bordering Hartley st, and thus *right in the middle of the proposed re-development zone*. It is *the only school in North Canberra catering to children of this age with a particular severity of special needs*. Turner is increasingly held up as the example of excellent public schooling, not just for special needs, catering all children and has been popular with many visiting embassy staff. In many ways it is a model of how we think Australian schools should be.

**Turner school is the big community infrastructure and hub of the area - traffic will need to come to it This is especially the case given it's special needs curriculum.**

\* Due to catering to the special needs children there will be disproportionate number of parents driving to it, from all areas of North Canberra or looking to live in very close proximity (walking distance being shorter than is normal) than in other schools.

\* Many other families try to live close by and at this age like to walk to school – which of course is the healthier option, providing that there are limited traffic/people hazards to negotiate.

\* Higher-density housing in the area to date has moved families further from the school; it has not attracted them in and there is big demand for houses not apartments near the school, as we will detail shortly.

Increasing high density housing in this area is to the *great detriment of the school and it's families*. The traffic along Hartley st in peak times is already almost impossible to navigate and poses a danger and deterrent to children walking. High density housing bordering the school would increase contact between school children and a range of adults, most of whom will not have families *and will not be aware of children's limited abilities to judge traffic*. This is particularly poignant for the special needs children.

Increasing traffic not only poses danger to children who run around these streets after and before school, but for *school events* like the cross-country which has traditionally been run along Hartley st. The *increased traffic emissions* could also affect the large number of kids at the school with asthma and other health conditions.

A large number of school children attending Turner live in these two streets. The idea of these *family homes being demolished to make way for high-density apartments* is devastating. Kids play in the street continuously, and enjoy the park-like grounds in the centre. Their *safety is likely to be severely compromised* if the proposed plan goes ahead. In Holder st alone there are at least eight separate families whose children currently or recently attend Turner school. All of them live in established homes, none are interested in moving in the near future. This means that there are in fact very few sections available to a developer and that they would be dotted randomly throughout the street, between established homes, where they will not be welcome. Clearly there is a demand in this area for decent family housing, which accommodates children's need for a garden, safety and privacy.

We talk of the weakness of the public school system, growing inequalities and a two tiered system as an emerging area of concern. It is interesting to see that Turner caters to all demographics but also that 5 of the recent school captains have come from Hartley st, Holder st or adjacent Macleay st. All in family homes and all, it would be fair to say, very much in the bracket of children the public schools are struggling to keep. We do not think changing these houses into apartments is likely to work in the community's interest.

## **(2) Holder st is worthy of preserving**

Holder st in particular is one of Canberra's most beautiful streets. The character and beauty of nearby streets with apartment blocks, such as Macleay st, has been radically changed, and families have deserted the area in droves.

In Holder St, which is just around the corner, the last three houses sold have all been to families with children at the school, attracted to the area by the school. As older people have moved out, new families have moved in.

At the North end of Macleay st there were 3 houses surrounded by apartments - one could say a success of salt and pepper planning – whereby apartments stand side by side with housing and everyone's needs are met. However, in two of the three houses (we lived in one) the landlords do almost no maintenance and no improvements, waiting for the other two to sell to a developer and make a higher price. Even basic sewage was an issue (3 times in the year spilling into the house) but being surrounded by apartments, the owner did not think maintenance was a justifiable expense. The others will probably go to developers once the kids leave school - it is not attractive for families to be the only island - shaded by apartments and increased traffic.

From the example of this area it seems important to maintain whole streets, the other option simply is not working. Given that the majority of the inhabitants of Holder st are absolutely adamant that they will not sell to developers this "salt and pepper" scheme will not work here.

Increased pollution and the destruction of established trees and character homes must not be allowed to take place.

**People living in a community, being committed to it and engaged with it, is something that should be supported and nurtured when it flourishes.**

We think that residents strongly engaged with and linked to their neighbours, their greater community and school, are of tremendous benefit. We think it should be encouraged. That there are a group of residents in an area keen to preserve and improve it should not be seen as a barrier to progress but indeed an example of exactly the kind of strong engaged community we are trying to create.

We have recently lived in Canada and New Zealand and witnessed areas of school greens becoming fenced off from the public due to vandalism concerns and safety. Even in high socioeconomic areas in New Zealand, the public are beginning to be kept from using school grounds in some cases with guards and dogs, to protect against increasing vandalism and unwelcome activity. The Turner grounds are used by sports teams and locals for games and recreation during weekends and after school. This usage could decrease if families and the part of the community most engaged with the school becomes separated from it. An engaged community and

neighbours help keep the green space safe and open. Families will leave streets if apartment blocks are built in the area as the aspect, character and safety of their homes will all be compromised.

**Please note:**

We have lived in apartments in Australia and high density housing overseas and loved it and would do so again. It was not fun with more than one child!

Keeping a range of options suited to families, near schools, is important. A salt and pepper approach of mixing housing types in this area would seem to work better by keeping whole areas free of apartments and Holder St and Hartley St fit this well.

There is still ample room to develop nearby within existing guidelines, that has not been used and of course for higher density housing in the city centre itself which we from experiences elsewhere, can thoroughly recommend.

Equally there is a time and place for residential houses and from our point of view Holder and Hartly streets represent just such an example.

**Holder and Hartley streets**

- (1) Have significant benefits remaining as they are and provide a crucial niche
- (2) Increased density development in surrounding areas is not complete and indeed increasing housing in these few remaining streets is not critical for housing or traffic in the region. It will in fact possibly compound the very problems it was designed to ameliorate, due to local factors most notably the school.
- (3) We are not opposed to high-density housing or to living in high-density areas

We love the area, we think preserving these blocks is the best way to maintain a diversity of housing needs to best suit the whole community, not just the residents.

Regards

Andrew and Nicola Watson

PS. our child Anneke tonight won a "Perfectly Planned" T shirt from ACTPLA, our hope in reviewing this submission is to help ACTPLA realise that increasing the density of housing in this little pocket will very likely increase traffic and other problems and will be to the detriment of the strong, energetic and engaged community we in Canberra are all striving to create.