

**Submission
No 142**

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

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The Hon Paul Green MLC
Chair
Select Committee on Social, Public and Affordable Housing
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Chair

Inquiry: Social, Public and Affordable Housing

Tenant Placement Policy:

Housing NSW's tenancy placement policy is not working in Woolloomooloo.

As a long term resident of Woolloomooloo Social Housing I've had the opportunity to witness and experience directly, the challenges of residing in a community that is neglected, is rife with dysfunction, with often times shoddy maintenance and unsuitable tenancy placement. The number of tenants who require assisted housing is rising, but there is little if any assistance in place. This significantly contributes to sanitation and maintenance issues, and to *ongoing tenant distress*.

As it currently stands, Woolloomooloo is experiencing the disastrous consequences of a dysfunctional priority and emergency housing policy.

Tenants with severe mental issues, including chronic substance abuse are literally lobbed on the broader community without warning and without supervision or assistance. They are foisted into the community and we are left to deal with the consequences. These tenants are not concerned with maintaining their properties, of respectfully using and maintaining common areas or recycling garbage, or even using a bin! The most basic neighbourhood etiquette is absent.

The area is littered regularly with rotting garbage, food wrappers, empty take away containers, and cigarette butts and this is a normal and acceptable environment for many of the more psychologically challenged tenants.

Properties become degraded through neglect and a high turnover of tenants. These properties are in continual need of repair and the surrounding areas are littered with garbage and filth.

The drains and sewerage systems are severely compromised as unsuitable tenants use their toilets as garbage disposals. These are tenants who need supervision and assisted housing and they are not getting the assistance they require. The area is being slowly degraded and it is left to a few committed tenants who voluntarily work to stem

the damage this does to the whole community - both psychologically and physically. This environment does not encourage self-betterment. On the contrary it causes apathy, depression, low self-esteem and hopelessness.

While unsuitable tenants are continuing to be placed in Woolloomooloo under failing priority and emergency allocation policies, *then **appropriate services should also be in place and properly managed by a permanent community development worker, to ensure these services are supervised and effectively delivered.***

The sanitation problem is particularly disturbing, with raw sewerage regularly leaking into the street and taking up to 6 weeks to clean and rectify! Garbage mounds pile up for weeks, until a handful of residents complain about it enough to be rectified.

Since most of the garbage skips were removed and replaced with household bins it appears that some tenants are clueless as to how to use them.

These ongoing dump sites and blocked drains are breeding enormous numbers of flies and mosquitoes, and causing stress and trauma to residents.

We find ourselves repetitively complaining about re-occurring issues , which at times could be mistaken as a deliberate attempt to force us out through neglect.

I prefer to believe it is a case of ongoing mismanagement and outdated tenant policies.

Some History:

Woolloomooloo Social Housing has a special and colourful history in the annals of Social Housing Estates and it would be a shame if the great passion and commitment of people like **Jack Munday** were allowed to slowly fade into nothing:

"The union and environmental activism campaign undertaken by the BLF led to large areas of The Rocks, Woolloomooloo and Centennial Park being preserved, along with many buildings of individual heritage significance. It has been estimated that between 1971 and 1975, the BLF green-banned some 43 projects with a value of around \$3 billion. In the wake of the BLF's activities, the State government enacted heritage protection legislation that led, amongst other things, to the establishment of the Historic Houses Trust."

And what of the late **Juanita Neilson?** - The Kings Cross newspaper publisher and anti-development campaigner who disappeared in 1975 - vanished without trace, presumed murdered, most probably buried in the foundations of those monstrous apartments on Victoria Street. She fought to protect the most beautiful Victorian mansions in the inner city and paid with her life.

The developers of those apartment blocks destroyed what the National Trust described as “ *The Montmartre of Sydney*”.

Gentrification:

Despite gentrification of the surrounding areas, including Woolloomooloo Bay, which boasts residents such as Russell Crowe amongst others, *Woolloomooloo Social housing is still here*. While times have changed and the social demographic of surrounding areas has changed with it, there is a remarkable opportunity to do something great with urban social housing.

The tenancy placement policies of Housing NSW have remained the same and they are *markedly outdated*.

At this time there is a shortage of affordable housing for low-income creative professionals and students, and vocational/cultural professionals such as artists, writers, actors, Child Care Professionals, police officers, educators, nurses and health care workers in the inner city.

This group of forgotten low-income earners are vital. They are of fundamental importance to the city's life.

