



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Environment,
and Planning

Submission Cover Sheet

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

Submission number: 090

Submitter: Name withheld

Date authorised for publication: 16 October 2025

To whom it may concern,

Introduction

I am a lifelong Canberran, having grown up in Tuggeranong I moved to the Woden area in 2009, and have lived in Phillip since 2010.

I have over my life seen the Woden town centre evolve to suit the growing and changing needs of its population and support and sustain thriving communities. I make this submission to provide some context to Woden's continuing evolution and to provide some commentary on how the ACT Government can improve processes and practices to ensure the renewal of the Woden town centre continues.

Why I chose Woden.

I chose to move to Woden in 2009 as it had more suitable housing options for me which did not exist in Tuggeranong at the time. Woden provided a number of medium and high-density options for housing which were and continue to be more suitable for me.

In contrast Tuggeranong was made up predominantly of 3- or 4-bedroom detached houses on large blocks which was not desirable or appropriate for my circumstances. It is also in limited supply, constrained as the ACT is in the provision of greenfield sites for suburban development.

My choice was also motivated by Woden, and Phillip in particular, offering a centrality of services which appealed to me such as Westfield Woden, the availability of public transport, employment options and health facilities.

Evolution of Woden

Before continuing to address the specific questions contained in the terms of reference, I thought it would be useful to provide some historical context of the development of the Woden town centre since I moved here.

I note many submissions speak of a loss of services and amenity in the Woden town centre; however, it is my view this represents a particular point of time and does not capture the significant renewal taking place in Woden currently.

When I first moved it was true to say the town centre was in a low ebb and in need of renewal. At this time due to consolidation of Australian Public Service office blocks, there were a number of vacant or underutilised buildings which were a blight on the town centre and attracting anti-social behaviours, including:

- The Alexander and Albermarle building.
- Penryn House (2-6 Bowes Street)
- 10 Bowes Street
- 15 Bowes Street

Recreation opportunities were also diminishing around this time, the AMF 10-pin bowling alley closed around 2005, and the pitch and putt closed in 2013 due to declining usage¹. Other sporting and recreational activities were also in need of revival, the Woden CIT building on Ainsworth Street was isolated and, the building beyond their use by date and was no longer fit for purpose.

¹ [Phillip Pitch and Putt to close - ABC News](#)

Despite these losses I believe a corner has been turned in the Woden town centre with significant renewal of this hub thanks to investment by both government and private interests as well as government policy.

I particularly note the:

- Upgrades to equipment and facilities in Eddison Park between 2016-2018, including new outdoor gym equipment and nature play spaces and the expansion of the disc golf course.;²³
- The new athletics and soccer facilities built in 2019;⁴
- The opening of a number of cafes, bars and restaurants in the refurbished and adapted Alexander and Albermarle buildings and No. 10 Bowes Street⁵
- The creation of a dining and entertainment precinct on Bradley Street.
- The current upgrades to Woden Enclosed Oval⁶
- The relocation of CIT to the town centre to create a new education precinct.

This is to name just a few of the many new developments breathing new life into the town centre following years of decline.

I am excited by the prospect of continued renewal and would like to see support from the ACT Government as well as their partnership with private owners to ensure this renewal continues.

•Social connectivity that encourages participation for all demographics;

Woden is an integral hub for a wide range of important activities for the south of Canberra, and it must continue to play that role. The renewal and planning strategies from the government must continue to protect and promote the Woden town centre as this vital hub.

The town centre is home to a number of important community facilities including: CIT Woden, Woden Library, Woden Community Health Centre, Woden Youth Centre, Woden Community Services and Woden Seniors centre.

As Woden continues to grow, I would welcome the ACT Government's consideration of how these services can continue to be integrated into Woden town planning, with a particular focus on how urban design and landscaping can promote not just the utilisation of these services but their centrality to the social fabric of Woden Town centre and the Woden area more generally.

In particular as Woden continues to develop, there is a risk the Youth Centre and Woden Seniors could be pushed into a fringe place in the town centre. Consideration should be given to how urban design of public spaces can be utilised to ensure these services remain accessible and core to Woden town centre and its social connectivity.

•Housing, including social, public and affordable housing;

The ACT has limited availability of greenfield sites for the continued expansion of suburbs with detached houses. While detached housing must and will remain an important part of the housing mix, the ACT must densify through increased usage of medium and high-density housing.

² [Government to spend \\$1.9m to build three new nature play spaces across ACT | Region Canberra](#)

³ [Eddison Park Disc Golf Course - FlySpot](#)

⁴ [Canberra athletics boosted by \\$7 million synthetic track at Woden Park | The Canberra Times | Canberra, ACT](#)

⁵ [Alby and friends bringing good times to Woden. | HerCanberra](#)

⁶ [Phillip District Enclosed Oval - Built for CBR](#)

This densification will also allow increased choices in housing options and an ages and stages approach, for people like me who want to live central to service hubs but who don't want to live in large, detached houses because of increased costs or because they do not want to or cannot maintain such large housing footprints.

