

Christopher L. Watson

3/10/10

The Secretary, Mrs Nicola Kosseck,
Assembly Standing Committee on Planning

 A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE	
SUBMISSION NUMBER	12
DATE AUTH'D FOR PUBLICATION	



Re My Objection to Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No.298 Holt - Section 99, Part Block 11 (Belconnen Golf Course)

It is gratifying that your Committee is inviting public submissions on this Draft Variation involving excision of land from the Belconnen Golf Course for housing; it is indeed a matter of vital concern to many Belconnen residents. You will have access to my earlier objection (3 pages plus annexes) received by ACTPLA on 17/5/10.

I would like to address, here, the ACTPLA responses to my concerns contained in their "Report on Consultation: Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No 298" (18 pages, July 2010). My written concerns are bracketed in this document under ACTPLA's paragraph headings entitled "Issues and responses".

Remoteness (2.2.5. (a) p6. I strongly disagree with their statement "that the development is located within a reasonable distance to facilities including retail, commercial and community". The Committee needs to ask what indeed is ACTPLA's definition of *reasonable distance* in terms of town planning principles?. For example, reasonable walking distance for shopping would be no more than half to one kilometre, especially for the elderly (like my wife and I), and, for mothers travelling with young children. From the proponents location map I estimate that residents from the furthest quarter of the estate would have to walk almost two kilometres to reach the facilities at Holt's local centre! .

This subdivision would certainly not comply with the plea of ACTPLA's CEO, Neil Savery, to make "bus commuting, cycling or walking cool"('CityNews' Sept 23-29, 2010 p3: Annex 1).

This comment of Mr Savery raises the question of the adequacy, or otherwise, of bus services for future residents to reach the shops at Holt's local centre and the Kippax group centre? The Committee needs to ask the ACTION CEO if such an *add-on* residential precinct can be properly serviced by public transport? ACTPLA's response appears to indicate that there could well be no bus routes within the subdivision; only a provision for "the proponent to provide a pedestrian path from the development to Spofforth St". This will require a long walk for the young & old, often with heavy food supplies, of nearly a kilometre from the furthest dwellings! Moreover, buses on Spofforth St. run only hourly, in the main, on weekdays.

This proposal is a travesty of those urban planning standards set by the National Capital Planning Commission for the suburb of Holt back in the early 1970s. It will result in a complete reliance on cars for most future residents; pity the young & old, who do not drive, those who do not wish to own or cannot afford cars; some families

with two or more workers going in different directions may even be forced to buy a second car!

As a cautionary tale the Committee could well survey the obviously unmet bus needs of those residents already housed in the existing Belconnen Golf Course enclave, which was allowed to proceed under the auspices of the ACT Government about a decade ago? May I also make a plea for the Committee to visit this very enclave, and, of course, the nearby site of the current proposal; only then can one appreciate the undue long distances involved for residents to reach their daily transport needs and services.

Interface with non urban areas (2.2.5.(b) p7. The response of ACTPLA merely states that it “has determined the land is suitable for residential uses”! This statement has not addressed the lead heading in my original objection that an “Overall Plan for West Belconnen & Adjacent NSW Land Needed First”. These same sentiments were reiterated in my submission to the *Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment* (Annex 2). This matter has now been referred to the *ACT Natural Resource Management Council* for their examination.

ACTPLA also says “that alternative uses are not considered viable”(see bottom of page 7). Presumably, does this means that alternative recreational uses are not seen to be economically viable for the proponent? The issue, here, is not one of financial viability, but that of the most appropriate use for this prime land. Once there has been full Assembly and/or Government investigations to assess the various recreational needs of the current and projected population of Belconnen, reservation of this land is likely. These points are spelled out in some detail in Items (i) to (v), but, unfortunately have been completely ignored in ACTPLA’s response. Therefore, I hope the Committee can give these matters the attention they deserve?

Residential Subdivision Design 2.2.7 a) & b) p8 & 9 Unfortunately, ACTPLA gives no assurance that this estate will comply with passive solar design: there is merely the statement that the currently discussed ‘Estate Development Code’ “may apply to future development on this site”! Of course, high solar ratings *may not* be in the interest of this proponent, who wants to squeeze some 330 units into a 23ha site ? I note, too, the current media comment on likely delays to the ACT solar implementation because of impending rezoning legislation (‘Rezoning may delay solar push’ Sunday Canberra Times, 3/10/10, p7).

