

February, 2017

Unit Titles Act Review
Construction and Housing Markets, BRM
Ministry of business, Innovation and Employment
PO Box 1473, Wellington 6140

Dear Review team: Unit Titles Act (2010)

The **High St Cohousing project**, operating as **Urban Cohousing Otepoti Ltd**, wishes to make the following submission:

Introduction and background: Our group is the second Cohousing project in New Zealand (the other is *Earthsong* in Ranui, Auckland). As such, we are an intentional neighbourhood, operating under the principles of 'cohousing', part of the sustainable community movement that began in Scandanavia forty years ago (for a history and current examples around the world see *Creating Cohousing: Building sustainable communities* by Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett, 2011).

Our vision is to create an urban cohousing neighbourhood, which promotes social and environmental sustainability, based on respect and shared responsibilities.

- Through robust eco-design and layout establish a cohesive community, which fosters wellbeing, diversity and the right use of resources.
- Develop and foster a thriving living environment, which uses clear communication, decision-making and conflict resolution guidelines that promote tolerance, safety, respect and co-operation.

Research into successful communities over the years has established that the minimum size for these communities is six houses and the maximum is thirty four, or 50 adults (ibid). Communities larger than this have tended to split into two smaller groups.

Our situation: Plans for the construction of High Street Co-housing are close to completion. The project involves 22 units, including two units purchased by the Dunedin City Council for social housing. Almost all units have already been sold.

On completion, each household will have private living space, as well as sharing in common facilities such as driveways, green spaces, vegetable and flower gardens, a common house including commercial kitchen, dining room, meeting rooms and a workshop. All households have been part of the design and planning process. Two of the architects involved and their families will move into the project on completion. An aspect of the co-housing philosophy involves sharing meals together, cooked by community members: we are looking forward to this as another way to build community. Meantime, we meet each week to make decisions around design etc, using cohousing decision making processes. We also meet informally for working bees on the property and for meals in one another's homes.

On completion of the build, Unit titles will be issued for each unit, which will comprise the private unit, some private land and a share in the common green space and common house. A Body Corporate will then be in place, and we will then continue to meet and utilize our existing meeting

processes into the future as we make shared decisions around the ongoing needs of our community. We anticipate that these meetings will be on a monthly basis.

With this in mind, some aspects of this proposal simply don't fit the cohousing model. I.e i) **Q 15: we do not support the proposal that all 'medium sized' and 'large' unit title groups must have a professional manager** and will take the option of passing a special resolution against this if it is included in the legislation. This is because within cohousing, all unit owners share the responsibility for decision making. The role of meeting chair and minutes secretary rotates through the membership. Once the build is complete, we will continue to have monthly meetings and regular presentation of accounts in common.

The model proposed of requiring a professional body corporate manager does not fit with the cohousing model. While the High St Cohousing project, because of its size, can elect not to have a professional manager, any other cohousing development with thirty or more units will not be able to continue to operate in the very way cohousing is designed and functions. **Cohousing is a quite different model from the standard 'developer- led' development.** We believe choices of sustainable models of living need to be encouraged in New Zealand to address future housing needs.

ii) **Q 27: We support proposals around the use of mediation** in the event that our ordinary discussion process fails to find a resolution and have built this into our Cohousing Organising Agreement, which will form the basis of our body corporate rules, alongside legislative requirements.

iii) **Q 22: We do support the proposal that LTMP extend out to 30 yrs**, that these plans be reviewed every three years (Q 24) and **that LTMF allow for this.** Our group has made provision for a LTMF. As these funds will be reported to members at least annually, as reported by the project accountant, **we do not support the suggestion that these funds must be audited annually** (Q 25). An annual review is sufficient.

iv) We support the suggestions around 'pre disclosure' statements (Q 5).

s 9(2)(a)

As presented to the group meeting on 23rd Feb, 2017

Reference: *Creating Cohousing: Building sustainable communities* (2011): Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett. New Society Publishers