

Submission by the Curtin Residents Association (CRA) about proposed development in the North Curtin Residential Area

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The CRA is a community organisation that serves the Curtin community by supporting projects and providing community-based advocacy. The CRA is supported by Curtin residents and is affiliated with the Woden Valley Community Council (WVCC).

This submission is based on discussions over many years with residents of Curtin.

Planning, design and development of the new residential area on the eastern side of the horse paddocks north of the existing residential area in Curtin must:

- **foster the creation of a community and the well-being of its residents; and,**
 - **be integrated within the broader urban context of the site;**
- rather than simply focus on the number of dwellings.**

Given the position of the site within its broader urban context and the problems to be solved to create a workable community, including access and the need for on-site shops, services and community facilities, the proposed number of dwellings (approximately 1,300) and number of people (approximately 2,500) are too high. Difficulties in connecting the new residential area with surrounding suburbs and other parts of Canberra are a major constraint.

A medium, rather than high, density development would be a significant densification project for Canberra and a major contribution to the ACT's need for housing.

A medium density development - one with a dwelling and population density similar to Braddon or Kingston - would be a significant densification project for Canberra and a major contribution to the ACT's need for housing (as identified in the ACT Housing Choices report).

ISSUES FOR PLANNING, DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTH CURTIN RESIDENTIAL AREA

The current proposal for the new North Curtin Residential Area - a new residential area on the eastern side of the horse paddocks north of the existing residential area in Curtin - would be a new residential suburb but is not being planned as one

The planned population of about 2,500 people is 80% of the population of the adjacent suburbs of Yarralumla to the north and Deakin to the west and 45% of Curtin to the south. (Curtin is a 'double suburb' in the size of its population and its area.) So, the planned population of the new North Curtin Residential Area is equivalent to a new residential suburb.

(The population of nearby suburbs from the 2021 census is: Curtin: 5,569 people; Hughes: 3,210; Deakin 3,124; and, Yarralumla 3,120.)

Consequently, planning and design for the development of the new North Curtin Residential Area must be done in the same way as for establishing a new residential suburb in Canberra. This will include a planning and design for:

- a range of local community facilities
- roads and traffic, particularly impact on nearby roads which are already congested
- walkability - pedestrian and cycle paths within the area and connectivity with surrounding areas and public transport
- diversity of housing choices
- "green" open space, both public and private, and tree canopy cover

However, this not happening. So, for example, it must not be assumed that the demands of such a large number of people can be added to existing retail, services and education infrastructure in Curtin or Yarralumla. There must be some local facilities within walking distance of the new residences.

Very constrained access by vehicles, pedestrians and active wheeled travel

The new North Curtin Residential Area is essentially inaccessible from two sides and access is very constrained from the other two sides.

- To the east no access is permitted from Yarra Glen (a condition from the National Capital Plan).
- Yarralumla Creek is the southern boundary.
- The planned Diplomatic Estate is on the western boundary.
- Cotter Road, a very busy road that's already congested during peak hour, is the northern boundary.

These constraints on access mean that this relatively small area of 13.1 hectares is not suitable for housing the large number of people (about 2,500) proposed in the current development plan as a large number of people will be moving in and out of a relatively small area via very limited connections to existing infrastructure. This problem will be particularly acute at peak hour, both morning and evening.

Planning for the new residential area must include reasonably direct connections – not dog-legged, winding pathways – to one or both of Curtin group centre or Yarralumla local centre for (segregated) pedestrian and active wheeled travel, as well as car travel.

Access, including for pedestrian and active wheeled travel, to existing and new public transport on Cotter Rd and Yarra Glen must be made a priority in planning the area and not left to be an emergent, second-class outcome of the development. Additional local bus services must be considered.

The large number of people and high population density proposed for new North Curtin Residential Area must be discussed now, so that development can be planned in a holistic way.

The planned population density for the north Curtin site (approximately 19,000 people per sq km) is almost 4 times higher than Braddon and Kingston - the Canberra suburbs with the highest population density - and about the same as Chippendale and Haymarket - the areas of Sydney with the highest population density.

(ACT areas with the highest density at June 2023 were:

- Kingston (5,100 people per sq km)

- Braddon (5,000)

NSW: The areas with the highest density at June 2023 were:

- Sydney (South) - Haymarket (21,000 people per sq km)
- Chippendale (20,000), to the south of Sydney's city centre)

The 1,300 dwellings proposed by the ACT Government and the number of people this translates to would result in a high population density. This is presented as a predetermined choice made by the ACT Government. There are consequences of this choice that must be discussed now, so that the new North Curtin development can be planned, designed and developed in a holistic way.

Traffic congestion, unsustainable pressure on existing facilities and an urban heat island

Some of the consequences of the large number of people and high population density are:

Roads and traffic congestion

A large number of people would be moving in and out of a relatively small area, especially at peak hour. Existing surrounding roads - Cotter Road, McCulloch St, Dudley St, Kent St and Yarra Glen - are already congested. The proposed development would make a bad situation worse.

