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Do more by those who do for us

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Sydney owes our essential workers a lot and the least we can do is give them better access to affordable housing closer to where they work.

It's time housing developments aimed specifically at essential workers received special consideration.

These are the people who turned up to work throughout the pandemic and still turn up because our city cannot function without them.

Here's an idea. In the NSW budget, Treasurer Daniel Mookhey included a \$1bn government guarantee supporting construction of 5000 homes. Why not devote all of that guarantee to essential worker housing projects?

As confirmed by a state parliamentary committee chaired by Sydney independent MP Alex Greenwich, essential workers have been overlooked.

The committee found many resort to sleeping in their cars between shifts or have to travel for hours each day.

These workers are described as the "missing middle" – unable to afford expensive rents or mortgages but too well-off for government subsidised housing.

The solution lies with energising the private sector to get on with the task of building and the obvious place to start is redeveloping urban-blighted Parramatta Rd.

It could deliver up to 35,000 new homes, including a mix of properties with many devoted to essential workers.

With Mr Greenwich and urban planning consultancy Urbis, Business Sydney helped launch the parliamentary committee's report with its 20 recommendations, some of which were Urbis's suggestions such as long-term leases on government-owned land, shared equity schemes between employers and essential workers, and mandating essential worker housing in council strategies.

We also see scope for "pattern" designs to accelerate essential worker housing approvals.

Some suitable projects are either already built or in progress. The best of them could serve as a "pattern" for other areas.

Premier Chris Minns and Planning Minister Paul Scully have a golden opportunity to make housing their political legacy.

And they could make providing essential worker housing part of that legacy.

Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney

