



Submission Planning Proposal: Explorer Street – Rezoning Proposal

December 2023

About Counterpoint Community Services INC

Counterpoint Community Services Inc. provides various community support services in the Inner City and Southeast Sydney LGAs.

We have operated in the heart of Waterloo since 1977, focusing on working with social housing tenants and diverse communities. We operate The Factory Community Centre in Waterloo, Counterpoint Multicultural Centre in Alexandria, and Poet's Corner pre-school in Redfern, and we act as the lead agency for many local grassroots groups and services.

Our Executive Officer, Michael Shreenan, also chairs the Redfern and Waterloo Groundswell coalition, consisting of local and peak body NGOs working to resource residents through redevelopment processes, and co-chair of the Waterloo Neighbourhood Advisory Board resident leads the Waterloo redevelopment group.

We have a community development team that is part-funded by the City of Sydney to support tenants through the redevelopment engagement process and numerous community groups.

DCJ funds our community support team and hub staff to support a wide range of individual residents and families. We support approximately 8,500 individuals annually.

Rest assured, our funding and relationships with funders have no bearing on the content of this submission. Despite our ongoing engagement with local parliamentarians and elected representatives, we maintain our political neutrality.

Executive Summary

Counterpoint Community Services thanks the Department of Planning and Environment for the opportunity to comment on the proposal to rezone Explorer Street – Rezoning Proposal. Our critical responsibilities as community service providers are to support residents impartially and ensure that diverse voices and opinions are considered.

This submission is informed by our work with individuals and community groups within the public housing community, including local service providers. We aim to express the diverse views of the local community while also providing a local lens that we hope will inform the final determination of the proposal.

Due to limited time and resources, we have not been able to consider the proposal in the detail and level we would have liked to.

Concerning technical arguments within the proposal, we broadly support all the arguments raised by the City of Sydney and REDWatch submissions and confirm that we have supported their work in this space.

Nerveless, we hope our additional comments and recommendations below are of use and are happy to discuss them further if required.

Government policy

We want to see a thriving public and social housing sector that can provide good quality affordable homes to a wide range of households and guarantees that everyone has one. We are committed to working with all stakeholders to see this realised.

While we recognise that much work is still ahead, we wholeheartedly welcome and support the new government's commitment to revamping our public housing policies and operations. However, we must address a concerning contradiction: the government's claim that public housing land is not being sold off when it is. This misleading narrative undermines the public's trust and raises questions of honesty. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that plans were already in motion before implementing the new approach.

As mentioned in previous submissions, disposing of valuable public land for short-term gains is economically short-sighted and unsustainable for current and future tenants. We firmly believe that the only way to achieve our vision is through direct government investment and retaining government-owned land. Success today should not come at the cost of tomorrow's deficits.

Therefore, we propose that the government consider maintaining the site as 100% social housing or, at the very least, retaining ownership of the land. This ensures the long-term availability of affordable housing for those in need.

Housing Mix

We applaud the government's shift towards new social and affordable housing targets, moving away from the previous 70/30 social mix formula. However, we urge the government to aim for a more balanced approach in all development sites. We recommend a mix of one-third social, one-third affordable, and one-third private housing on all government-owned sites.

Furthermore, we assert that affordable housing must be available in perpetuity. Without this guarantee, it becomes nothing more than a short-lived headline that brings no real, tangible change to our current housing crisis.

In line with our support of the Redfern Waterloo Aboriginal Affordable Housing Campaign, we endorse the design guide recommendation of dedicating 10% of the site to Aboriginal Affordable and Social Housing. This inclusion aligns with our commitment to equality and providing housing options for all communities.

Waiting list and bedroom mix

We acknowledge an issue with the under-occupancy rate on the site. However, we believe this is a result of tenancy management problems rather than the fault of our current tenants. Only 4% of those on the waiting list seek 3+ bedroom properties. Despite this, the waiting time for such properties is ten years, even for those in priority need.

To ensure fairness and provide families with viable options for inner-city living, we strongly advocate for this development site's social housing bedroom mix to reflect what is currently available. Doing so can address the erosion of opportunities for families seeking public housing near the city centre, a concern over the past two decades.

Social impact

While we appreciate and support most of the recommendations in the social impact study, we find it lacking in one crucial aspect: no public response or commitments or a social impact management plan included in the exhibited documents. We firmly believe that having these in place should be a requirement.

We are particularly concerned about the absence of plans for a community facility on site, especially considering the government's focus on creating mixed communities and the existing barriers residents face when accessing services. We argue that a community facility and its funding is an essential social infrastructure for any subsequent place-making/management plan, which will be vital for ensuring a more inclusive and cohesive Community.

Design Guide

To ensure the highest standards of housing and energy efficiency, the design guide for the Explorer Street Site should require compliance rather than mere consideration of development applications (DAs). By making this adjustment, we can future-proof our housing and incorporate the most straightforward mechanisms for tenants to participate in recycling services, waste management, and energy efficiency.

For example, we firmly believe that all new units should be equipped with energy-efficient heating and cooling systems, noise mitigation solutions, Dual waste chutes for general and recycling waste, and common areas powered by solar energy systems. Moreover, we advocate for all units to meet basic disability accessibility requirements instead of relying on retrofitting.

Preventing Crime and Ensuring Safety: The Need for a Comprehensive Study

Counterpoint argues that all new developments should undertake a Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) study. Sadly, the planning proposal fails to adequately address this aspect, with token references that do not link specific crime and safety issues to different development components and locations. A CPTED study must be conducted to ensure the consideration of all safety matters.

Supporting Residents: Ensuring Community Engagement and Well-being

Throughout the planning process for the Waterloo Estate development, residents have received vital independent support. Sadly, this support has been lacking for tenants in this and other developments, and there is no indication that it will be provided during upcoming relocations. As a result, the affected residents have experienced social harm, as documented in previous studies.

The government must allocate sufficient resources to social infrastructure to achieve our vision of vibrant, diverse, and thriving communities. The proponent of any development must be obligated to ensure independent support is available before, during, and after the project.

Furthermore, we propose that a community engagement compact, like the one agreed upon for the Waterloo estate, should be implemented as a policy and legal requirement for all projects. This will help foster productive relationships between developers and residents.

We greatly appreciate your consideration of this submission and eagerly anticipate collaborating with all stakeholders as the project progresses.

Thank you.

THANK YOU

For further info, kindly contact:

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