



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Environment,
Planning, Transport and City Services

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the Role and Future of the Woden Town Centre in the context of a compact city

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Submission to the Inquiry into the Role and Future of the Woden Town Centre

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Position: President, Australian Multicultural Action Network (AMAN)

Introduction

The Australian Multicultural Action Network (AMAN) is pleased to provide this submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly's inquiry into the role and future of the Woden Town Centre. As an organisation that advocates for the wellbeing of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, AMAN strongly supports the objective of developing a vibrant, inclusive, accessible, and sustainable Woden Town Centre that reflects Canberra's diverse population and evolving urban needs.

Woden is uniquely positioned as a critical hub within the ACT. With significant transport upgrades underway, including the Light Rail Stage 2B extension, this inquiry is timely and necessary to ensure social equity, economic vitality, and environmental sustainability are at the core of future planning.

Positives in Current Developments and Direction

- **✓ Urban Renewal Momentum:** The light rail extension and associated urban redevelopment provide a strong foundation for transforming Woden into a connected and thriving regional centre.

- **✓ Health and Government Infrastructure:** The presence of Canberra Hospital, CIT Woden, and major government offices brings institutional strength and employment to the precinct.
 - **✓ Zoning Review Opportunity:** The inquiry presents a valuable opportunity to reshape zoning policies to prioritise affordable housing, community facilities, and sustainable design.
 - **✓ Public Engagement Invitation:** The Committee's call for feedback across business, government, and community groups is a welcome step toward participatory planning.
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Concerns and Gaps Requiring Attention

1. Inclusive Urban Design for CALD Communities

- **✗ Lack of Multicultural Community Spaces:** Woden lacks dedicated spaces for cultural exchange, social connection, and intergenerational community engagement.
- **✗ Cultural Blind Spots in Urban Planning:** Planning has not adequately addressed how built environments can reflect Canberra's growing ethnic diversity (e.g. signage in multiple languages, prayer rooms, intercultural gathering areas).
- **✓ Recommendation:** Integrate multicultural precinct planning into the Woden redevelopment, co-designed with CALD organisations and local communities.




2. Affordable and Diverse Housing

- **✗ Escalating Housing Prices:** Woden's regeneration has driven up housing costs, pricing out low-income families and seniors—especially migrants in insecure work.
- **✗ Lack of Housing Diversity:** Existing developments often prioritise high-rise apartments without sufficient provision for larger families or accessible ageing-in-place designs.
- **✓ Recommendation:** Ensure inclusionary zoning mandates at least 20–30% affordable and accessible housing, with quotas for culturally appropriate designs.




3. Economic Participation and Employment Hubs

- **✗ Limited Local Enterprise Support:** CALD entrepreneurs face hurdles in accessing retail spaces, business mentorship, and commercial licensing support.
- **✓ Recommendation:** Establish a microbusiness incubator space in Woden focused on refugee, migrant, and women-led enterprises—supported through ACT Government grants.




4. Transport Equity and Accessibility

-  **Light Rail Investment:** The upcoming Light Rail Stage 2B will improve accessibility for Woden residents and workers, including CALD seniors and those with mobility limitations.
-  **Feeder Network Gaps:** Many outer suburbs and low-income areas still lack reliable bus connections to Woden, limiting accessibility for non-driving residents.
-  **Recommendation:** Improve integrated transport with multilingual signage, safe walking/cycling pathways, and community consultation on route coverage.



5. Health and Aged Care Infrastructure



-  **Proximity to Canberra Hospital:** This strengthens the case for Woden to become a health and wellbeing precinct.
-  **Overlooked Community Health Needs:** Migrant seniors and international students often experience difficulty navigating local health systems due to language, cultural, and financial barriers.
-  **Recommendation:** Expand culturally responsive primary healthcare services, health literacy workshops, and in-language navigation support embedded within Woden community facilities.

6. Climate Resilience and Sustainability

-  **Potential for Green Urbanism:** The compact city model enables opportunities for energy-efficient housing, pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, and active transport.
-  **Urban Heat and Tree Canopy Loss:** High-density development risks contributing to urban heat islands and reduced green space unless actively mitigated.
-  **Recommendation:** Mandate green infrastructure standards, ensure minimum tree canopy cover, and create shaded public plazas accessible to families and elders.

Additional Recommendations

-  **Establish a Woden Community Partnership Council:** Include representatives from CALD communities, youth, aged care, businesses, and disability groups to guide implementation.
-  **Public Art and Cultural Expression:** Fund multicultural murals, art installations, and seasonal festivals to bring Woden to life as a cultural and social hub.

-  **Multilingual Communication:** Ensure all planning updates, signage, and consultations are available in key community languages, and accessible to people with low literacy or vision impairments.
 -  **Data-Driven Equity Planning:** Collect disaggregated data on housing, transport, health, and employment outcomes for CALD communities in Woden to inform inclusive policy design.
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Conclusion

The future of Woden Town Centre must be more than just high-rises and transport hubs—it must be a **model of inclusive, people-centred urbanism** that welcomes and reflects Canberra’s multicultural reality. By embedding equity, cultural respect, and community voice into every layer of the planning process, Woden can become not only a compact city hub but a **connected, compassionate, and liveable precinct** for all.

AMAN stands ready to support this transformation through ongoing engagement and collaboration with ACT Government and planning authorities.

Ravi Krishnamurthy

President, Australian Multicultural Action Network (AMAN)