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FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND URBAN RENEWAL

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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Planning for the Surgical Procedures, Interventional Radiology and Emergency Centre (SPIRE) and the Canberra Hospital campus and immediate surrounds.

Submission Number: 04 - J. Cochran

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SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PLANNING AND URBAN RENEWAL, LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY FOR THE ACT

Inquiry into Planning for the Surgical Procedures,
Interventional Radiology and Emergency Centre (SPIRE) and
the Canberra Hospital campus and immediate surrounds.

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7 February 2020

Submission to the Inquiry into Planning for the Surgical Procedures, Interventional Radiology and Emergency Centre (SPIRE) and the Canberra Hospital campus and immediate surrounds.

I am writing this submission in my capacity as a private citizen, a trained health professional, and as a former resident of Garran for 40 years, during which time our children attended Garran Primary School and I was active on the P&C and School Board. As a family we have benefitted over the years from care at the Canberra Hospital and we have an interest in seeing that Canberra citizens continue to receive first class and timely professional medical care in a hospital setting when it is needed.

There is currently an undisputed and critical need to expand many areas of the hospital's functions and the SPIRE centre is expected to meet some, at least, of this need. In December 2018, the ACT Minister for Health announced that the very significant amount of \$500 million would be invested in the SPIRE centre. This is an exceptionally large investment by any standard and it is vital that this expenditure addresses a need and represents true value for money.

The need to expand the capacity of Canberra hospitals was recognised by the Minister for Health in 2008, and by 2011 the government considered that 400 additional beds and a full redevelopment of the Canberra Hospital site were needed. An assessment of expected future growth at that time foresaw a continuing expansion of this need for bed capacity. Population numbers and demand for beds have grown significantly over the last decade, but the government commitment to meeting the demand has waxed and waned, resulting in the present critical under-provision of beds. Apart from the obvious difficulties associated with bed shortages, staff are affected by lack of job satisfaction, disillusionment and bullying, and a general atmosphere of continual "stop-gap" measures. Solving the bed shortage should be a top government priority, and hopefully SPIRE will help in the process. Thorough consultation and planning and the allocation of the necessary human resources in this atmosphere of urgency, is difficult but essential.

Master Plan & Site Selection

Planning for SPIRE must take place within the framework of a **master plan** for the whole Canberra Hospital site. Without a master plan, site selection, vehicular site access and on-site movement, parking considerations and interaction between the hospital and the immediate surrounds become fragmented, ad hoc and totally unsatisfactory. The development of a master plan, or refinement of any earlier master plan, should be an urgent, essential, and immediate first step in the planning process and in site selection.

Consultation

Consultation throughout the planning and master planning process is vital. Meaningful inputs from professional and lay hospital staff, patients and the hospital neighbours will help lead to a first-class hospital facility that will meet the needs of its users. This process should be treated as a positive input to the planning process, rather than as a token public relations exercise. Thoughtful consideration should go into the selection of representatives, ensuring that Garran residents and the Primary School are included.

Timing

Time is critical and urgent for this much-needed project. Ad hoc, rushed action without master planning is unlikely to lead to a satisfactory end result or value for money. Very well-resourced, speedy action on a well-planned timeframe is called for.

Vehicle Access

The current vehicular access points work well and should remain. Palmer Street in Garran presents a number of significant traffic hazards and there is no wisdom at all in the proposal to add new entry points for ambulances and services off this street. Palmer Street is a narrow suburban street, with difficult topography because of the rise in land level and it already has visibility problems for vehicular and pedestrian traffic. The close proximity of the proposed ambulance and service entry points to Garran Primary School and the busy intersection of Palmer Street and Gilmore Crescent poses serious safety issues which definitely need a re-think. The significant increase in vehicular traffic along Gilmore Crescent brought about by the proposed Palmer Street access points, creates a significant safety issue for students of Garran Primary School which fronts onto Gilmore Crescent. Considerable traffic is already generated by the Hospital Road entrance off Gilmore Crescent which serves both the Canberra Hospital and the National Capital Hospital. The safety of young children should be a very high priority, and minimising the traffic travelling along Gilmore Crescent in front of the school seems enormously sensible.

Other Traffic and Parking Issues

Other traffic and parking issues are complex. Hospital-generated car parking is located on site and in a number of rather ugly-looking off site locations. The issue of car parking should be an important part of the master plan for the Canberra Hospital site. Where possible, car parking should be contained within the hospital grounds for safety, convenience and aesthetic reasons.

A chaotic and dangerous traffic and parking situation arose in Gilmore Crescent during the extensions to the National Capital Hospital during 2018-2019. The hospital is directly opposite the Garran Primary School and next to the currently proposed location of the SPIRE building. During the long period of construction, workers' cars and work vehicles made exclusive use of one side of Gilmore Crescent, excluding the school community from using that side of the road throughout the day. The children's safety during drop-offs and pick-ups, and parent parking for special school assemblies, parent-teacher interviews and school functions generally, were severely hindered. Considered thought should be given at the contract stage to provision of parking for workers' and work vehicles during the period of SPIRE's construction.

Community Safety and Noise

Any significant expansion of the Canberra Hospital will impact the Garran Primary School in terms of pedestrian safety, traffic volume and movement, and noise. Over 600 children aged between 5 and 13 years of age attend the school, and it is the Junior School, attended by the younger children, that is located in the building closest to the currently proposed SPIRE site. The children's safety and the interaction of school and hospital functions must be a major consideration in planning for the hospital's expansion.

The community appreciates the value of the helipad as an essential part of the hospital's services. This facility of necessity creates noise during take-off and landing and at times for quite extended "waiting" periods. The noise is an obvious problem for the nearby Primary School and for homes in close proximity. The currently proposed location of the helipad on top of the SPIRE building is probably the worst possible positioning from the perspective of a negative impact on the immediate surrounds. In determining the location of the helipad on the Master Plan for the hospital site, minimising the impact of noise on the school and nearby homes should be taken into account.

If land in the area of the current helipad site was to be considered for use as part of the hospital expansion, thought could be given to relocating the helipad to a nearby off-site location (perhaps one of the very close by sports ovals) during the construction stage of SPIRE, and returning it on-site once building work is completed.

Landscaping

Over many years landscaping of the Canberra Hospital campus has been poor and the whole site has looked dreary and unwelcoming. Random fenced off areas and storage places for abandoned and left-over building materials abound. The on-site "works of art" are rather pathetically out of proportion to their surroundings and add very little if anything by way of inspiration. A few small strategically placed gardens planted with thoughtfully selected hardy and colourful shrubs and trees, could make a welcome difference.

Members of the Canberra community pay high taxes and place a very high priority on the availability of a public hospital facility that is well-planned and readily accessible, manned by well qualified staff, and that is appropriately sized to meet community needs. A well planned and integrated campus of a size matched to the size of the population it serves, should provide a satisfying workplace for staff and appropriate facilities for the well-being and better health of patients. I very much hope that the proposed expenditure of half a billion dollars of public money over the next few years moves the ACT significantly towards that goal.

Julie Cochran

7 February 2020