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Submission on - The Explanation of Intended Effect:

Changes to create low and mid-rise housing

The Beecroft Cheltenham Civic Trust (the Trust) strongly objects to the proposed housing reforms.

The Trust is a volunteer community organisation that has been representing the interests of the local residents of Beecroft and Cheltenham for 60 years. The suburbs of Beecroft and Cheltenham fall within the local government areas of Parramatta City Council and Hornsby Shire Council. Except for the residential R4 zoning at the Beecroft shopping precinct the rest of Beecroft and Cheltenham is zoned residential R2 low density.

The Trust acknowledges that there is a housing crisis in NSW. But NSW is not alone, as there are similar housing issues Australia wide.

The proposed reforms appear to be devoid of any serious strategic analysis.

The housing crisis has been slowly developing over a long period of time and has been influenced by unfavourable state and federal government policies and associated legislation. To relieve the current crisis will take time and carefully designed long- term planning strategies will be required in order to protect what is valuable in our society and not lost through a rushed reform.

The 'knee jerk' reform that is proposed will create a short term flurry of uncontrolled development ignoring proven town planning practices. So in order to solve a long term housing crisis by uncontrolled rushed development is highly unlikely to achieve the best long term land use planning outcomes. In fact such a reform as proposed will potentially create long term irreversible harm to the social and environmental fabric that is so important to human health and sustainability.

There are numerous significant planning matters that have not been addressed but should be addressed as part of any housing reforms. Besides federally related issues that have recently been canvassed in the media, the Trust has listed a number of state controlled matters that should be considered as part of the current housing reforms.

State issues

Current local council housing strategies. The Trust understands many if not all local councils are currently undertaking housing strategies, as requested by the State Government. The Trust has read Hornsby Council's business paper dated 14 February 2024 (refer to item 7 in <https://businesspapers.hornsby.nsw.gov.au/?committee=4>) and agree with Hornsby Council's concerns. It is totally inappropriate for the State Government to suddenly dismiss and abandon the valuable strategic planning local councils have already undertaken and currently proceeding with, in

their local housing strategies. The Trust understands Parramatta City Council is in a similar position to Hornsby Council. Refer to https://www.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au/sites/council/files/2024-02/LowtoHiHouses_Factsheet_Digi_a4.pdf

Merit based planning is instilled in all local planning schemes and has been working effectively over the years. To abandon this sound and tested development assessment process will have severe impacts on not just what have been achieved and preserved over many years but will create a mono culture of uninspiring development across Sydney governed by basic prescriptive controls. A 'one size fits all' across Sydney will destroy the unique characteristics of Sydney.

Private certifiers should not be appointed and controlled by the developer. The current arrangement allows corruption within the building industry and has led to sub-standard construction, as witnessed in recent failures with unit developments. Private certifiers have the delegated authority to act on behalf of local councils as a consent authority. So private certifiers must be appointed, managed and fully controlled by the local councils.

Strata Renewal process has been in force for a short time and many strata owners are struggling with understanding the strata renewal process. For the State Government to achieve its reform goals it would appear the government will be reliant upon the success of the strata renewal process. The Trust suggests the State Government reviews the existing process and legislation.

Environmental constraints. The proposed housing reforms only identifies flooding as a housing constraint. Equally important are other environmental constraints such as bushfire, contamination, vegetation and biodiversity and they must be considered as well.

Infrastructure such as open space, schools, hospitals, water supply, stormwater drainage, transport and sewerage need to be assessed as to their capacity to service additional housing. Many local council areas, like Hornsby Shire, have fringe residential areas with limited infrastructure capacity to service additional housing and therefore not suitable for increased housing.

Heritage constraints must also be considered. Destroying the past will not improve the future. Learn the many lessons of the past. Adverse impacts on our heritage will severely impact on society into the future and once heritage is lost can never be restored.

Workforce requirements will be a major constraint on any acceleration in housing development. The media continue to highlight a shortage of skilled workers. This shortage needs time to be corrected, so any housing reform must consider this constraint.

The operation of the market place with its unpredictable construction time frames is another matter that must be considered. Many local government areas have already been rezoned for higher density but builders are not proceeding to construction, instead simply land-banking development sites waiting for more a more appropriate time to build.

Land-banking units by overseas investors has also been reported in the media. Ownership of real estate in Australia is no doubt recognised by overseas investors as a very safe financially attractive investment, often with the units left vacant. This strategy should be investigated.

Affordable housing as opposed to public housing has been raised in the media already. In short if the State Government want to control what appears to be the critical component of the current housing crisis then it must have a significant degree of ownership in the development process. Similar to the post WW2 housing crisis time the State Government provided public housing for many

years. Relying solely on private development, even with increased yield for affordable housing is no guarantee of success, as witnessed recently with the Meriton development in the City of Sydney LGA.

In conclusion, success in addressing the current housing crisis will only be achieved by all stakeholders working in a collaborative partnership, including the federal government. The current housing crisis has been many years in the making and is highly likely will take many years to correct.

The Trust acknowledges there is pressure on all governments to take some type of action to achieve immediate results, however there is a high probability that such actions as outlined in the proposed housing reforms has the potential to destroy the very values that make Sydney and NSW such a vibrant place to live.

Yours faithfully,

Ross Walker OAM

Vice President, Beecroft Cheltenham Civic Trust

20 February 2024