



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY
Dr Marisa Paterson MLA (Chair), Ms Jo Clay MLA (Deputy Chair), Mr Ed Cocks MLA

Exhibit

Inquiry into ACT's heritage arrangements

Exhibit Number: 014

Date Authorised for Publication: 23 May 2023



REID RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION INC.

AO 1247

info@reid.northcanberra.org.au

Reid 'Garden City Precinct' 1926 –2023

Reid Residents' Association Inc. 1944–2023

'Let's get the facts right about Reid'

This is response to the Reid 'pile on' or to use an Aussie term, the furrphies, that appear to be coming from a number of sections in both the planning sector and community.

We put forward our story based on evidence of the Australian style Garden City Precincts, including the Reid Housing Precinct.

1. Reaction to squalor and densification of populations: a 'Garden City' movement' 1898

Ebenezer Howard is the figurehead of the Garden City movement and was joined by other architects in the USA with the 'City Beautiful' movement. Started in 1898, the movement was a reaction to the squalor of cities like London. These disease-ridden precincts were artefacts of the Industrial Revolution when huge numbers of people migrated to cities resulting in the densification of masses in slums.

The Garden City movement worked to raise living standards (i.e. health and safety) for the working classes and combined elements of both town & country life: fresh air, light, easy access to work, enough space to grow fruit and vegetables.

2. The rush to get workers to Canberra, 1908 ...

Once there was the decision in 1908 to establish the national capital of Australia in Canberra there was a rush to get workers and their families to Canberra. Houses were needed for them to live in so that the business of building Parliament House (now OPH), the suburbs and infrastructure of Canberra could proceed. The Commonwealth Government of Australia needed the support of public servants so that the various public service activities for which the Government holds responsibility could be carried out. Thus, the early suburbs of inner Canberra were built in a rush, in a hierarchy, and built largely according to the overarching Griffin Plan.

3. The Griffins and Sulman versions of Garden Cities and Garden City Precincts (suburbs)

Enter John Sulman who, while he supported the Griffins' plan for the National Capital, did not always agree with some aspects. He was chairman of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee (1921–24) and was able to apply the principles and values of the Garden City movement at a suburb scale. The early suburbs, which were government housing developments, are now what we call our housing precincts and nine of the remaining are heritage listed.

Having lived in Australia at this stage for some 30 years and travelled a great deal, Sulman favoured providing workers individual cottages on generous blocks of land with trees,

gardens and without back lanes or front fences. He probably anticipated that gardens would be handy on the windswept Limestone Plains. Entry 20023 Reid Housing Precinct (p. 5) supports this notion: *Large rear gardens reflect the planners' intention to provide opportunities for residents to grow fruit and vegetables in the face of critical shortages of locally available fresh produce.*

Thus, we have a particularly Australian interpretation of a garden city precinct. These remaining Garden City housing precincts are unique to Canberra because they were built to support our democratic government and they were adapted to Australian conditions. With regards to the Griffin Plan one could ask which particular one. Further, it would seem that various governments choose to interpret the Griffin Plan in various ways depending on whatever suits current policy e.g. West Basin and Mt Ainslie's' foothills, ridges and buffers.

Reid was built to house middle-level public servants. It weathered the Great Depression and the Second World War, and it was during this time that the Reid Progress Association was formed (1944) which later became the Reid Residents' Association. There are marvellous stories from Reid residents recalling these times in vivid detail, horse-drawn library book deliveries, bonfire nights, flash floods and their close community ties.

4. Register of the National Estate established under the *Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975: Reid Conservation Area*

The Australian Heritage Commission was headed by the extraordinary Professor David Yencken, who championed the Australian environment, the nation's heritage and excellence in design. To our good fortune, the Reid Conservation Area was entered after genuine consultation with, and agreement by, residents on 21/10/1980. We hold some of this material in the Reid Archive.

So, this place had been assessed by experts for its significance as 'A key example of housing and landscape planned by the Federal Capital Commission in the early development of Canberra. **The housing was specially designed for Canberra** and exhibits influences of Arts and Crafts, Georgian Revival and Mediterranean Georgian styles. The planning around public gardens with axial walkways followed the precepts of English Garden suburbs'.

This 'intact area of planning, planting and housing c 1927' is rapidly reaching its 100th anniversary and its planning, planting and housing show **great adaptive reuse** with obvious improvements including telecommunications, modern kitchen and bathrooms photovoltaics etc. This is not a frozen-in-time precinct which seems to disappoint some people.

