



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND URBAN RENEWAL

Ms Caroline Le Couteur MLA (Chair), Mr Mark Parton MLA (Deputy Chair)

Mr Michael Petterson MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

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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Committee Secretary,
Standing Committee on Planning and Urban Renewal,
Legislative Assembly for the ACT,
GPO Box 1020, CANBERRA ACT 2601
Email: LACommitteePUR@parliament.act.gov.au

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING FOR THE SURGICAL PROCEDURES,
INTERVENTIONAL RADIOLOGY AND EMERGENCY CENTRE (SPIRE) AND THE
CANBERRA HOSPITAL CAMPUS AND IMMEDIATE SURROUNDS**

1. The Friends of Hawker Village (FOHV) wish to provide comments on the SPIRE proposal on the basis that it is an issue relevant to all Canberra residents who might have to be treated at the hospital or even just visit patients in this hospital. FoHV appreciate the importance of this development and the vital services it will provide. Unfortunately, we see severe failings in the proposal, especially the location.
2. At present, the ad hoc development of the site is confusing to irregular users; in fact, it appears to have ‘grown like Topsy’ ever since the original Royal Canberra Hospital on Acton Peninsula was closed in 1991 and demolished in 1997. Despite the Woden hospital then being designated as the major hospital for Canberra and the surrounding region, there seems, to date, to have been little thoughtful, forward planning for the future and the suitability of the current site for long-term needs.

History

3. One of the problems seems to be the unexpectedly rapid rate of population growth. The ‘Your Health – our priority’ statement released in 2009, declared that, “By the year 2032, Canberra’s population is projected to grow to 389,000”. In fact, according to ACT Treasury, “The resident population of the ACT is estimated to have been around 411,667 people as at 30 June 2017. The ACT population is projected to reach 452,590 people by 2022.”¹

¹ <https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/snapshot/demography/act>

4. Since 2009, there have been many developments in the wider medical system with new walk-in clinics across the city, private hospitals and the University of Canberra Hospital, for rehabilitation, as well as new buildings on the Canberra Hospital site. Now it is proposed to demolish three low buildings to make way for two new buildings of nine-storeys and three storeys, to construct one other new building for staff and to reconfigure/refurbish two others as the site is effectively full. This is a dramatic escalation in the intensity of development and it is no wonder that Garran residents are unhappy.
5. The siting and design of the SPIRE project dates from 2017-18 and a Request for Registrations of Interest for proof of concept design for SPIRE closed on 29 March 2018. No master plan has been produced for this area or the hospital site, itself, at this stage. We note that, on 31 Oct 2019, a media release from Ms Stephen-Smith advised that a tender had been released for a lead design consultant for the Canberra Hospital Master Plan which was expected to be finalised by mid-2020. It was stated that, “The Master Plan will primarily focus on the hospital campus itself, but will also consider the Canberra Hospital as part of a broader precinct, particularly with regard to traffic and parking issues”. The Spire consultation, then, pre-empts the master plan in that its location has been selected and seems to be non-negotiable.

Site selection

The current hospital site, in a residential suburb, was chosen for what was expected to be the second public hospital in Canberra, not the major hospital. Development until recently, has seen taller buildings along the Yamba Drive side, with smaller buildings closer to the residential area. The Canberra Private Hospital broke that trend and the intention, now, is to build an extensive, nine-storeyed building, with a helicopter pad on the roof, immediately opposite houses and a primary school, and on ordinary suburban roads. This is a textbook case of very poor and inappropriate building expansion and site planning.

6. It appears that the existing hospital site is barely adequate for current needs in 2020, let alone for future needs. Whilst it is surrounded by two major roads, it is only directly accessible from one, Yamba Drive. The other roads are minor suburban roads that were not designed for such a major facility, which was not envisioned at the time the suburb was developed. The current proposal strongly indicates that an additional site is needed to cater for the rapid population growth of our city.
7. If the population is to continue to grow and this hospital is to adequately serve patients from the wider region, then consideration of available land in the environs for future needs is required. A prime candidate is the site of the former high school, which became the CIT and fronts Hindmarsh Drive and Ainsworth Street. The buildings are scheduled for demolition but, before the land is sold for revenue-raising², serious consideration should be given to the potential need for extra space for Canberra Hospital in the future. Despite being separate

² We presume that the CIT was moved to Tuggeranong to make this more valuable site available for redevelopment.

from the hospital site, it could be used for various purposes that do not require access to the main hospital but benefit from its proximity, such as staff accommodation and a new hydrotherapy pool to serve southern Canberra, now that the current pool is to make way for alternative use of the space it occupies.

Access

8. Creation of the proposed SPIRE Centre with its range of services will vastly increase the amount of traffic on Kitchener Street, Gilmour Crescent and Palmer Street. Parking will necessarily be an issue. A major concern of local residents is that the emergency vehicle access to the new building will be off Palmer Street. This is better than being directly opposite the primary school and it gives access from Yamba Drive but neither Palmer nor Gilmour Streets are designed for such a function and are not suitable for such a function.

Impact

9. There is no doubt that the increased traffic, especially the emergency vehicles and the helicopters, will disrupt the peaceful neighbourhood. The negative effects would be greater on the school. Serious consideration must be given to the mitigation of excessive and irritating sounds in the residential and school areas before the site is cleared and redevelopment becomes a fait accompli. The establishment of such a large building in such proximity to suburban houses will dominate the vicinity.

Conclusion

10. Our concerns can be summarised as:
 - a) This suburban site is inappropriate for this degree of development;
 - b) Emergency services are not in a prominent location on a major road but behind the hospital on minor roads;
 - c) Residences and a primary school will be subject to excessive noise from ambulances and helicopters;
 - d) Traffic will increase significantly on minor suburban roads which are not suitable for this purpose and will inevitably increase traffic hazards for local traffic and residents;
 - e) Parking needs will most likely be inadequate – multi-storeyed carparks will be inappropriate in the vicinity of this residential area;
 - f) There is an apparent lack of strategic, long-term planning for the future hospital needs of the Canberra community within the context of a master plan for the area and a detailed precinct plan for the actual campus.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.



Colin Lyons,
Convenor
Friends of Hawker Village Incorporated