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MEDIUM-DENSITY HOUSING – IS IT FOR US?



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ARCHITECT CYMON ALLFREY OFFERS AN INSIGHT INTO WHY WE NEED TO RETHINK HOW WE LIVE AND EMBRACE A NEW STYLE OF HOME.



Medium density housing in New Zealand has been defined by the Ministry for the Environment as 'comprehensive developments, including four or more dwellings with an average density of less than 350 metres square per unit. It can include stand-alone dwellings, semi-attached, terraced housing or apartments, within a building of four storeys or less'.

With the quarter acre Kiwi dream no

longer viable within most of our cities, we need to reconsider our housing stock. Where once McMansions dominated the housing sector, the need is now arising for a more compact living environment. However, we must take care to not produce 'zero calorie' homes where we have simply shrunk the home we understand. We need to ask ourselves deeper questions regarding what we require from a living environment, and

be prepared to look beyond our four walls to see what amenity the wider area can deliver, then conceive a new housing typology.

Earlier this month, I presented at the Medium Density Housing Summit in Auckland. Run by the Architectural Designers New Zealand professional body, it was designed to provide inspiration and information around the challenges faced when it comes to successfully embracing



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this 'new' way of living. Essentially, this is about equipping the design profession with the skills and confidence to overcome medium density housing solutions.

A recent media article indicated that terraced houses in Christchurch were struggling to sell, and suggested that medium-density housing won't work in our city. The areas mentioned are a case of which came first: the chicken or the egg. In these instances, there has been a push

to create a medium-density environment where the amenities do not yet exist.

The rise of these sub-divisions grew from a variety of reasons, however, they have created communities of people who are still attached to other areas of Christchurch. They have to travel to work, to school, to socialise and even to shop; they are professionally, socially and emotionally engaged with other parts of the city. These examples are simply just

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houses close together. In a successful medium-density environment, the adjacent amenity will support those that live there.

In Christchurch, our most successful examples of this style of living are found within the four Avenues, with pockets in the immediate outlying suburbs. For my business partner, fellow architect Craig South, medium-density housing is something he is particularly passionate about and skilled in. Crafting buildings that are designed to accommodate it all: rental, first home, co-operative living and shared resources; all without a compromise on quality or design.

Medium-density is not something to fear, or even to shy away from. We are no longer building houses of the 80s where commercialism took us into bigger homes, but are instead building for the future. While it is not how our parents, or even grandparents lived, it is about building for the next generation. Looking back to consider the best way forward risks losing innovation. It is about embracing the playground on our doorstep and reshaping what we believe our homes need to be.

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