



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Environment
and Planning

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into DPA-04 – Missing Middle Housing Reform

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A submission to the Standing Committee on Environment & Planning — Inquiry into Draft Major Plan Amendment to the Territory Plan 04 (DPA-04)

1. Introduction

This is a personal submission to the Standing Committee on Environment & Planning — Inquiry into Draft Major Plan Amendment to the Territory Plan 04 (DPA-04)

By way of introduction, I note that a Standing committee “...is created after an ACT election and runs for the full term of an Assembly. ‘Standing’ refers to the fact that they continue for the full four years and “..(e)ach standing committee is responsible for a certain subject area that the Territory governs.”. Moreover “Committees perform three important functions -

- **They investigate new proposed laws (bills) in depth and make recommendations to the Assembly (to) improve them**
- They scrutinise the decisions, actions, and spending of the government, particularly through the public inquiries into the budget (future spending) and annual reports (the past year’s spending), and
- **They provide a platform for the community to have their say on proposed laws, government spending, and important issues.**

This is all self-evident to committee members but I highlight these higher order goals as a way to introduce a proposal in response to the Draft Major Plan Amendment to the Territory Plan 04 (DPA-04). I envisage the Standing committee has a possibly unique opportunity to reflect upon key issues over time and within a wider context than the narrow ‘present’, so much the focus of the government of the day.

My proposal is that the committee include in its considerations of the Draft Planning Amendment a big picture view which encompasses an increased role for the ACT public sector on issues to do with planning, the environment and housing and offer to the Assembly for its consideration a proposal to establish what I call a **Canberra Futures entity**.

I put this proposal especially in the context of this present investigation into the Draft amendment Major Plan Amendment to the Territory Plan 04 (DPA-04) for the following reasons:

- All too often governments address issues for the present with the thinking of the present – often under the guise of interdepartmental consultation
- There is often a lack of appreciation of what has happened in the past with relevance to the future
- For many reasons, the population of the ACT is frequently unable to foresee the implications of decisions taken today for the future of our children and their children’s children
- The wider ACT population is effectively excluded from genuinely learning about and thus participating in a very important aspect of the local democratic process

- There is considerable public comment that society today is changing in so many different guises without any way for most people and organizations to at least pull together and understand some of these developments with an influence on our ACT societal future
- The idea of resource use and a new way of developing a viable economy is omitted from our present social process thereby limiting options for important future social action
- Climate change issues are multifactorial ranging from environmental impacts to social situations to non-human issues without any public vehicle obviously available to help holistic perspectives being properly linked
- The so-called, because it is so misleading, 'Missing Middle' suggestions do not stack up logically or practically

2. Discussion

These matters listed above come to a head in the present investigation into the draft Major Plan Amendment to the Territory Plan, the subject of the Legislative Assembly's Committee of Inquiry.

For example, clearly the issue of how we house people, the materials we use and the designs we follow and, critically, the use of available space, impacts upon what type of future society we will have. Surely this is a matter upon which, in some way or another, younger generations should have a say and the matter not left to a select few called planners. I will return to the consultation process a little later.

However, the fact that the Territory Planning Authority consultation report indicates the ideas behind this proposed amendment come from already well entrenched beneficiaries certainly raises in my mind a query as to how far sighted these suburban and house design ideas will be.

There has already been raised in various ways the issue of how the survival of other species is tied to the answers provided as to the type of city design we will end up with¹. This issue links to the concept of human exceptionalism which needs to be seriously considered, but is very rarely brought before such Legislative Assembly investigations as the present one.

The philosophy behind the present thinking of government bureaucracies is dominated by the immediate past and present in which most recently a neoliberal viewpoint has been prevalent but which is now widely discredited. There are already many alternative perspectives being considered² regarding how wealth might be

¹ "We can't continue to allow vegetation in urban areas to be lost to development. These places are very important for nature and also for people's physical and mental health," Professor Bekessy said.
<https://www.unimelb.edu.au/newsroom/news/2018/december/small-and-isolated-habitat-patches-crucial-to-species-survival>.

² See these articles representing the type of debate which might be undertaken:
<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/future-business-alternatives-capitalism> April 2013:

created and distributed driven by public sector initiatives, but which are disregarded and yet may indeed be the future pathway for our community at a time of significant change.

However, if we take a broader view, we see that in the past the role of government in these very matters has been most successful. For example, the original post-World War II Australian public housing scheme was a *"significant initiative aimed at providing affordable housing for lower-income earners. This scheme was part of a broader effort to address the housing shortage and improve living conditions in urban areas. The scheme involved the construction of public housing estates, which were designed to be efficient solutions to social, economic, and political problems. These estates provided affordable and secure housing for those households who could not afford to house themselves appropriately through owner occupation or private rental. Despite its small proportion of total housing stock, public housing played a vital role in the post-World War II reconstruction and economic development of Australian cities"*.³

Then there is the action taken in Wales which has a most inspiring Act of relevance. This Act is called the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015)⁴. Its purpose is for "the community to work together to improve our environment, our economy, our society and our culture, for people, for our planet. For now, and for our future."⁵

This is a law which is about ensuring that future generations have at least the same quality of life as we do now. The Act provides for better decision-making by ensuring that public bodies:

- take account of the long term
- help to prevent problems occurring or getting worse
- take an integrated approach
- take a collaborative approach, and
- consider and involve people of all ages and diversity.

