

## ELECTION ISSUE: HOUSING

## 'Ghetto town' risk



URBAN DEVELOPMENT: Infill housing is dramatically changing the city landscape.

by Peter Thornton

Auckland is in real danger of becoming a ghetto town, says Dick Hubbard, chief executive officer of Hubbard Foods and Auckland mayoralty candidate.

Hubbard is concerned about the ways in which infill housing is being introduced, particularly in the CBD and the inner suburbs.

"There are a very large number of small apartments, and there is the potential for the inner city to turn into a ghetto in the next 20 to 30 years," he says.

The population of Auckland City grew by 3.4% in the year to June 2003, according to estimates from Statistics New Zealand.

Housing Minister Steve Maharey's press secretary, Michael Gibbs, says the city's growth has seen a dramatic change in the landscape.

"In central Auckland the

dream of a quarter-acre section is gone," he says.

"Intensification is not a solitary issue; housing in general is an issue for Auckland," says Gibbs.

As property prices soar, infill housing is dramatically changing the urban landscape and raising questions about future quality of life.

Infill housing is defined as individual property developments in an already developed area on the Auckland regional growth plan.

A Barfoot and Thompson real estate agent in Epsom, who did not want to be named, estimates that 60% of the Epsom area is subject to infill housing and he indicated this is likely to increase.

"Real estate is all about location. The proximity to work and school is the ultimate factor, so this is likely to continue to promote infill housing," he says.

"You can't keep growing outwards can you?"

"House prices in the last three years have increased by 20-25%," he says.

"It's all relative though — you will sell a house for more and buy for more," he says.

The Auckland Regional Council plan has set a perimeter belt around Auckland and housing development of the city must now intensify and build upwards to contain urban sprawl, which Hubbard says is vital.

"Infill housing is an absolute necessity in Auckland.

"I think that people accept that as we grow as a city we cannot keep producing urban sprawl," he says.

Maharey said in a speech last month that the changing housing sector had seen more New Zealanders renting — and renting for life.

Cities are feeling more of the pressure from intensification

and many people are choosing to have fewer children.

There has also been a high demand for quality housing.

Gibbs says that with increased infill housing, the biggest impact will be on the infrastructure.

"With intensification, the issue for us is using our land more effectively."

Mark Trubuhovich, a Barfoot and Thompson real estate agent in Ponsonby, estimates that house prices have increased by 30% over the last three decades.

He suggested lifestyle factors, such as not having to maintain a property, were strong motivating factors for renters and buyers of infill housing along with proximity.

"It's horses for courses really. If you want to live in the city there is a certain lifestyle that goes with that," says Trubuhovich.

"There seems to be a direct

correlation between size and quality.

In general, the larger apartment blocks that we are introducing have much higher quality.

He cites three factors of concern about apartments.

"Twenty years ago there were very few apartments in town. So the first of these factors is ensuring that there is the right balance between commercial and residential development," he says.

"Secondly, there is a clear need for appropriate transport infrastructure, so that getting around our city is manageable.

"And thirdly, the increase in infill housing must go hand-in-hand with the creation of parks and reserves to cope with reduced space," he says.

If the city's growth is not handled properly this could be a strong factor forcing people out of Auckland, says Hubbard.

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