5. Replacement of Reid with a Parisian precinct & the Burra Charter 1979

Do we really need a fake Parisian precinct? Surely such precincts are better left in Paris where the Parisians do them so well and because this is totally contrary to the Burra Charter. This Charter, formalised in 1979 at the historic mining town of Burra, South Australia, defines the basic principles and procedures to be followed in the conservation of Australian heritage places.

It's such a good charter that the International Committee of Monuments and Sites, affectionally known as ICOMOS, uses it as a foundational document for decision making on places of significance in Australia and it is used by the Australian Government, States and Territories. ICOMOS is in Paris and now doubt their staff enjoy the Parisian precincts near their HQ.

If there's one thing the Charter seeks to protect it is cultural landscapes and these housing precincts are cultural landscapes. These are places that should be conserved because of their cultural significance i.e. aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations. Reid and the other housing precincts most definitely meet the aesthetic, historic and social values that comprise a cultural landscape. These cultural landscapes have been conserved because of Heritage arrangements that have been put in place by expert analysis and resident input and they are unique.

Further, before starting to impose high-rise on Reid it might be an idea to check the geomorphology of this area. Reid has floods and there are underground water ways that run from Mt Ainslie to Lake Burley Griffin. The drainage just does not cope!

6. Reid Housing Precinct Entry 20023 ACT Heritage Register

Reid shares with the other nine precincts a Statement of Significance (pp. 4-5 https://www.environment.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/148474/462.pdf) which includes:

The resultant composition of architectural and landscape elements forms a cohesive streetscape that the community values.¹

However, like the other Garden City precincts, Reid had some additional specific values:

- The majority of the precinct was constructed in 1926–27 to meet the urgent need to provide housing for public servants prior to the opening of the provisional Parliament House in 1927.
- The tennis courts and pavilion in Dirrawan Gardens formed a focal point for social life in the founding community of the newly established suburb of Reid.
- The public domain landscape was directed by Thomas Charles Weston who was Canberra's first Superintendent of Parks and Gardens. The species used are typical of Weston's choice of planting for Canberra. (pp. 5-6)

Please see the footnote:

¹ Industry Representatives, precinct residents and the general community were invited to attend one of a series of consultation workshops held during October 2000 to discuss proposed revisions to the conservation objectives and development controls for the Precincts. During these workshops all participants agreed that the Precincts had special values that should be conserved.

How good is it to see what certainly appears again like genuine consultation.

7. Rumours of the 'Reid University' are unfounded.

We do not have our 'own university'. We understand that, in fact, the Canberra Institute of Technology is to be replaced by the University of New South Wales Canberra City Campus. The Campus will extend beyond Reid across Constitution Avenue to the suburb of Parkes. This information is readily available and has been for years and again for the record, UNSW's home base is Kensington (Sydney).

Regarding the long-awaited high-speed rail stop for Reid, we really don't have any choice where it goes or where it stops. Any advance on the high-speed rail would be welcome!

8. That Reid is 'a largely exclusive oasis to the wealthy' is also unfounded and is without supporting evidence

Reid, far from being wealthy, has a median household income below the average for the ACT. All the suburbs near Reid (Ainslie, Campbell, Braddon, Turner and O'Connor) have a median household income higher than the median household income in Reid. The median household income in Campbell is over 30% higher than it is in Reid.

The population of Reid has higher median age compared with the rest of the ACT and Australia – fewer children and more post retirees. However, offsetting this is the proportion of 20- to 30-year-olds in Reid, which is much higher than for the ACT and Australia.

We urge you to fact check the Australian Bureau of Statistics data:

<https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/SAL80113>.

9. Limited accessibility to Reid & its stories!

There are many streets providing access to Reid and internal access for pedestrians through the laneways is one of the excellent features of a human-scale suburb. Pedestrians find it difficult to cross Coranderrk Street from Glebe Park into Reid as there are not enough pedestrian crossings. However, walking, bicycling, pushing strollers, whizzing past on scooters as well as car traffic through Reid is all entirely possible and at any time, though for pedestrians the footpaths are trip hazards, and it is definitely too dark at night.

Thousands of people, young and old, kids and parents use the Reid Park Sports Ground (AKA Reid Oval) where the two ovals provide training for both cricket, AFL & Ultimate or just running, walking, picnicking, hand ball, golf practice, walking their dogs. It's a great space for everyone and it doesn't matter where you come from. Often, city walkers take a break from their concrete environment to stroll through Reid during their lunch break. Even the Australian War Memorial uses this place for overflow occasions such as Anzac Day.

Canberra Tracks signage featuring our 4th Prime Minister George Houston Reid, is at just about every road entrance to Reid and the Track sign at the Reid Tennis Club tells the Reid story. The Reid Open House and Garden event has run for 15 years and the Reid Residents' Association invites people to walks and events during every ACT Heritage Festival except when inclement weather and/or illness prevails. The National Trust (ACT) has an excellent

The mandated heritage requirements to conserve Reid's landscape have created a refuge providing shelter from heat. This cooling effect no doubt helps to offset the heat bank of Civic which appears to have lost quite a number of large shade trees over the last decade.

