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# YOU DO NOT FIND THE NEXT GHETTO, THE NEXT GHETTO FINDS YOU

**L**ike the search for the Holy Grail, many critics are searching for the next ghettos in the new master planned apartment precincts in our inner cities.

The design of high density development that is home to a special demographic of like-minded people may confront some people; but are planners actually laying the design seeds for these areas to be the next ghettos?

Not surprisingly inner city neighbourhoods are well placed to meet the needs of people demanding better access to amenities and services, employment and entertainment. They can offer high quality urban design, in both their architecture and their public domain. They also effectively respond to contemporary household character, particularly as more of us are living on our own or choosing to have fewer or no children. Significantly households, when having children, are showing signs of remaining in the inner city and abandoning the suburban lifestyle. Real estate agents see inner city

areas as most likely to retain their longer term property value.

This seems to suggest that their social and economic future is, for the time being, assured.

In Australia, a ghetto constitutes a concentration of people who, due to circumstances such as ethnicity or income, are forced to concentrate in areas that, correspondingly, suffer from high crime levels, social and economic malaise, and deteriorating built environments through declining investment. Can we predict the location of the next of these ghettos?

There is evidence to suggest that the design seeds of our next ghettos were planted some time ago in locations that are distant from our inner cities.

The wealth of many baby boomers is invested in family homes, a large proportion of which are located in the middle-ring suburbs built in the period from the 1960s to the 1980s. Many of these homes will have to be sold to unlock wealth to fund retirement or 'sea-change' lifestyles. However the new

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Generation X is showing declining purchaser interest and, whilst migration may fill this void in certain areas, it is not unreasonable to predict that prices may decline in other areas.

To exacerbate matters middle-ring suburbs offer few assets and opportunities for redevelopment. It is hard to retrofit new development in an area designed around the cul-de-sac. Lot amalgamation is difficult and lot configuration does not facilitate new uses. Similarly a hierarchical road network is inflexible and cannot adapt to changes in use and function. Existing communities are also hostile to new development. Often schools and facilities have closed, depriving new residents of access to services.

Furthermore declining oil supplies, declining household occupancy rates and the aging of households will increase the cost of car ownership, reduce public transport services and reduce car use, potentially reducing accessibility to, in, and out of these areas.

The wealth locked in the middle-ring suburbs could evaporate, accessibility could decline, and social isolation and a decline in investment may emerge. The long term outlook for car-oriented, mono-use, middle-ring, low-density suburbs could be gloomy.

The critics may be looking in the wrong place for our next ghetto; it may be the very place to which, after work, they drive every night. ■

