

Craig Spencer
Your Say – ACT Government

PUBLIC HOUSING PROPOSAL FOR 79-85 ANTILL STREET

Dear Craig,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the public housing proposal for 79-85 Antill Street, dated 5th December 2016.

This submission will:

- Note that ACT Government has various commitments under Action Plan 2, particularly relating to priority households (i.e. low-income households) and comment on their importance for public housing
- Advocate for best practice in sustainable building design, materials and construction, along with energy efficiency measures and education for the proposed public housing residents
- Acknowledge the role of negative public perception of public housing in perpetuating social exclusion
- Identify a window of opportunity provided by new public housing to challenge the stereotypes associated with public housing tenants

Action Plan 2 – relevant actions for public housing

The ACT Government's climate change action plan, Action Plan 2 (AP2), details a number of actions aimed at increasing the energy efficiency of residential housing:

- **Action 1** – The ACT Government's Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme will commence from 1 January 2013 requiring retailers to implement energy efficiency improvements to ACT homes with a focus on low-income households. The Scheme has been extended to 2020.
- **Action 3** - Subject to a regulatory impact assessment, the ACT Government will introduce legislation to require landlords to provide information to tenants on the energy efficiency of homes and fixed appliances and major energy uses. Regulatory impact assessment and stakeholder consultation will be completed in 2013.

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This Office is independent of, but funded by, the ACT Government.

- **Action 4** - The ACT Government will publish by 2015 a Pathway to Zero Emissions Buildings policy informed by a regulatory impact assessment and stakeholder consultation to be undertaken from 2013 covering residential and non-residential building types.
- **Action 5** - The ACT Government will continue to build on the experience of its successful ACTSmart programs to develop a comprehensive strategy to engage the community on climate change matters and to provide integrated information, advice and support to Canberra households on reducing energy bills and cutting emissions. This will be guided by a community engagement strategy to be published in early 2013.

The ACT Government should ensure that these actions, and the policy intent of these actions, are implemented within future developments including the Downer public housing proposal.

Best practice sustainable buildings

Climate change

Noting that while generally the contents of the draft Housing ACT Capital Program - Design Brief – Multi Unit Sites appears to provide a high standard of specification for design, it does not explicitly account for the expected impacts of climate change in the ACT region - the annual number of hot days over 35 degrees Celsius that Canberra experiences is expected to increase from 5 days to up to 10 days by 2030.¹ The expected rise in extreme heat days will cause an increase in the number of cases of heat stress in the ACT, and is likely to disproportionately impact low income households.

In keeping with the ACT Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, the ACT Government should actively consider how best to ensure its public housing stock is protected from such impacts through building design and material choices. Solar orientation should be optimised to access solar energy through photovoltaic whilst minimising summer heat into the living areas. Landscaping and use of appropriate shade trees should also be included as climate adaptation measures – in addition to providing visual amenity, trees can have a considerable impact on local ambient temperatures, with shade and evapotranspiration provided by trees on hot summer days helping to reduce localised temperatures by up to 5 degrees Celsius.^{2 3}

Education and user behaviour

In addition to design, user behaviour also plays a significant role in the overall energy consumption in buildings. As identified in Action 5 of AP2, the ACT Government should continue to develop its

¹ ACT Environment and Planning Directorate, 'Draft ACT Climate Change Adaptation Strategy'

² City of Melbourne, 'Urban Forest Strategy' (Victorian Government 2012).

³ Victorian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation, 'Responding To The Urban Heat Island: A Review Of The Potential Of Green Infrastructure' (Victorian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation 2012).

energy efficiency education programs (ie. ACTSmart) and ensure that they are promoted among public housing tenants.

Other opportunities for sustainable living

Noting that communal gardens may not be feasibly located within the proposed development, the ACT Government could provide an orientation package that includes information on local community gardens. Canberra Organic Growers Society (COGS) has a number of community gardens located throughout Canberra, with one being located nearby at Dickson College.

Public perceptions of public housing

Within Australia and elsewhere, public housing has progressively ‘moved from being a general needs tenure, in which a range of groups lived, to one containing a much larger proportion of high need and deprived tenants’.⁴ Due to a number of factors, primarily a significant reduction in government funding over time, public housing is now perceived as a ‘last resort’ option amongst the general public. Widely held negative perceptions of public housing and its users, reinforced by sensationalist media and long-running political discourse on the issue,⁵ has had the effect of perpetuating social exclusion. In addition to financial insecurity, social exclusion, the notion that ‘poverty is more than just material deprivation and includes social relationships, participation and access to services’, presents a considerable impediment to achieving self reliance for public housing users.⁶ Continued negative perceptions clearly have profound implications for households living in public housing.

Opportunities to disrupt media stereotypes of public housing

With the establishment of a new public housing site the ACT Government will have an opportunity to disrupt local media discourse on the issue of public housing. The Downer development could be leveraged as a showcase for the community by demonstrating best practice policy, design and implementation for public housing.

The ACT Government should consider the development of a media strategy that;

- has the aim of **promoting a positive reception** / perception of the Downer development by the local public

⁴ Rowland Atkinson, Keith Jacobs, 2008, Public housing in Australia, stigma, home and opportunity, Housing and Community Research Unit, viewed 12 December 2016, <<http://apo.org.au/node/311>>.

⁵ Jacobs, K. etc. (2011) The stigmatisation of social housing: findings from a panel investigation, AHURI Final Report No.166. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

⁶ Rowland Atkinson, Keith Jacobs, 2008, Public housing in Australia, stigma, home and opportunity, Housing and Community Research Unit, viewed 12 December 2016, <<http://apo.org.au/node/311>>.

- **highlights the benefits of community engagement** for both public housing users and the local community – noting specifically that engaged communities are happier, healthier and safer for all
- showcases the buildings as examples of **best practice sustainable design**
- encompasses regular **print media, digital and social media** channels
- is **timed to coincide with the opening** of the site for habitation – **early intervention is key** to disrupting commonly held perceptions relating to public housing
- seeks to **establish lasting relationships with media personnel** that enable public housing stakeholders (government, community groups, users) to convey positive news stories over time

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment on the public housing proposal for 79-85 Antill Street.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kate Auty". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Dr Kate Auty
Commissioner for Sustainability
and the Environment

20 December 2016