3. Consultation on Draft Amendment

I have read several times the Territory Planning Authority Consultation report September 2025, based on its 11 weeks duration. Consultation on important matters such as presently before the Legislative Assembly Committee of Inquiry is always a contested field of endeavour. Resources, time, method, accessibility, clarity, community willingness (or ability) to be engaged, effectiveness etc are all issues which regularly are raised and disputed as part of the process of consultation and the outcomes reported upon. Being able to submit written material and possibly

<https://esg.sustainability-directory.com/term/alternative-economic-models/#:~:text=Meaning%20%E2%86%92%20Economic%20systems%20prioritizing,being%20over%20solely%20economic%20growth.>; https://www.fabians.org.au/comparative_economic_systems_and_fabianism: <https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/alternatives-to-capitalism-in-the-21st-century> as an academic reference.

³ Communication from a former ACT Government Planner December 11, 2025

⁴ <https://www.gov.wales/well-being-of-future-generations-wales>

⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/introduction>

appearing before the committee itself are further mechanisms available for those in the ACT community.

For me, the key consultation issue here is that this is about the future wellbeing of our community! Of so many subjects under consideration, surely this is especially important to the widest cohort of residents and the time to look into this matter cannot be cut short. This matter is not new. Note for example the ACT Government report entitled “ENGAGING CANBERRANS A guide to community engagement - 2011⁶. To my mind what clearly and abysmally fails as part of effective consultation is the so-called electronic Have your Say! Portal.

I therefore propose to the Committee of inquiry that it consider the issue of transparency and engagement as part of an effective consultation process given that the future will bring with it so many important challenges reflected in this Draft Major Plan Amendment to the Territory Plan 04 (DPA-04) discussion. The committee should then develop itself or seek the development of an up-dated report on the key elements of effective consultation and against which all such ACT Government consultation processes should be assessed

4. Proposals

To assist in this aim of effective consideration of futures in the ACT, at a time when Planning issues are being considered with significant impact upon our future, my proposal, as mentioned above, is for the establishment of a **Canberra Futures entity**.

One can immediately imagine that the idea of establishing such an entity will have its critics. There will be as usual, howls of indignation supported by calls as to how such a body is funded, who staffs the organisation, what prejudices or knowledge such employees might have, what power the body might have in reality and so on. Additionally, we see all too often the effective sidelining of such bodies and no notice taken of their findings or recommendations or claims that this already happens, when it clearly does not. Despite the ill intent of such criticisms and actions, nevertheless such matters merit investigation but in a way to assist the wider community know what might emerge if certain pathways are taken.

This concept I am proposing is not to set up what might be seen as a group of experts, nor a group which lays down the law regarding future options. As the Australian Government Future Primer puts it: “There are no ‘facts’ about the future – only our expectations, and more or less plausible possibilities.”⁷

Therefore, I am proposing this new entity be a facilitating body, an information resource to help the wider community and the organisational structures within this society, grapple with complex issues associated with thinking of the future in order to find a community-betterment outcome rather than an establishment result. This type

⁶ https://www.hrc.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/2270638/communityengagement_FINAL.pdf

⁷ P7 <https://www.apsreform.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-08/Australian%20Government%20Futures%20Primer.pdf>

of outcome is completely lacking in the paperwork associated with the present Draft Major Plan Amendment to the Territory Plan 04 (DPA-04).

I should add that just how the efforts of such a Body are taken on Board by reluctant bureaucracies or government at large is an issue to be properly explored.

There are many examples across the world of an approach to this matter which the Committee might look into, aside from Wales. But we also have at least one example in Australia which is explained under the heading: Policy Fit for Future – Australian Government Future Primer ⁸, ...“developed by the (Commonwealth) Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in partnership with the Futures Hub at the National Security College, ANU, and which includes contributions from most major departments. Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and Forestry were a key partner, delivering the [Ag2050 future scenario project](https://www.apsreform.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-08/Australian%20Government%20Futures%20Primer.pdf) in collaboration with CSIRO.”. Just how effective is this entity, and the breadth of input into its considerations, may be questioned but its existence is important and potential outcomes are there to be implemented.

My point here is that the framework for an amendment to the Draft Major Plan Amendment to the Territory Plan 04 (DPA-04) is not set out in terms of a sustainable, equitable, clearly explained or justified ACT future, but I believe it should be, and such a framework ought to be one of inclusiveness, intergenerational equity, engaging of the wider community, ecological sensitivity, be accountable and holistic including beyond limiting thinking to human exceptionalism, challenging as this all may be.

It is not only my view but that of others that the ACT public sector has been largely absent from this space for a long time, thereby leaving the field to propaganda from a neo-liberal perspective ('Missing Middle') and making a mockery of intergenerational equity to say the least. The impact of this lack also means the trust in our societal structures including government is severely weakened just when it is needed more than ever.

5. Conclusion

I have written this submission because I think the present Draft Planning proposals presently before the Committee of Inquiry are severely lacking. They lack a framework:

- encompassing what the community might think about the future,
- addressing ecological change and other species impacts
- of genuinely and widespread consultation with the community impacted by the proposals
- of intergenerational equity

⁸ <https://www.apsreform.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-08/Australian%20Government%20Futures%20Primer.pdf>

Not only should the Draft Amendment actions be rejected but I propose that the committee properly initiate

1. A process as to what a genuinely engaging, transparent and effective community consultation process should be in the society of today and against which all ACT government consultation processes are assessed
2. The establishment of an entity entitled something like a **Canberra Futures entity**.

Such an entity must be open and transparent, not be an expert group but a knowledge facilitating entity, have its own budget, report publicly to the Legislative Assembly and report upon its processes and outcomes, and work especially closely with ACT government agencies to ensure they understand and incorporate futures thinking into their work load

Geoff Pryor

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Dec 17 2025