



Australian Institute of Architects

13 June 2016

Director
Lands Planning
Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment
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To the Director,

Re. Dual Occupancy in Zone SD

The Australian Institute of Architects supports the introduction of the proposed Dual Occupancy in Zone SD amendment to the Northern Territory Planning Scheme.

It is our view that dual occupancy on minimum 800m² rather than 1000m² lots would better achieve the goal of increased urban density; however, we would like to see the adoption of the proposed amendment and would hope for dual occupancy to be extended to 800m² minimum lots in the near future.

We provide the following comments.

1. General

We support the introduction of Dual Occupancy to SD sites as a natural and sustainable response to our increasing urban populations. It is an effective planning instrument in reducing the sprawl of our urban settlements. Correctly implemented, we believe that a Dual Occupancy policy is able to facilitate the provision of additional housing opportunities in areas which are proximate to goods and services, and with existing levels of high amenity. We note, however, that any policy development needs to be balanced by strategic planning to oversee its location. What we do not wish to see are isolated Dual Occupancy developments far separated from any existing services.

2. Lot size

While perhaps it may seem more palatable for Dual Occupancy subdivisions to be limited to larger scale lots, a study of the existing morphology of the Northern Territory's urban settlements presents a clear discrepancy at the 900m² mark. In the case of Darwin, for example, if Dual Occupancy was limited to lot sizes equal to or greater than 900m² it would restrict any increase in density of this kind to the Darwin Mid and Inner Suburbs, with limited opportunities within the Northern Suburbs and Palmerston. If the ultimate goal is achieving sustainable built environments, we believe that the imperative lies with a broader increase in density.

We, therefore, maintain the view that 800m² ought to be adopted as the minimum lot size for Dual Occupancy subdivision within SD. Indeed it is entirely possible to achieve a successful Dual Occupancy development on much less than this, but within the market and cultural expectations of the Northern Territory, 800m² is a reasonable minimum threshold.

With such a change we believe a number of social, environmental and economic benefits will accrue to the community.

3. Social Benefits

- An aging population will continue to have the opportunity to remain in the suburb they are familiar with, as well as have the opportunity for a second dwelling to provide either additional income, or a place for extended family members to reside in immediate proximity.
- First-time home buyers will have an opportunity to enter the housing market with the availability of more modestly sized (and priced) lots and houses.
- There will be more opportunities for affordable housing for families on low incomes living close to shopping, transport and other services.

4. Environmental Benefits

- Increasing urban density close to public transportation, shopping, schools and other public services means less reliance upon cars for travel.
- Development close to existing power, sewer and water supply infrastructure eliminates the need to extend these services to more remote locations.
- Building on existing inner-urban lots will eliminate urban sprawl, the search for green-field sites and the attendant environmental impacts of new developments.

5. Economic Benefits

- An increase in development opportunities will mean a boost to the construction industry.
- More housing at affordable prices will encourage people move to those areas

800m² lot sizes will provide ample opportunity for various design solutions to accommodate two dwellings to a site, including:

- Maintaining an existing dwelling and locating an additional dwelling on the site;
- Renovating the existing dwelling in such a way as to accommodate two dwellings;
- Demolishing the existing dwelling and constructing two new dwellings, via a variety of possible arrangements (side by side, "battle axe" arrangement, duplex arrangement, etc.)

Regardless of how the various permutations evolve, we are of the view that there must be a relevant and responsive set of design control mechanisms in place.

6. Design Controls

These design controls should take into consideration and be responsive to various issues, such as:

- Sites not to be overly built out (plot ratios of built area to open space),
- Impact to neighbouring sites and maintaining adequate privacy (overlooking to neighbouring properties and within),
- Site design, with consideration to orientation, breezes, and cross ventilation,
- Design-based arguments for setbacks, including opportunities for zero lot lines based on merit,
- Landscaping and screening elements,
- Neighbourhood character,
- Private open spaces,
- Garages and parking structures,
- Parking requirements. Currently the car parking provisions require a minimum of two per dwelling; as a means for maintaining character, this might be relaxed, with an allowance for more on street parking. In addition, carparking provisions should minimise the extent of hard surfaces. Shared driveways should be encouraged as a means of improving urban design,
- Setbacks (considering setbacks to habitable rooms with windows or doors), and
- Safe pedestrian and visitor access to all dwellings

7. Loss of the "Territory Dream"?

Our members understand that community concerns with Dual Occupancy relate to the perceived threat that increased density poses to what might be called the "Territory Dream" - freestanding residences on large (800 - 1400m²) lots with ample landscaped buffering between properties.

Whilst the proposed amendments do involve some change, we do not believe that such change need necessarily equate with loss; and that with adequate design controls the "Territory Dream" of an outdoor lifestyle can not only be maintained, but enhanced.

Yours sincerely,



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NT Chapter President
Australian Institute of Architects

This submission was prepared by Andrew Broffman (NT Chapter President), Jo Rees, Rossi Kourounis, and Tammy Neumann, on behalf of NT Chapter Council.

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