



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: 100

Submitter: Woden Valley Community Council

Date authorised for publication: 16 October 2025

Standing Committee on Environment and Planning
ACT Legislative Assembly
CANBERRA ACT 2601
by email: LAcommitteeEnvironment@parliament.act.gov.au

25 September 2025

Dear Committee

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE ROLE AND FUTURE OF THE WODEN TOWN CENTRE IN THE CONTEXT OF A COMPACT CITY

1. The Woden Valley Community Council thanks the Committee for the opportunity to make a submission on the Woden Town Centre. We represent residents and workers in the Woden Valley and this inquiry is of direct importance to our community given the town centre's location and the potential impacts of future planning decisions on how people live, work and move.
2. In preparing this submission we held two public meetings, conducted a community workshop and received individual feedback. This document summarises the views expressed during that consultation and is organised around the key themes raised by the community.

Recommendations

Whole-of-centre planning and governance

3. Prepare a clear and publicly available strategic plan that coordinates land use, transport, public space and community facilities for the Woden Town Centre and Phillip Business District
1. Avoid piecemeal changes that erode amenity and function over time and ensure changes are tested with the community before decisions are finalised

2. Update the district plan with a structured program of positive community engagement and regular public reporting

Community facilities and activation

4. Deliver a town hall style indoor venue suitable for large community gatherings, concerts and performances
5. Provide a dedicated arts and cultural space that supports exhibitions, rehearsal and live performance
6. Plan and deliver an all-weather multi-court indoor sports facility within the town centre

Aquatic and ice facilities

7. Replace or upgrade the Phillip Pool with a like-for-like or better basis, including strong consideration of a 50-metre pool and a hydrotherapy pool
8. Provide certainty on the Phillip ice rink timeline and location and prefer a central and accessible site within or near the town centre
9. Explore co-location and shared energy systems between ice and aquatic facilities to improve efficiency and reduce operating costs

Housing supply and diversity

10. Encourage a genuine mix of dwelling sizes and types, including family-sized apartments with more than two bedrooms
11. Support accessible single-level housing that enables older residents to downsize locally
12. Review policy settings that affect rental affordability, including the impacts of taxes and charges, and monitor supply of larger rental dwellings

Economy and night-time vibrancy

13. Strengthen the role of Bradley Street and Furzer Street as night-time economy hubs with active ground floors, safe lighting and seating
14. Clarify the role of the Phillip Business District and improve its public transport and walking links to the core town centre
15. Support local retail variety, including examining options to improve viability of everyday services such as a hardware store

Public spaces and safety

16. Improve lighting, visibility and CCTV in Woden Town Square, Bowes Place and along key walkways including the Melrose Drive underpass
17. Add shade, weather cover, seating and wayfinding to make walking attractive in all conditions
18. Expand and support the Woden Sunday Markets through improved servicing and public amenities

Transport and accessibility

19. Address the Corinna Street bottleneck and improve access to Westfield parking while prioritising safe pedestrian movement
20. Improve weekend and evening bus frequencies to and within the town centre and strengthen connections to Canberra Hospital
21. Provide more public fast-charging stations for electric vehicles, including at Phillip Oval car park and other suitable sites

Sustainability and Yarralumla Creek

22. Maintain shared paths along Yarralumla Creek with a program to fix root-damaged pavement and remove trip hazards
23. Protect the green corridor and enable community sport and events while managing flood risk with nature-based solutions
24. Expand community gardens and small green spaces to support apartment living and urban cooling

A town centre that prioritises community needs

25. The primary message from the community is that future planning for the Woden Town Centre should prioritise the expansion and activation of shared community space, together with improved transport access. The community also expects a clear strategic plan to guide development, public space activation and infrastructure investment in the town centre.

Social connectivity that encourages participation for all demographics

26. Community members report a clear gap in indoor public venues that can host large town hall meetings, concerts and civic events. The absence of a multi-purpose space limits civic life and pushes activity into private locations such as the shopping centre. People want the town square and the new west plaza to feel like the heart of

Woden, supported by regular events, performance opportunities and places to sit and meet.

27. There are currently no dedicated public community spaces suitable for larger events. This is a practical problem for community organisations including the WVCC, which has struggled to identify venues capable of hosting events such as election forums that can accommodate enough people, or community arts performances. Community groups raised frustrations about being limited to outdoor spaces that are highly dependent on weather.
28. A further concern is the absence of a dedicated arts centre or concert hall. Unlike other town centres in Canberra, Woden does not have a dedicated space for art exhibitions or live performance. This limits local cultural activity and reduces opportunities for creative practice to be readily accessible to residents.
29. The consequence of not having a civic community space is that Woden can be perceived as sterile. The Westfield shopping centre, with its shops and cinema, effectively becomes the focal point of the town centre. While shops and entertainment are valued, many community members argue that the heart of a town should be a public space and civic infrastructure such as a square, park or community hall that is accessible to all regardless of wealth or age.

Safety

30. Generally, the feedback from the community is that most areas of the Woden Town Centre feel safe for commuting. However, there are pockets within the town centre where more attention and lighting are needed.
31. Community members believe that certain areas of the Woden Town Centre require better safety measures. Woden Town Square at Bowes Place is perceived as dark after nightfall, and residents have expressed reluctance to walk through the area in the evening. Better lighting would help. Improving safety features on connections between focal points and transport hubs should be prioritised in any upgrades.
32. Pedestrian routes such as the tunnel under Melrose Drive are important thoroughfares that are currently poorly lit. Residents have raised concerns about using these walkways at night. Given the increasing population in the area, the ACT Government should review pedestrian routes in the Woden Town Centre to ensure they are safe and inviting.

