



Densification of city suburbs is definitely not an ogre to be feared



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comment

Medium-density housing across New Zealand cities is on the rise. Nearly 60 per cent of new consents in Auckland city and inner-city suburbs in the past year have been for construction of this type of housing.

Densification of our city suburbs is not an ogre to be feared, to the contrary: If it is designed well, it can offer extraordinary lifestyle opportunities and a solution to housing pressure in our major cities.

By saying no to densification we are ignoring urban sprawl, overcrowding, the housing shortage and our growing population and the pressure this puts on our infrastructure.

Visit any one of the world's most incredible cities – Barcelona, Amsterdam,

Venice – and you will see beautifully designed, high-quality, four- to six-storey buildings lining the streets.

Densification is not a threat to a city's heritage, it can be quite the opposite. It provides more people with the chance to belong and to celebrate and enhance a city's character and identity.

Big picture advantages of medium-density living include the creation of urban communities, the reduction in use of arable land for subdivisions (single-storey homes with tiny lawns), environmentally sustainable construction and solar energy captured en masse.

Urban densification needs to happen. We need exemplars of medium-density living; examples of lifestyles to rival the suburban Kiwi dream, that are affordable,

minimise energy requirements through passive solar design, that offer healthy homes with views, sun and storage and are suitable for single people, families, extended families and retired people.

Vinegar Lane in Ponsonby is an example of how Auckland can provide for medium-density development. Instead of a "one size fits all" development approach, "collective individuality" brings together commercial and residential buildings which complement the function, character and heritage of the streetscapes.

This design-led development is the result of a collaboration between a client, urban designers, planners, architects and other specialists working with the Auckland Council.

Across the ditch, for example,

Nightingale Housing developments are providing well-built, well-sized homes for people who would otherwise be priced out of the Australian housing market.

The model is based on human well-being and originates from the German baugruppen (building group) model, which is essentially a group of Mum and Dad investors who chip in to a development fund and an architect/designer guides a collaborative design approach for the community.

Astrid Andersen is chief executive of Architectural Designers New Zealand (ADNZ) which is holding a two-day seminar on future housing for New Zealand next week. Visit www.adnz.org.nz for more information.