The "Mint Interchange" needs to be built so that traffic can flow from Cotter Road on to Yarra Glen towards Woden and traffic coming from the south can flow from Yarra Glen on to Cotter Road.

Traffic modelling undertaken for the Canberra Brickworks redevelopment by AECOM and SMEC in 2012-13 demonstrated that a major interchange "The Mint Interchange" will be required to provide access to the West Deakin commercial centre to prevent the roads from being overwhelmed, light rail notwithstanding. The ACT Government advised at the time that the construction of the interchange would be considered in the planning for Stage2B of Light Rail from Civic to Woden.

The additional number of people using Cotter Rd from this development makes implementing this improved interchange an essential precondition, not an afterthought. Traffic must be able to flow on to Yarra Glen towards Woden, as well as on to Adelaide Avenue towards the Inner South and Civic, and traffic coming from the south must be able to flow from Yarra Glen on to Cotter Road.

Local facilities

Existing retail, services and education infrastructure in Curtin and Yarralumla are already heavily used, with parking at the Curtin and Yarralumla shops already difficult. There must be some local facilities within walking distance of the new residences. Also, a major advantage of high population density is 'walkability', the ability to walk to a diverse range of local facilities.

The demographic of the people in the new residential area must also be taken into account now. On current plans most households in the new North Curtin Residential Area would be couples without children or a single person. This demographic has a distinct demand for facilities within walking distance that has to be incorporated in planning and design for any development.

Urban heat island and water runoff

The large number of dwellings planned for the site, combined with the fact that most of the area is already a heat island, mean that it is essential to avoid the creation of an urban heat island with all the adverse consequences it would create for residents' well-being. Tree canopy cover in

residential areas needs to be greater than 40% in order to provide cooling during the hottest part of the day when people are most vulnerable to the adverse health impact of urban heat islands.

The large number of dwellings planned for the site would also increase runoff from this area by adding buildings, roads and pavement. This would increase run-off during rain and studies will be needed to manage flooding in Yarralumla Creek. This is an opportunity to start naturalising the Yarralumla Creek. Despite the potential for heavy rainfall in its catchment, this should be no harder than naturalising Sullivan's Creek. Doing so would open recreation space for the new residents and create a blue-green wildlife corridor between Red Hill and the Molonglo River valley.

Overall, the trade-off between hard surfaces (buildings, roads, pavement) and soft, permeable ('green') open space is critical and should be discussed now rather than left to be an emergent outcome of the development.

Not family-friendly

The 1,300 dwellings proposed for the 13.1 hectare area of the new North Curtin Residential Area will discriminate against households with children; that is, it is not 'family-friendly'.

During his interview on ABC Radio Canberra on 8th May, Jeremy Smith, Executive Group Manager in the ACT's Planning Directorate, said that the typology of housing planned for the new North Curtin Residential Area would result in on average about 1.7 people per dwelling. Existing ACT suburbs with this number of people per household are Braddon and Kingston, both with 1.8 people per household (from the 2021 census). So, the typology of housing planned for the new North Curtin Residential Area can be expected to be similar to that in Braddon and Kingston and result in relatively few dwellings being suitable for families with children.

(From the 2021 census Canberra as a whole has 1 child/household; Braddon has 0.1 children/household; Kingston has 0.2 children/household.)

Even so, the current plan would result in an additional 250 children requiring child care and primary schools. Primary school growth in North Woden is planned to be in Garran, way beyond walking or cycling distance for a child of primary-school age, and will result in increased traffic flow from the area towards Woden.

Not consistent with the National Capital Plan

The new North Curtin Residential Area is part of the Curtin Diplomatic Precinct and so is designated land within the National Capital Plan. Consequently, planning, design and development must satisfy the objectives for designated land. These include that *planning must provide a landscape response which supports the image of a garden city of national and international significance.*

This objective can be met by buildings of a height up to 3 to 4 storeys as this is typically not greater than the height of the mature tree canopy. The current plan, which is dominated by 6 and 9 storey buildings, does not meet this 'garden city' objective.

CONCLUSION

The North Curtin Residential Area - a new residential area on the eastern side of the horse paddocks north of the existing residential area in Curtin - is an opportunity for the ACT Government to demonstrate exemplary planning, design and development

The new North Curtin Residential Area provides an excellent opportunity to create a medium density community - one with a dwelling and population density that's similar to Braddon, which is on a light-rail corridor, or Kingston - that delivers on two key planning priorities for Canberra:

- Plan for more housing in and around key precincts, shops and rapid transport connections.
- Enable diverse housing choices and increase the number of dwellings in the missing middle, such as townhouses, terrace homes and low-rise apartment living.

A medium density development would be a significant densification project for Canberra and a major contribution to the ACT's need for housing (as identified in the ACT Housing Choices report). It would demonstrate that densification can occur in a way that:

- is 'family-inclusive'; and,
- does not create urban heat islands with their adverse consequences for equity and well-being of Canberrans.

The new North Curtin Residential Area can also be a showcase example of high class planning and development under the view of Canberra's diplomatic community