Further, we have Gang-gangs. They particularly love the eastern side of Reid and then veer over to the Reid Railway Reserve where Dr Michael Mulvaney witnessed them enjoying the avenue of Eucalypts, parallel to Amaroo Street. Obviously, Reid is part of their food supply and flight paths to and from Mt Ainslie. This is connectivity in action.

Superb Fairy-wrens, Willie Wagtails, Grey Fantails and Silver Eyes all seem to find shelter and food in Reid gardens, parks and reserves and so much more appropriate and welcome than a Parisian precinct, which by its very nature would wipe out the connectivity that is obviously working well in Reid. Infill Reid with a Parisian precinct will have a perverse outcome. It will inevitably result in a major loss of habitat.

- iii. 'economic terms': this is spelled out in point 8. There are a number of home-based enterprises including a rug shop and car park in Booroondara Street and probably some B&Bs but this is basically a residential suburb, like many in Canberra.

Reid's proximity to the city benefits those living in apartments nearby. Increasingly built up, there are fewer places to relax or exercise outdoors in Civic. While difficult to measure, there are economic benefits that flow from increased outdoor time.

11. Densification

The doctrine of densification needs to be applied intelligently, consistently and wisely if the intention is to manage sustainably the juggernaut of ever-increasing population. The loss of the ABC Flats and the concomitant social housing with easy access to the facilities of Civic was replaced by high rise apartment blocks with prices out of the reach of many young people. One could advocate this could be somewhat rectified with what we hear are plans for Ainslie Avenue. We note that the social housing at Reid and Jerilderie courts appears to be undergoing the usual withdrawal of maintenance and shifting into general shabbiness that foretells a future knockdown rebuild.

Providing more affordable housing for the so called 'missing middle' along this delightful avenue with easy access to Civic should be considered. Just as it could have considered before approval was given for the DOMA development, or the sale of CIT to UNSW. There are many options other than turning Reid into a Parisian Precinct.

The Reid Housing Precinct is the result of residents who, through some three generations, have taken pride in their community and have enjoyed a sense of place in this unique suburb. Over many decades they have been stewards of the attributes of Reid, supported since the 1980s with the knowledge that this is, indeed, a special place because of its history and place in the environment of Canberra.

This precinct, as do the other heritage precincts, adds extraordinary value to the heritage of the National Capital and removing these suburbs would diminish Canberra. Sacrificing them

to a distorted and divisive view of the value of heritage would have a major impact on Canberra's history and environment.

Reid residents were the driving force behind the Save Glebe Park Committee. This park, enjoyed today by many city dwellers, would not exist had the plans of developers, White Industries, come to fruition. It would have been a 'Tivoli Gardens' connected to their development in Civic. Now, there are similar calls to develop a 'Parisian Precinct' without any thought about the long-term impact of so doing.

Because of the obvious value these precincts add to Canberra and Australia the Heritage Arrangements that affords conservation and protection of these precincts needs to be strengthened and the capacity to administer these actions needs increased resourcing.

12. Lack of good faith

If the ACT Government changes the long-term nature of the suburb which is contrary to understanding & reliance of purchases for at least not less than 40 years, it would appear to be a lack of good faith. This attempt to change the nature of a suburb is a breach of the Government's good faith policy not to unduly impact or assume rights of a citizen without strong reasonable cause and compensation for detriment and loss.

In conclusion, the Reid Housing Precinct is unique and integral to the story of establishing Canberra as Australia's national capital. Further, planners need to heed Gissing's insightful warning, *we will need to account more and more for extreme heat in our urban design and land use planning into the future.*

While this place has survived various attempts to change its nature thus far it is obvious that the Heritage arrangements, including the Heritage Act, need to be strengthened and broadened; sufficient resources need to be provided so that the Heritage Unit has the expertise and capability to support the ACT's unique build form, heritage housing precincts and natural heritage. The Heritage Council should be a truly statutory organisation, their decisions made accessible and transparent and be an independent from the Planning Division.

Destroying areas like Reid that contribute so evidently to an understanding of our history, that support our wellbeing, that cool the place and contribute habitat for our endangered species would be totally illogical.

RRA Committee

Contact via: info@reid.northcanberra.org.au

President: Marianne Albury-Colless, Secretary: Robyn Bergin

Treasurer & Public Officer: Roy Jordan

Committee: Anne Buttsworth, Sue Byrne, John Henderson