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Small language gets in the way of a bigger future

Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore has joined the growing number of politicians who are using alarmist language to drum up opposition the new development proposals.

Moore has come out swinging against the NSW government's proposal to redevelop the Waterloo social housing estate, calling it a "planning disaster" that will create "ghettos of the future". The project even threatens Sydney's economic growth with tall "dark" towers next to "overshadowed" parks. There is no mention of the new metro rail station, the four hectares of public park or the new housing for over 2000 social housing units in her comments.

Clover Moore has probably been encouraged in her use of language by



CHRIS JOHNSON

the environment leading up to the state election in March next year where many politicians are ramping up emotive language against new development to garner votes.

With communities concerned about this change there are a growing number of media articles that cover the downsides of change, and academic research has become interested in the messaging that the media uses to attract readers.

Two academic researchers, Katrina Raynor and Tony Matthews, col-

lated thousands of media stories on urban development in Brisbane in 2015 and they found that there was mostly negative imagery that referenced war, death and disease.

They found that increased urban density becomes associated with "towering buildings", "unhealthy places", "city under siege" and "ripping the heart out of its suburbs". Local politicians opposed to new development were characterised as "saviours of the people" and "the white knights stand strong", and they offered constituents "protection from the destruction of over-development".

Raynor and Matthews stated that high-density apartments are characterised as "choking the city", "shoeboxes", "rabbit hutches" and "charmless chunks of brick".

The negative image building up around apartment buildings is driven largely by politicians championing community concerns, but a third of Sydney's voters now live in apartments and projections indicate that this could become half in 40 years' time. So will the scaremongering and negative language end up alienating all those living in apartments?

Having read the Raynor and Matthews research I undertook my own research by reviewing the print media in Sydney over the last few months. There is more than enough material for another academic paper.

Ryde's mayor Jerome Laxale said in April "unless the Minister reverses these changes, there will be bulldozers in every street in Ryde".

The MP for Ryde, Victor Dominel-

lo, said in May: "I have been advocating against overdevelopment since I got elected 10 years ago."

"Development out of control," the Member for Macquarie Fields, Anou-lack Chanthivong said. Deputy Leader of the Opposition Michael Daley said "a massive overdevelopment on a grand scale".

Summing up the current scene, Sydney Morning Herald journalist Aiden Anderson said on July 5: "All across Sydney people feel under-served, overcrowded, dwarfed by high-rises, squashed into train carriages, smothered by streets flooded with cars and crammed onto toll roads."

So we are being dwarfed, squashed, smothered, flooded and crammed as Sydney grows.

Chris Johnson is CEO of Urban Taskforce Australia.