

'Gungahlin-ised': Forrest Residents Group slams approval of seven-storey hotel

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Published: March 13, 2017 - 12:15AM

Forrest is in danger of losing its status as a suburb people aspire to live in with its leafy ambience under attack from developers, according to the local residents' group.

One resident described it as the "Gungahlin-isation of Forrest" while another says the inner-south suburb is in danger of becoming "like western Sydney" - busier, noisier, more dense and with homes being built on smaller blocks.

The latest development to anger the Forrest Residents Group is a seven-storey hotel approved by ACT planning authorities for the site of the old Italo-Australian Club on the corner of Dominion Circuit and Franklin Street.

The Land Development Agency has also put up for sale a large block of land on the corner of State Circle and Canberra Avenue in Forrest for development, possibly for a hotel or apartments, with the auction due to take place on March 21.

Forrest Residents Group chair Margaret Atcherley, who lives in Dominion Circuit, said the exclusive suburb was in danger of becoming more like the "western suburbs of Sydney" due to the encroaching development.

"It is a suburb to which people aspire to live," she said.

"So many people I speak to say they would like to in Forrest. When I ask, 'Why?', they say the tree corridors, the peace and quiet, the blocks are relatively big... and all that is under threat."

Another Forrest resident and member of the group, John-Paul Romano, said the planned \$70 million hotel would generate more road traffic, more pedestrian foot traffic past homes into Manuka and more noise at night.

"I think, yes, Forrest has generally been a heritage-type suburb with big blocks and certainly there is a risk that when you get developments like this, along with bigger blocks being subdivided, not so much for dual occupancy, but for multiple residences, six to eight dwellings, it is certainly changing the character of the suburb," Mr Romano said.

"I call it the Gungahlin-isation of Forrest. The block sizes are becoming smaller and you go from having big backyards to almost no backyard at all."

Ms Atcherley said there seemed to be a general perception that Forrest was "full of silvertails" who could afford not to have the attention of the ACT Government. But the suburb was in danger of losing residents, not only because of the increasing development, but also skyrocketing rates and inadequate services.

"Our rates are enormous," she said. "I know one resident who pays \$15,000 a year in rates and she is an elderly woman. All she gets is the garbage collection because streets are in an absolute mess."

Ms Atcherley said in general there was "a great deal of disappointment" with the ACT Planning and Land Authority's decision to conditionally approve the \$70 million, 227-room hotel which also includes a 500-seat function centre. The conditions of approval include a revised noise management plan.

However, Ms Atcherley's said residents' concerns about the height of the building and the additional noise and activity, especially at night, remained.

"Aren't there enough hotels in the area now?" she said. "Are they all fully booked? I doubt it."

Inner South Canberra Community Council chair Gary Kent also criticised the approval of the hotel, saying a so-called public meeting about the development was attended by two people in a private home.

"This is the worst example of consultation I've seen in my seven years on the ISCC," Mr Kent said.

"We asked the developer for a public meeting and that request was refused.

"None of the residents' concerns have been taken into account so you're going to end up with a seven-storey building in a residential area which is taller than what is allowable on Canberra Avenue."

This story was found at: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/gungahlinised-forrest-residents-group-slams-approval-of-sevenstorey-hotel-20170312-guvirh.html>