Effectiveness of the Consultation Strategy 2.2.12.a) & b) p10. The facts re ACTPLA’s minimal public consultation speak for themselves; they did not host a public meeting to allow independent discussion of the many issues involved in the proposed alienation of such prime land for housing. Instead we had only one public meeting called by the proponent, and held in the very Club that runs the golf facility, itself; a classic conflict of interest, indeed!

Since ACTPLA, itself, failed to conduct appropriate consultation, it was only fit and proper for the Minister to refer this Variation to the Committee.

Concluding Remarks

I submit that there are a number of fundamental reasons for the Committee to refuse this Variation to the Territory Plan. ACTPLA's 'Report on Consultation' has certainly failed to address my concerns; especially the need to retain this land for recreational purposes - together with a survey of appropriate land use of all remaining outer Belconnen rural land – so urgent in view of high population projections for Canberra in the decades to come.

Moreover, this outlying *add-on* subdivision has no nearby social amenities, and ACTPLA's comments show a lack of environmental awareness. Residents, per force, will be prone to high personal fossil fuel use, since there is a likely to be a paucity of passive solar layout, as well as an almost complete reliance on a car-oriented transport mode (all families suffering *penury* in the process). Hopefully, the Committee will be mindful of the Government's aim to cut greenhouse emissions by 40% in just 10 years (see comments in recent 'Letters', Canberra Times 30/8/10, Annex 3).

I trust it will be possible to speak before the Committee at the Hearings: I value, too, the opportunity that Public Hearings give to interact with Members as well as see & hear the views of others, especially those of ACTPLA and the proponent..

Sincerely,



C.L. Watson



Office of the Commissioner for
Sustainability and the Environment

Mr Christopher Watson
79 Denny St
Latham
ACT, 2615

File No GI10/001

9 August 2010

Dear Mr Watson,

Thank you from your letter regarding the restoration and conservation of the Lower Ginninderra Creek and its Falls. I appreciate your concerns regarding the cross border issues however, at this stage I believe that the ACT Natural Resource Management Council is best placed to answer your concerns regarding the issues you have outlined in your letter. With your permission, I would be happy to forward your concerns to the Council.

For your information I have included some information on the role of this Office. Community members can contact this Office to make a complaint in relation to the management of the environment by the Territory or a Territory authority.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Burrows
Senior Manager
for
Dr Maxine Cooper
Commissioner

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This Office is independent of, but funded by, the ACT Government.



Christopher L. Watson
79 Denny St., Latham ACT 2615

11/7/10

ACT Commissioner for the Environment
Dickson ACT 2602

Dear Maxine Cooper,

Re Restoration & Conservation of Lower Ginninderra Creek and its Falls: A Cross-Border Issue

When we had a phone chat a couple of months back on the problems associated with Canberra's population growth, I flagged the urgency of conserving the environs of lower Ginninderra Creek catchment - both in the ACT and NSW - because of the area's proximate environmental & recreational importance. Of course, this area abounds West Belconnen, which is still expanding: witness the current Macgregor West (Stages 1&2) *add-on style* subdivisions.

Therefore, I do hope you - or your delegate - can be present when a range of current concerns are highlighted at a Belconnen Community Council Forum on Tuesday July 20 at the Belconnen Library (flyer encl).

Lower Ginninderra Creek

As a soil scientist & conservationist I have long been appalled at the *moonscape condition* of lower Ginninderra Creek from the edge of 'old' Macgregor all the way down to the Falls itself; a shocking indictment, indeed, of riparian neglect by all parties! To this day the watercourse, itself, is still not fenced off, thereby allowing cattle to play havoc with its banks. I'm particularly ashamed of the lethargy of our own ACT Government jurisdiction. In vain, I have attempted to draw attention to this sorry state of affairs - both through the political process and with ACTPLA. In the past - for the Belconnen suburbs from Macgregor upstream - NCDC planners restored the Creek corridor, concurrently with adjacent subdivisions; e.g. in Latham, where my wife & I have lived since 1973, we now have a relatively biodiverse corridor - together with a great recreational resource, much used by residents.

It is, of course, appalling that the residents of the new Macgregor West subdivision, which in part comes less than one hundred meters from the Creek, are denied the use of this waterway - crying out for restoration! ACTPLA's reply - to my comments on the need for connections to Ginninderra Creek - opts out by merely saying "that matters of rural tenure may need to be considered" (see 2.2.2.E of "Report on Consultation: Proposed Technical Amendment, V2009-12, June 2009).