Creative professionals for example, bring new ideas and 'grass roots' innovation, and the kind of flair and cultural 'vibe' that makes a place worth living in.... Ergo the great property booms of places like Paddington, Surry Hills and Newtown, which were preceded by the students, artist, small business and creative residents that made these affordable urban locations their home. This attracts first homeowners and property developers. Ironically, the same people that raise the cultural desirability of an area, are the first ones to be pushed out by rising rents and living costs when the same property values rise and rents become too high, and developers see the chance to make a substantial profit – thus the very community that made the place worth living in, are forced to leave and the flourishing creative community is dispersed.

The Vision:

Woolloomooloo Social Housing has the potential to be a *protected Sydney style 'Greenwich Village'*. Imagine the shift in consciousness extending into the surrounding areas, as low-income creative professionals filled new vacancies without the risk of being sold out by overinflated property values! Ironically, such a change in tenancy would actually raise the value of surrounding private properties by creating a wonderful creative and innovative social mix, which could only benefit our city.

The ever changing faces of Housing NSW staff and the wasting of money by trying to save it:

I believe there is a demand for housing staff to be interested in what they are doing and to remain committed for long enough to see a job through to its conclusion - or give the job to someone who IS passionate about their work.

When one has established some kind of understanding with a particular area manager or staff member, it is extremely frustrating when they vanish and are replaced by someone who is virtually clueless of current issues. This wears down the community members who give their time and interest voluntarily. Consequently, great community incentives simply fade away because those who are passionate about the development of the community become exhausted.

I reiterate the necessity for a permanent position for a community development worker in Woolloomooloo.

The true cost of maintenance:

While enlisting the services of the cheapest contracting companies - (who hire the cheapest tradesmen – who use the cheapest materials) may initially appear to be cutting costs, it's not saving money. The outcome is shoddy workmanship that breaks quickly and has to be replaced over and over again.

The workman gets paid again, the contractor gets paid again, and the new shoddy materials are replaced with more of the same and the money saved becomes the money wasted.

There is also the occurrence of mismanagement in the guise of 'maintenance'

Last year, one staff member told me that the reason two healthy old growth trees were being removed from the rear of my property was because they had to use the remainder of the **\$50,000 dollars** allotted for maintenance by the end of the financial year, which was only a week away at the time. This was to ensure they received adequate funding the following year.

No ten-day notice was placed on those trees as required, in the *clearly outlined regulations of the City of Sydney's Tree Management Policy*.

He had not read it nor even knew it existed.

Those two large deciduous trees provided valuable protection from the Summer sun and were part of a 'grove' of trees that had just become tall enough to attract a pair of **Powerful Owls** which nest in the Botanic Gardens.

This is well documented and I include the photos of the Powerful Owl and the trees they were visiting. I exchanged emails with a member of the Powerful Owl Society who was very excited to hear about urban sightings of this magnificent bird.

The area is now an ugly eyesore and a heat bank – with bare brick walls, and neglected properties in sightline. The exposed cement absorbs heat during the day and radiates into surrounding properties at night.

This summer costly plants were burnt, which required the purchase of shade cloths. Additionally, ***energy and water costs went through the roof.***

Yards were exposed to unsavoury laneway activity, noise levels were elevated, and privacy was compromised - ergo the added personal cost of higher fencing for security and privacy.

Meanwhile, other huge trees close by (that are still in dire need of care and maintenance) were ignored – even though a large branch had fallen and crushed a fence.

This is a prime example of a waste of money, which could have been used correctly with proper management, respect, communication and care.

Instead it has caused bitterness and trauma and damaged a lovely common area.

Reform of Social Housing tenant Allocation:

Woolloomooloo could be the starting point for a progressive, new, experimental policy that *reserves a percentage of Woolloomooloo social housing estates, for low-income professionals and creative arts tenants.*

Instead of having property developers rubbing their hands together, waiting for the privatisation of this historic estate, wouldn't it be culturally wiser for Sydney to lead the way and reserve just a part of one social housing estate for those who give so much to the city? Diversifying the social mix with a change in tenant allocation policy would contribute to the richness of our city and solve many seemingly unsolvable and recurring problems.

This is a big idea but it's also a practical one that opens up a progressive future for Woolloomooloo and the City of Sydney.

Sincerely,

Rozee Cutrone

Mobile:

Powerful Owl in Woolloomooloo at the rear of my home.
The tree was felled last year to use up funding before the end of financial year

