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Battle to save our peaceful way of life

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We all like to think of our suburban residential streets as our haven from the relentless pressures of big-city living.

However, this is changing much faster than we think - under government planning laws that allow flats, villas and townhouse development to go ahead in quiet streets. This happens even when proposals for these developments are rejected by councils for breaching normal planning controls.

Controls that restrict developments to single houses in areas zoned for that purpose are just bypassed.

SEPP5 (an abbreviation for State Environmental Planning Policy No 5) was originally designed to provide affordable housing for aged or disabled people.

Unfortunately the Government has changed the policy rules.

The result is that this housing no longer has to include essential on-site services for the infirm or disabled, but still allows these developments to be built in areas zoned for single residences. The units are supposed to be inhabited by at least one person over 55 years old but this requirement is easily circumvented.

So-called SEPP5 developments are now ordinary medium-density.

By describing developments as SEPP5, developers can avoid council planning rules and build multi-unit developments for rich empty-nesters anywhere in the community.

There is evidence that estate agents make it clear that genuinely disabled people are not welcome

in these SEPP5 developments as, presumably, they would lower the tone.

The fact that these medium-density units can be built among single-residential blocks means they can be sold at high prices. They look out on to other people's gardens while the original residents have to look at a newly created block of units.

Residents, who have worked a good part of their lifetime to buy and set up their home as they want it, are suddenly informed of a proposal to build multiple units next to them.

They will be affected by a huge reduction in privacy from many overlooking windows as well as dramatically increased traffic movement, parking problems, noise, overshadowing and loss of property value.

The basic unfairness of their situation is causing increasing controversy.

The fact that the local council, supported by residents and community organisations show up a proposed SEPP5 development as unsuitable, inappropriate or destructive of neighbourhood amenity is treated as irrelevant: the Government's planning policy is used to, override normal council planning controls. The Land and Environment Court almost always overrules these council decisions.

The State Government maintains higher densities make the city more sustainable but cannot prove how.

The stifling congestion and environmental destruction resulting from high-density cities all over the world is apparent to us all.

How does this happen? Most alarmingly, there are three developers on the six-member Residential Strategy Advisory Committee which advises the Government on residential planning. This composition, even with the best of intentions must present a severe conflict of interest.

Councils and local community groups seeking to rein in overdevelopment in Sydney have been



sidelined.

The only way to prevent the destruction of our suburban environment is to unify opposition to gross overdevelopment all over Sydney. We need to save our neighbourhoods from a future of overcrowding, traffic congestion, environment destruction and overdevelopment.

If we do not regain control over unsympathetic development, Sydney and our way of life will be changed forever.