

All-rounder leads SOS

Leader of the SOS Upper House ticket, Dr Tony Recsei, is an environmental consultant. He has written numerous articles and spoken at many conferences on the subject of over-development.

He has a B.Sc. in Chemistry and Zoology from Rhodes University, a Masters degree in Engineering Science in Waste Management, and PhD in Civil Engineering from the University of New South Wales.

Dr Recsei has also held a commercial pilot's licence and is Past President of the Royal Aero Club of New South Wales.

He is also chairman of the Turramurra Zone Salvation Army Red Shield collection and a committee member of the Sydney Mozart Society.

Tony's leisure activities include bush walking, surfing and swimming.

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ON MARCH 22

VOTE 1

Save Our Suburbs



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Buying influence

Tony Recsei

Can political parties make money out of property development? Not directly – the community would oppose that. But the major political parties *do* profit from property development by an indirect process.

Politicians first create a scarcity of land by restricting properly planned urban release areas.

Then property developers are allowed to overdevelop our suburbs without having to upgrade the overloaded infrastructure of roads, open space, sewers and stormwater systems. The community has to put up with a reduction in their quality of life, while developers make big profits.

No wonder property developers who require some form of planning approval want to make campaign donations to a political party, particularly the one in power or likely to win the next election.

The practical result: permission for property overdevelopment → large profits → part of the profits to political parties.

Figures from the Election Funding Authority of New South Wales show that property developers gave more than \$1,000,000 to the NSW Labor Party during the 1999 electoral cycle. They also gave large amounts to the Opposition. It is impossible to believe this was done for altruistic reasons.

The NSW Government is pursuing very aggressive policies of forcing apartment and townhouse development onto communities. Councils are required to submit 'residential strategies' to the Department of Planning (now termed PlanningNSW) for apartments and townhouses to replace existing traditional single dwelling house blocks. Meanwhile new urban area release is severely restricted.

Save Our Suburbs has discovered that these residential strategies are assessed by the Minister for Planning's 'Residential Strategy Advisory Committee' (RSAC). This committee is composed of from 6 to 8 members, of whom 3 are major developers!

Thus, developers have been allowed to have a huge influence on policy making in PlanningNSW. Unbeknown to the community and behind closed doors, PlanningNSW makes available to developers the residential strategies it requires councils to submit for its approval. This must, obviously, result in a conflict-of-interest because the developers on the RSAC can influence the strategies that every municipal council has to send to the Minister for approval.

Whereas councils strive for the long-term benefit of their communities, the developers' concern is for short-term profit. They can influence the Minister to accept housing strategies that are different from those that simply benefit communities.

Save Our Suburbs has developed comprehensive policies designed to rectify this situation and to hinder development approvals being influenced by political donations.

Sustainability the goal

PlanningNSW should revise its plan-making process to embrace ecological sustainability as its overarching objective, according to *Sustainable Population Australia's* NSW President, Tomi Strugar.

Mr Strugar insists that "No plan or report can claim to consider sustainability unless it examines trends over several generations. And the plan needs to be assessed against each new *State of the Environment Report* to monitor the plan's performance".

What about ...families?

Houses for families need to be retained and recycled as younger families move in when older folk move out, according to SOS's Dr Tony Recsei. "High-density developments are not good for bringing up children", he said, "neither are tiny housing blocks (an endless sea of shoe-boxes), where children have nowhere to play outside, nowhere to invite their friends over to kick a ball, and nowhere to go to with other children."

