



## Social housing shock for Knox

By *TARA McGRATH*

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NO applications were approved for new social housing dwellings in Knox during 2012, council figures show.

That is despite bold predictions in a 2011 Knox Council report that 95 dwellings must be approved each year between 2010-15 to meet demand.

In 2011, there were similar figures with just five social housing dwellings approved for construction in Wantirna.

Councillors rejected a social housing proposal by Housing Choices Australia in June last year, a decision the organisation said left them "disappointed and dismayed". But the solution to resolving the social housing crisis in Knox — and across the state — is simple, says Community Housing Limited managing director Steve Bevington.

CHL — a not-for-profit organisation that provides community housing — built the large social housing development on the corner of Dorset Road and Burwood Highway in Ferntree Gully.

Mr Bevington believes the sole reason for the lack of applications for development was due to a lack of funding for housing providers, like CHL or HCA.

He said there was a boom in social housing during the economic stimulus from 2007 because of a significant \$1.8 billion funding injection from federal and state governments.

The Ferntree Gully development was built during that time, as well as other social housing dwellings in Boronia.

But that money has dried up and housing organisations are struggling to raise sufficient money to build new homes. "Unless there is another means of actually funding these properties, there will be no new developments," Mr Bevington warned.

He said the solution was to follow the lead of the Queensland state government and transfer public housing units to community housing organisations — "it takes creativity to fix it".

Mr Bevington called it a "win-win" solution because it would reduce operating costs for the government, while allowing housing organisations to raise money.

He said organisations could charge higher rent because since the units were no longer run by the government tenants could claim Commonwealth rent assistance. The organisations could then use that surplus to provide additional social housing rentals and purchase more housing stock.

A government spokeswoman said almost 3000 government-owned properties had been leased to the not-for-profit sector. A discussion paper was released on the topic last year and was being considered as part of the government's new social housing framework that would be released later this year.

**What do you think? Post a comment below.**