I trust that the Commission's terms of reference will allow you to pursue this pressing need for creek restoration, which simultaneously provides a recreational resource?

1 (of 2)

The Ginninderra Falls Precinct

You would be aware that the Gorge & surrounds are privately owned by at least two major landowners. A surface mining operation – only a hundred metres or so from the Falls – effectively desecrates this whole precinct, undoubtedly, a unique area of geological, biodiverse and recreational value. The owner, Tharwa Sands Pty Ltd, has a licence to extract so called 'red granite', and moreover, in early 2009 sought permission to extend operations to an area totalling 18ha! (for record, the Company publicly opened the southern side of the gorge, for a fee, from the 1970s to 2002).

Obviously, the first aim would be for a cessation of mining and proper restoration of the land. At the same time appropriate reservation status for the complete gorge and its surrounds must be pursued, entailing purchases from landholders. It could possibly be classified as a NSW "State Conservation & Recreation Reserve". Would this be the most suitable reservation category?

Cross-border Initiatives

Despite the *ACT-NSW Regional Management Framework* in place since 2006, this rural land, west of Belconnen, is still off the ACT Government's radar! The letter (dated 22/12/09) from Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, to local Assembly Member, Meredith Hunter, states in part "as you know much of the Ginninderra Catchment lies outside the ACT and is therefore a NSW land management responsibility. This of course includes the red granite quarry."

Also, I have alerted ACTPLA to the very pressing need to conduct an 'overall plan for rural-west Belconnen & adjacent NSW land'. (refer submission dated 17/5/10, to *Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No. 298: Holt, Sec99, Part Block 11; Belconnen Golf Course*). Such a report is absolutely essential before any further housing subdivisions can be countenanced: some 330 units are proposed on a 23ha area to be excised from the south west section of the Golf Course – on prime land sloping down to the Murrumbidgee River with the Brindabella Range as a nearby backdrop and only about 200 m from *Strathnairn Art Centre*. Sadly, in similar ad hoc vein there is the current application to carve up an adjacent seven square km rural lease – sloping from Parkwood Road down to the Murrumbidgee - for a multitude of obviously untoward uses. (ACTPLA: DA No. 200914427 Blocks 1605 & 1606, Belconnen; see my submissions of 11/6/09 & 23/4/10)

As you can see from the attached flyer, the current aim is to form a *working group* to achieve the conservation & recreation aims for this area of the lower Ginninderra Catchment. Hopefully, in due course, this group will be the catalyst for an officially appointed group to get tangible results, especially for purchase of lands at the Gorge and its Falls. Presumably, such an official body would need to have core representatives from Yass Valley Council and both NSW & ACT Governments? Your advice on both the range of its membership and from what specific quarters of government, would be appreciated?

Sincerely *Chair L. Watson*

C.L. Watson (Dr)

Copies to Chairs, Belconnen Community Council & Ginninderra Catchment Group

12:00

City News (ACT) Sept 23-29, 2010

P 3

news

TAMS TRANSPORT MANAGER PUBLICLY ADMITS...

'We make it hard to catch a bus'

"WE'RE making it as hard as we can right now for people to catch the bus," Kristen Blume said last week in a brightly lit lecture theatre stuffed full of academics, political hacks and consultants, agreeing with public concerns that ACTION does not provide adequate timetabling information.

Blume, the Department of Territory and Municipal Services strategic project manager for the Office of Transport should know, after all she's on the team tasked to make the ACT's bus budget promises reality.

The plethora of problems mirroring our public transport system to eight per cent patronage is as deep as it is complicated, but that doesn't mean there are no solutions being put on the table or enacted.

At a University of Canberra Passenger Transport and Development Symposium, the focus of the day was not what is wrong with ACTION, but what can be done to make it better.

It was like speed dating for Canberra transport solutions, running along three key recommendations: ACTION needs to cover more ground and increase services; stick with routes so people become familiar and comfortable with them; and improve communication of



By Eleri Harris

information about buses to educate the public about their availability.

Blume said the Government is in the process of doing quite a lot to improve ACTION's information accessibility – but none of it will be ready until after the new ticketing system is up and running sometime in early 2011.

Her colleague, TAMS senior manager, Kuga Kugathas said the department's actions follow developments towards a "vision" for transport infrastructure.

"I'm not going to defend the public transport system we have now, but if we don't have a clear vision then we'll continue to be in this position and be lucky to get from eight per cent to 10 per cent," Kugathas said.

