

**Submission
No 207**

**INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL, PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE
HOUSING**

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The Director
Select Committee on Social, Public, and Affordable Housing
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Re: Select Committee on Social, Public, and Affordable Housing

Dear Select Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the following submission regarding the Select Committee on Social, Public, and Affordable Housing.

I write as a Councillor on the City of Sydney Council to make the following comments to the Select Committee.

I would like to put on the record my strong support for investment in social and public housing by all levels of government in NSW, as well as the implementation of strategies and policies at the Federal, State, and Local levels of government to make housing more affordable. The continued lack of public, social, and affordable housing options in the City of Sydney local government area will engender spatial polarisation in the communities of the inner-city, leading to social and economic segregation with widespread negative consequences such as anti-social behaviour and generational disadvantage. Experience and evidence shows that a healthy community, and social and economic opportunity, can be fostered by government intervention to plan for and encourage a mixture of housing options to cater for a diverse income range within a specific locale. Rather than create disparate communities where the rich and the poor are geographically separated, a “salt-and-pepper” model can be used to approach the question of housing affordability.

City of Sydney

Sydney is one of the most unaffordable housing markets in the world, ranked fourth behind Hong Kong, Vancouver, and San Francisco in the *10th Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey: 2014*. Further, the Department of Family and Community Services lists the City of Sydney as a LGA in “high need” of affordable housing. Evidently, there is a crisis of housing affordability in the City of Sydney and more generally, throughout Sydney.

city of villages

The City of Sydney LGA is home to over 10,000 public housing residents, one of the highest densities of any LGA in the country. Public housing contributes to relieving cost-pressures in the private housing market by providing homes at the lower end of the cost spectrum. Public housing estates in Glebe, Redfern, Waterloo, Erskineville, Surry Hills, Woolloomooloo, and Millers Point contribute much to the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the City by providing homes to workers and people of low incomes, close to essential services and jobs. The people who live in these homes make a wonderful and significant contribution to the City, and as a Councillor I wish to place on record my appreciation of their efforts to make Sydney a better place.

These public housing estates are largely the legacy of decisions by previous State and Federal governments to invest in public housing in the inner-city, with no significant increases in public housing properties in recent history within the LGA. This situation causes a myriad of problems in Sydney.

The City's strategies to address housing affordability note that housing in the LGA is becoming increasingly unaffordable. The City has targets set out in *Sustainable Sydney 2030* for 7.5% of all housing in the LGA to be social housing, and a further 7.5% of all housing in the LGA to be public housing. These targets for social and public housing are ambitious for the City to deliver upon and would require a moderate growth in the number of social housing units and a four-fold increase in the supply of public housing units by 2030. With 53.1% of all residents in the LGA renting, compared to 30.4% renting in the Greater Sydney region, the City also has an Affordable Rental Housing Strategy to address the issue of housing affordability for renters. Whilst social housing can be addressed by the City entering into partnerships with community housing providers, increasing public housing stock in the City will require the NSW State Government to develop plans to construct new projects.

Maintenance

In my role as a Councillor, I often meet with residents who live in properties owned by Housing NSW. Maintenance of the current public housing stock in the City of Sydney is a key issue for the NSW State Government to consider in order to provide adequate and dignified public housing. Strong investment in maintenance by the NSW State Government will be required to conduct urgent repairs of these properties.

I have personally visited many properties owned by the State Government in the City of Sydney and what I have seen, frankly, is shocking. Families with children are living in units covered in mould which is affecting their health; needles and human waste can be found littered throughout hallways, on walls and garbage areas, and residents rightly fear for their health, safety and wellbeing. It is a disgrace that people in a country as wealthy as Australia should live in this state in government owned and run housing.

Social, or Community Housing

There are a number of community housing properties in the City of Sydney, including the Common Ground project in Camperdown and City West, predominately in Pyrmont and Ultimo. These are sound examples of capital investment by government, co-operation from all levels of government (i.e., Federal, State, and Local), and strategic partnerships with stakeholders to deliver secure and appropriate housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness, as well as people on low-to-moderate incomes. It is my strong view that there is opportunity for further initiatives based on these models to be developed on sites throughout the City of Sydney, however this will require further capital and other commitments from both the Commonwealth and NSW Governments.

Sale of Housing

I note that the NSW State Government is considering the future sale of public housing properties in Millers Point and Dawes Point, as well as elsewhere. I am strongly opposed to such a sale. Like many Australians, my grandmother lived in this area when she first moved to Sydney from rural NSW. Many residents in this area have had connections to Millers Point, Dawes Point and The Rocks for several generations, and the community is strong and makes an important contribution to the City of Sydney. In addition, the properties of some of the earliest examples of Sydney's settler housing, and should be maintained and preserved to ensure Sydney's stories are told. The people and buildings in this area serve as an important reminder of where Sydney has come from, and should be preserved.

If residents have to be moved during renovations or maintenance to their property, this should be done where possible within the same geographical and social community. Put simply, capital is needed for the construction of new stock, appropriately designed with social, cultural, economic, and environmental considerations, and could be built first in the same locale as the properties that require significant maintenance. Many residents of public housing have existing networks of support, as well as access to essential services and familiarity with their community and any geographical displacement will likely lead to social displacement, affecting vulnerable members of the community who are in need of support and protection.

Sirius, The Rocks

I would like to take this time to make note of the Sirius complex in The Rocks. Sirius was built to re-house tenants displaced during redevelopment of The Rocks area during the 1960s and 1970s, and it contributes to community cohesion and provides low-cost housing to a diverse range of people. The building currently provides decent housing to people on low-incomes. The tenants in Sirius have been provided with a 50 year lease until 2030, and this agreement must be respected in any consideration of the sale of state assets in this area. The Sirius model provides a sound foundation for the how new funds can be invested in higher density developments.

In summary, all levels of government in Australia must do more to address the housing affordability crisis through a combination of public, social, and affordable

housing initiatives. There is evidence that this can be done, both historically through the Sirius model in The Rocks, but also through more contemporary examples such as the Common Ground project in Camperdown, however, it will require a significant investment of capital and political will in order to truly address the housing affordability and affordable housing crisis in Sydney.

I look forward to the results of the Select Committee's findings and I am happy to be contacted to appear before the Committee, should that be required.

Yours Sincerely,

Councillor Linda Scott
Labor Councillor, City of Sydney Council