Since its inception Woden has had zoning which has allowed the construction of high-rise buildings, for instance Lovett Tower constructed in 1974⁷ was the ACT's tallest building until very recently.

This existing zoning permission places Woden in a unique position to support this densification through the construction of medium and high-density housing, as well as through the adaptive reuse of existing commercial buildings as it does not require significant zoning changes and is already understood and supported by the broader community.

The model of adaptive re-use was highly successful for the Alexander and Albermarle buildings and I have no doubt the proposals for the re-use of Lovett tower will be similarly successful.

Increasing density around the Town Centres, including Woden, will decrease the need to significantly increase density in less appropriate suburban places and reduce the need to continue to expand suburbs into less viable, less appropriate and more environmentally damaging areas on the fringes of the ACT.

It should also be noted that new high density apartment buildings are constructed from inception to be compliant with the latest accessibility requirements of the building code so can prove quite useful as supported accommodation for people with disabilities and older Canberrans. I am aware that in my own building a number of apartments are owned by a disability provider for these very reasons.

No doubt the added centrality of these apartment buildings in town centres like Woden mean residents are also close to health and community services and transport which is advantageous to these residents.

The ACT government should ensure planning rules allow for the continued development of high-quality residential apartment blocks, as well as support the adaptive re-use of existing buildings.

There are issues that should be addressed though in relation to the construction of medium and high-density housing. As an owner of such an apartment it is my view that more should be done to protect owners and body corporates from poor build quality, this is particularly important given the increasing need to densify our housing supply.

It is expected Developers build such buildings to get a return on their investment this is not surprising and shocking. In today's property climate this is done by targeting institutional and private investors who are ultimately seeking to rent the property rather than live in them. This has an impact on the type (i.e. single bedrooms) and the quality of units being constructed leaving renters and the smaller number of owner/occupiers somewhat alone to rectify issues with the building. This is where government could do more, to ensure high quality building certifications, set standards which allow buildings to be liveable and support body corporates and owners to tackle often very large corporate entities when issues arise.

⁷ [Lovett Tower | Cromwell](#)

Further the legislation currently sets a very short time for which property developers and builders are liable for defects, often meaning they are constructed in such a way issues only begin to occur when the builder's liability has expired.

- **Employment and economic activity, including the night-time economy;**

Woden's renewal over the last few years has seen a significant revival and enhancement to the employment opportunities in the town centre. Woden is the home of the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, as well as the National Indigenous Australians Agency and the Clean Energy Regulator. These agencies provide a significant core of employment in the town centre.

This has only been enhanced by the recent movement of Disability staff from Tuggeranong to Woden as part of a Commonwealth government MOG process and the announcement that the new Centre for Disease Control will also be housed in Woden. The location of the ACT Health Directorate, Access Canberra Staff and the Woden CIT also contribute to Woden being a central hub of employment and economic activity.

The location of the agencies in Woden is supporting an increased number of hospitality services, with many new restaurants, bars and cafes located along a refurbished Bradley Street, in the Alexander and Albemarle buildings and the new Wova building on Launceston and Furzer Streets.

People are now not just staying in Woden to go to restaurants or bars but many people from outside the area are choosing to come here because of the presence of these hospitality locations.

The Hellenic and Southern Cross clubs, along with the Cinema and new TimeZone continue to be a solid attraction to the Woden area and provide a venue for a range of concerts and other performances.

The ACT government should do what it can to ensure that these major employers remain in Woden to sustain employment and economic activity.

- **Health, education and community services;**

Given its geographic location in the south of Canberra, the Woden Town Centre is central to the delivery of quality health care in the ACT. The location of the hospital in Garran services as a focal point for health care not just in Woden, but to the entire ACT. This is supported locally by a range of allied health professionals on Corina Street, including the Woden Community Health Centre.

Given the already existing hub of health services in the town centre, there is opportunity for the ACT government to develop and promote Woden as a health hub and centre for the care economy which would further support the town centres ongoing prosperity and more importantly ensuring residents on the south side have access to the services they need.

I would also suggest the ACT Government examine transport and pedestrian links between the hospital and town centre to ensure they encourage interactivity between the two spaces.

In relation to education, the return to Woden of a CIT is an excellent step forward, having been missing from the area for some time. The closure of the former Woden CIT⁸ on Ainsworth St in 2018 was the culmination of a number of years of decline for that facility.

It was, as I understand, originally the Woden High School before it became CIT Woden. It was never a purpose-built vocational education facility, and by the time of its closure it was clear the building was beyond its use by date. While the gap between its closure and the opening of the new site in the town centre is unfortunate, the new purpose-built facility is a significant improvement on the previous site and is much more centrally located which holds benefits for students and the general population.

- **Public spaces that encourage activity and in which people feel safe;**

Woden is well served by public spaces including Eddison Park, Arabanoo Park, Woden Town Park, Woden Square and the new CIT Commons. I would however call on the ACT Government to ensure the continued maintenance of these sites as well as ensuring all these spaces are well linked and form a continuous part of the town centres urban environment. At times roads and car parks interfere with the natural flows between these spaces and more thought could be given to how to avoid this.