"We need to get a reliable network."

Blume said the major routes that Redex currently runs on need to be legislated public transport avenues.

"We're trying to make legislation for the red lines on the routes. What we really need is certainty for developers and commuters," Blume said.

ACT Planning and Land Authority chief planning executive Nell Savery said dialogue with the community is key to generating a cultural change – countering our love of cars and making bus commuting, cycling or walking cool.

"If the public aren't educated their behaviour won't change, we have to change the design of the roads to change behaviour," Savery said.

Transport policy researcher Rod Katz says transport in Canberra needs to take advantage of growing difficulties with car travel and enhance the appeal of alternative transport.

"You need to frame the debate around a holistic understanding of transport and take advantage of opportunities," he said.

"You need to actively discriminate against car use, because people are conditioned to respond to an environment that is an automobile monopoly."

On the plus side, UC Urban and Regional Planning lecturer Dr Richard Hu pointed out that Canberrans actually score better than the average Australian state capital in active transport.

"In a way, we're very good because Canberra has higher walking and cycling rates than other capital cities."

The Heart Foundation's active living coordinator Gregor Mews said Government needed to balance any costings associated with improvement in public and active transport infrastructure with the burden issues such as obesity place on our health system.

Mews pointed out that even half an hour walking to and from bus stops each day significantly decreases chances of heart disease.

Want to tell the ACT Government what you think about transport? Go to <http://www.canberra2030.org.au> for "Time to Talk".

ACT leadership on climate policy or just a mirage?

I congratulate the ACT Government for showing real leadership on climate change with its announcement of a 40 per cent emissions reduction target ("ACT eyes leading target on emissions", August 26, p1).

Regardless of whether Julia Gillard or Tony Abbott is living in The Lodge in the next couple of weeks, we are not likely to see federal action on carbon pollution for some time.

This void leaves significant room for action on a local level.

Thanks to the foresight that has been shown by the ACT Government, we Canberrans have an important opportunity to become a sustainable city of the future, not only leading Australia but also the world.

Setting the target is the easy part; the hard work will be getting there.

I am really proud to be a Canberran

today, let's embrace this challenge as an opportunity and lead the world to a sustainable future.

Roland Miller McCall, Reid

So the ACT is to lead the nation (if not the world) in cutting its greenhouse gas emissions by 40 per cent over the next 10 years. Sounds impressive.

But how is this worthy target to be achieved in practice?

In real (as opposed to theoretical) terms, the biggest polluters by far in the ACT would have to be motor vehicles.

Banning the driving of cars by, say, three days a week would go a long way toward achieving the Government's objective.

But of course there is not the remotest possibility of that happening.

The ACT has no coal-fired power stations within its borders, so we

cannot look for any local emission reductions in that quarter.

Reading between the lines, what is being planned by our representatives is a sleight-of-hand.

The ACT will buy far more expensive electricity from so-called green sources, and then claim that it is reducing carbon emissions from thermal power stations outside its borders.

But that won't really happen either.

The coal-fired stations will continue with business as usual, and their cheaper electricity will go instead to households and industries across the border in NSW.

Environment Minister Simon Corbell coyly states that ACT electricity prices could rise as a result of this policy.

It he was honest he would admit that they most definitely will rise – and by a very considerable amount.

If our representatives were really serious about reducing greenhouse gas emissions, they would be advocating nuclear power plants for Australia.

The ACT Government's heroic emissions gesture is likely to achieve nothing in practical terms – except a massive and painful electricity price rise for Canberra residents.

Peter Trickett, Fraser

I am proud to be a territorian today, after the announcement that the ACT would be adopting the country's most ambitious green house gas reduction target.

Adopting a 40 per cent target is taking responsibility for our emissions and doing our bit of what the science says we need to do to avoid dangerous climate change. The economists say the cost of inaction is far greater than the

cost of action and that ambitious early action is the cheapest way to get there. So let's get on with it and embrace the opportunities implementing this target presents.

I look forward to a better public transport system that is so good no one wants to drive their cars, because it's quicker, easier and cheaper to take the bus or train.

I look forward to well-designed, correctly orientated houses, that are warm and comfortable all year round with minimal energy input.

I look forward to a prospering economy with more green businesses and jobs that people are proud to do because they are part of the solution.

Implementing the policies needed to achieve this target will lead to a better, more liveable Canberra.

Ren Webb, Ainslie