

Build community and urban density may come

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While residents in all three areas opposed high-density living many weren't keen on the low-density status quo either. Credit: Daniel Lee

The Aussie dream of a detached house and big backyard isn't why Perthites are resistant to living in high-rise residential apartment blocks,

research suggests.

A Curtin University survey conducted in Canning Bridge, Cannington and Wellard shows residents are much more concerned about unexpected social encounters if they live in a high-density environment, or apartment blocks higher than four stories.

People in Wellard associated unwanted social encounters with crime and anti-social behaviour, while feedback from affluent Canning Bridge stated residents preferred to mingle only with people of a similar income level.

"This seems to reflect a desire to control interactions with others by choosing who to socialise with rather than enjoying spontaneous interactions," Curtin PhD candidate Shohreh Nematollahi says.

Study participants associated high-density living with rental properties and the area becoming 'boganised'.

These negative perceptions of increased urban density persist despite research showing neighbourhood social interaction builds trust and familiarity among residents, creates social networks and helps communities define rules and norms.

Residents were also wary about ethnic diversity in their neighbourhood.

A series of confidential interviews post-survey found people were hesitant about some cultural groups more than others, particularly those with customs and religions different from those regarded as traditionally Australian.

"It is fine to have planners say we need urban density for economic reasons, but clearly we need to address cultural issues and concerns if it

is going to work," Ms Nematollahi says.

"Governments need to promote the value of communities and benefits of knowing your neighbours, and we have to accept that living in a dense area requires tolerance—of more noise, different lifestyles and different appearances."

While residents in all three areas opposed high-density living many weren't keen on the low-density status quo either.

In Cannington, while 60.7 per cent of retirement-age respondents [lived](#) in a detached house, only 10.7 per cent indicated it was their dwelling of choice.

Most respondents preferred medium-density, including more than half of wealthy Canning Bridge inhabitants.

Medium-density involves compact, low-maintenance townhouses or apartment complexes below four stories with small gardens—well-suited for the older people and young singles that comprise two-thirds of Perth households.

"Some saw medium-density options as a balance between keeping privacy and a sense of community," Ms Nematollahi says.

"Also, many people expected to change their living place as they got older, and having a neighbourhood with various housing choices provides an opportunity to remain in the same area over time."

More information: Shohreh Nematollahi et al. Desirable Dense Neighbourhoods: An Environmental Psychological Approach for Understanding Community Resistance to Densification, *Urban Policy and Research* (2015). [DOI: 10.1080/08111146.2015.1078233](https://doi.org/10.1080/08111146.2015.1078233)

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