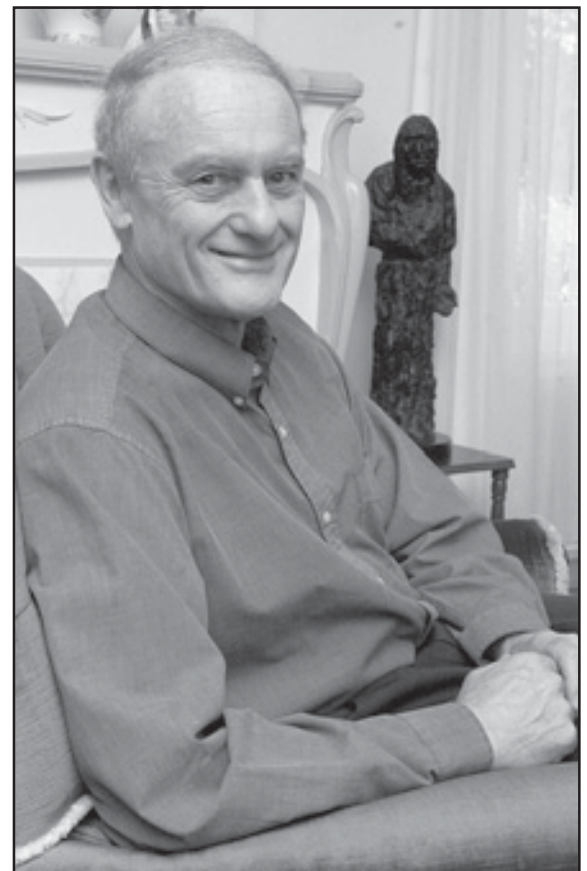
Supervision and safety issues render the few public places in high-density developments unsuitable for children, Dr Recsei added. "Concern is being increasingly expressed that children are becoming obese and less fit, because the lack of outdoor space drives them inside, where they play too many computer and video games and, as they grow older, unsupervised Internet surfing and video viewing. "PlanningNSW's urban consolidation policies are anti-family."

Voice denied!

The present planning process allows developers to 'drive' where and when development takes place. They are driven by the desire to make a profit – there is no requirement for them to consider the public good.

This process can be seen throughout Sydney. The developer chooses a site, prepares a proposal which will return the maximum profit, and lodges a development application with the local council. A kind of "community consultation" follows, but it is limited to objecting to the developer's proposal. And the community has no right of veto over unwanted, inappropriate development. On the other hand, the developer can appeal if the council does not approve the proposal.

Much of the clamour for access to the decision-making process arises because of the loss of quality-of-life associated with existing growth policies and the fact that residents are effectively denied a voice in developments that impact on them.



Dr Tony Recsei, the new voice for our suburbs!

Planning in a population policy vacuum

Dr Barry Jones (who chaired the 1994 *Inquiry into Australia's Population 'Carrying Capacity'*) noted in a 1997 speech, titled *Political challenge of population planning*, that a disproportionate amount of population growth comes into our major cities.

"The cities and the States have never been brought to the immigration party. When major decisions have been made, they've been left outside the door. If you go back through the period

of the Premiers' Conferences, and then later on COAG, (as we call the Council of Australian Governments) how many times were the States invited or how many times was immigration and/or population put on the agenda of COAG or the Premiers' Conference?"

"And the answer is Never! Never!"

Sydney's ability to plan effectively has been removed by a "policy" which boils down to

continuous growth. One shudders to take such a growth choice to a logical conclusion: the entire Sydney basin covered by high-density residential suburbs.

Save Our Suburbs believes that a full range of choices must be available to us in determining Sydney's future, and that a targeted limit must be set for Sydney's population within its current boundaries.

Such a limit must be set so as to preserve the environment,

heritage and character of Sydney's suburbs and the amenity of existing residents.

If our choice is limited by Australia (and hence Sydney) being doomed to an ever-increasing population – yet we wish to maintain the city's boundaries – there are only two options: establish new growth areas beyond the city or cram Sydney's people closer together.

The option of maintaining the scale and charm of the present city

is simply not possible if the city's boundaries are rigidly set and high-densities are imposed.

Save Our Suburbs policy is to demand that all three levels of government (Commonwealth, State and Local) be fully involved in planning immigration policy.

Such planning, SOS says, must be broadly based, prevent overpopulation and take into account incentives for immigrants to settle in areas capable of accepting population growth.