- **A range of community facilities/services, including cultural and recreational facilities (with a focus on an aquatic centre);**

Having already outlined a range of community facilities and services and what I see as the town centre's needs, I don't feel the need to further expand here. I will however make some comments in relation to the future of Phillip Pool and any proposed aquatic centre.

Although I have been a lifelong Canberran and south-sider, I can only recall one instance of using Phillip pool as part of a school swimming carnival in the 90s. I have not utilised it at all in the 16 years I have been a resident of Woden.

This is mostly due to the fact that as outdoor pool it is not open for most of the year and the relative ease of access to other more modern public and private pools in the surrounding area all year round.

Phillip pool was opened prior to self-government in 1971 and has since 1979 operated as a private commercial venture. While initially a very popular venue, changes to people's leisure preferences and Canberra's continued development has led to the decline of Phillip Pool.

While there may be a view that this is a recent issue caused by Phillip Pools acquisition by Geocon I don't believe this to be the case. In preparing this submission I came across minutes of a discussion at the Woden Community Council from April 1999⁹, discussing the declining patronage and maintenance of Phillip Pool.

I particularly note this section:

»John.Raut.advised.the.meeting.that.he.has.been.the.Manager.of.the.pool.facility.for.7⁵years.and.the.ice_skating.rink.was.established.in.7⁶46;.The.pool.previously.attracted.between.866⁷666.and.886⁷666.people.per.year.(over.the.1¹_month.swimming.season);.Since.the.Tuggeranong.

⁸ [CIT Woden to close this year, as talks with UNSW over Reid campus go on | The Canberra Times | Canberra, ACT](#)

⁹ [Minutes March 1999](#)

complex had opened. This has fallen to 90,666. This compares with the quoted attendance at Tuggeranong of 106,666.

The opening of Stromlo Leisure centre in 2020¹⁰ with its enclosed 50m pool, program pool and leisure and splash park can only have further contributed to the decline of patronage at Phillip Pool¹¹. Phillip pool requires significant investment and refurbishment to bring it in line with modern expectations.

The proposal for an aquatic centre as outlined in Geocon's plans does seem promising and more in line with modern expectations and while it will not have a 50m pool the proposal for a facility with a 25m pool, program pool and dedicated area for children would seem to be an opportunity to revitalise the pool and expand its patronage.

A degree of scepticism in relation to Geocon's ability to deliver is warranted. The ACT Government should apply maximum pressure through all the avenues available to it to ensure Geocon's delivery of exactly what was promised.

In terms of constructing a new facility in Woden while I am supportive of this, should Geocon fail I am concerned as to where it would be located. To build an additional facility in the Woden Town Centre on land controlled by the ACT government would necessitate compromising some other community space.

Edison Park is often cited^{12,13} as a potential location of a new 50m pool, however the footprint of such a large facility would be of significant detriment to the current usability and beauty of the park.

- **Transport and accessibility, to and within the town centre;**

The redevelopment of the Woden bus interchange on Callum Street is a welcome upgrade from the previous Woden interchange, this expansion of light rail to Woden will continue to ensure the town centres place as a central transport hub for south Canberra.

In terms of local accessibility there are several areas for improvement. While most recent upgrades are planned well and accessible there remain a number of legacy areas in need of upgrades not just aesthetically but to improve accessibility and remove barriers.

The stairs leading from Woden Town Square to the new CIT area are a particular problem. While there is an elevator it is frequently out of service and a target for anti-social behaviour. I would encourage the ACT Government to seek an alternative to this arrangement.

I remain generally concerned about how the ACT Government views accessibility, and believe it sees it as a nice extra rather than a core issue. My concern here has arisen from the recent full closure of Callum St and the rerouting of buses down Bowes St.

As part of works to facilitate this the ACT Government has removed an accessible pedestrian crossing at the corner of Bowes and Matilda Streets across from Services Australia.

¹⁰ [The Stromlo Leisure Centre's making quite a splash | Region Canberra](#)

¹¹ [Aquatic Facilities - Stromlo Leisure Centre](#)

¹² [Eddison Park a leading option for new 50-metre pool for Woden | Region Canberra](#)

¹³ [New 50-metre public pool for Woden still in frame despite Geocon plans | Region Canberra](#)

The pedestrian crossing was used by many people to cross from the carparks on Bowes Street to the workplaces, but more importantly was a key accessibility point for those seeking to access Medicare or Centrelink services.

This closure was raised with the ACT Government as part of the consultation on these works, but the concerns were ignored. As a result, pedestrians must now walk a further 128m to the next pedestrian crossing, which is a round trip of an additional 256m. The alternative, which many people use, is to attempt a more dangerous crossing at the same location.

This should not have occurred, given it was highlighted in consultations, however I fear expedience to achieve the works was prioritised over people's access to vital government services.

Conclusion

I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity. While Woden town centre was for a long time in decline with the movement of services and employers out of the town centre, it has now turned a corner and is in a new period of revitalisation. I am hopeful for the future of the town centre and would encourage the ACT Government to support this continue revitalisation.

Yours Sincerely