

Chapter Group's VCAT Win Spurs Balwyn Project Forward



Chapter Group's three-storey 31 apartment project at Balwyn has been given the green light after a trip to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal last month.

The Cera Stribley-designed project slated for the [3862sq m site at 23 Maleela Avenue](#), on the site of a former nursing home, was rejected by the City of Boroondara Council this year, prompting the developer to refer it to VCAT.

Chapter Group founder Dean Lefkos told *The Urban Developer* the Balwyn project would be targeting the downsizer market in the prestigious Melbourne suburb, 10km east of the CBD.

“We both (the developer and council) felt it would be better dealt with by VCAT,” Lefkos said.

“We got a decision fairly quickly, it was faster than we had planned for.”

The project was advertised in March this year and ultimately rejected by the City of Boroondara Council.

“We always try and resolve it with the council and neighbours but the locations where we tend to do project tend to be fairly well-heeled and well-educated,” Lefkos said.

“Everyone has a bit more of an objection to higher-density developments in these areas.

“But what I think we have in this project is respectful to the planning scheme and the neighbourhood, and VCAT agreed.”



▲ A former nursing home on the sloped site will make way for the Cera Stribley-designed apartment project.

A James Packer-led consortium is backing the project with the former executive chairman of Crown Resorts and Todd Nisbet owning 85 per cent of NPG Maleela Pty Ltd, which acquired the development site, and a Joe Gersh vehicle, Gersh Como Pty Ltd, has the other 15 per cent.

It's the first [project that Chapter Group](#) has done with architects Cera Stribley but Lefkos said the architects had "nailed the design brief".

"In the 1930s it was the most fashionable suburb to live in in Melbourne," Lefkos said.

"This is our first official project with Cera Stribley and we really like what they've done with the design which is a sort of homage to the heritage and the different types of architecture in the area.

"What we've found is that even in a good suburb a main street doesn't appeal to some of the market but Maleela Avenue is one of the best streets in Balwyn, it's a really leafy area and an elevated site."

Lefkos said Jack Merlo Landscaping had been tasked with creating an established English garden landscape that fitted seamlessly into the neighbourhood.

Chapter Group is working through finer details but hoped to get construction under way in 2025.

Lefkos said that although investor grade and more affordable residential product was challenging in the current market, Chapter Group was focused on the rightsizer market in the blue-chip suburbs of Melbourne.

The developer has two downsizer products in market at Fitzroy and Armadale, and Lefkos said they were both performing well.

“Prices for construction went up and we were able to adjust our prices and the market accepted it,” he said.

“We won’t hit peak population for another 20 years in the downsizer market so there’s still a way to go for this market.

“We look at between 20 and 30 sites a year and we might transact on one.”

And while it’s a longer customer journey for developers tapping this market, Lefkos said that over the last two years there had been “a lot more acceptance and understanding of apartment living and downsizing”.

Lefkos said this education process had been led by developers in this space and government’s policy focus on supporting downsizing.