Housing, including social, public and affordable housing

33. There continues to be strong growth in housing, particularly in apartment developments within the Woden Town Centre. A high volume of projects is proposed or underway in and around Phillip, including development sites at the Hellenic Club, the Southern Cross Club and the southern end of the town centre near Corinna Street and Bradley Street. Developments such as The Shard, WOVA and The Melrose have all opened this year.

34. Community feedback is that new housing should provide a variety of bedroom options, be accessible to services and amenities, and be located close to public transport. A mix of housing designs is important because varied housing attracts different demographics to the area. Larger apartments, including multi-bedroom dwellings, are more likely to attract families and support demographic diversity.
35. The community also noted a shortage of rental options with more than two bedrooms. There are limited opportunities to purchase larger, family-sized dwellings. Consultation also raised concerns about the effects of taxes and charges, such as land tax and lease variation charges, and broader policy reforms on rental affordability in Phillip.
36. Another theme raised through consultation is that there is a shortage of single-level accessible housing for older people in the Woden Town Centre. It is important that there is a broad mix of housing so that the area supports a diverse community. Accessible housing options enable older residents to downsize locally and remain part of the community.
37. The Woden Valley Community Council calls on the ACT Government to diversify the range of housing available in the Woden Town Centre. In particular, greater supply is needed of dwellings with more than two bedrooms as well as single-level homes that provide accessible accommodation for older people.

Employment and economic activity, including the nighttime economy

38. The Woden Valley Community Council would like to see clearer planning and zoning for employment and economic activities within the Woden Town Center. An immediate feedback from community is that there is a lack of flow and connectivity between places of employment and economic activities.
39. We received a range of positive feedback about the revitalisation of shops and restaurants and bars on Furzer St and on Bradley St. These areas are welcomed and areas hotspot for night time economy activities.
40. However, areas like the Phillip Business District is seemingly disconnected from the main Town Center, hard to access using public transport, and lack a plan for what role it plays in the future of the Woden Town Centre. There is a lot of potential for the area to be better integrated with and it remains the center of commercial and industrial activities in the Woden Valley. Developing Woden into a compact city would require a proper integration between a the Phillip business district and greater Woden town centre.
41. Connectivity In the one Town Center by way of walking is also a concern. There is no connection that is easy for people living in the north of the Woden town centre, such as in the Oaks and Ivy apartments, to the central shopping areas like Westfield. When carrying groceries, travelling to these places cannot happen without a car and there are no really available shuttle services that would allow commute to be made easy.

42. Offices spaces currently occupy much of the Woden Town Centre. These are a hive of activities that provide economic investment during the week. A better variety of shops and restaurants would support these office workers.
43. The Woden Sunday Markets is a great institution of the community. Community members are able to directly engage with stalls selling produce from the local areas and the region. The ACT Government should look at ways to expand the Woden Sunday Markets we welcome additional facilities to enable activation of the market.
44. The community has missed the ease of access to the a hardware store within the Woden Town Centre. There used to be several a hardware store in the Phillip Business District. They have since closed down citing unviability. The ACT Government should examine ways to encourage.

Health education and community services unit

45. Generally, the feedback received is that health services in the Woden area are adequate. The main feedback is that the role of walk-in center should be clarified as not many people are clear about what they are about. The ACT government should hold public campaigns to promote the role and functions of a walk-in centre.
46. The WVCC did not receive detail feedback in relation to education services. However, we understand from publicly available information that there is a education resources shortage in the one area including capacity being reached at Canberra College. This is a concern as it is the only public college within the Woden Valley.

Public spaces that encourage activity in which people feel safe

47. The Woden Town Centre contains a range of public spaces, including a public square, a town park with several adjoining parks, and many walkways that link these areas. Overall, these spaces are regarded as safe, but there are pockets where residents feel unsafe due to vandalism and antisocial behaviour. A recent example was a car fire under Melrose Drive, which highlighted the need for greater attention to safety.
48. The community believes that better monitoring and lighting would improve confidence in these spaces. Good design that attracts high pedestrian use would also increase natural surveillance and create a stronger sense of safety. Ensuring clear and well-connected routes between destinations and amenities is essential.
49. Woden Town Square, in particular, needs to be more active and inviting at all times of the day and evening. Comfortable seating, rest areas and spaces to gather and converse should be provided. Weather protection along walkways would make it easier for people to move between shops, services and transport, regardless of the conditions.

50. A wider range of community facilities and services is also needed, especially cultural and recreational facilities with a focus on aquatic and sporting infrastructure.
51. Community members consistently report that facilities in the Woden Town Centre are inadequate. A significant gap is the lack of a town hall–style venue for public meetings and community gatherings. The redevelopment of the CIT site presents an opportunity to provide a shared space for local groups and civic activity.
52. Recreational infrastructure is also under pressure. Phillip Hall is being redeveloped without a clear replacement, and the future of the Phillip Pool has created widespread concern. Geocon, the developer of the site, has proposed a privately operated 25-metre indoor pool. The community strongly objects to this, citing the loss of the existing 50-metre pool, the hydrotherapy pool and outdoor recreational areas such as the adjacent grassed space, which is well used. Residents believe that any redevelopment should deliver like-for-like or better facilities and must include a hydrotherapy pool.
53. Similar concerns exist around the Phillip ice rink. There is uncertainty about when a new rink will be delivered and when the existing one will close, making it difficult for sporting groups to plan training and competitions. Many in the community doubt that the promised new rink will proceed. The preferred outcome is to retain the rink at its current central site, where it is accessible to both Woden Valley residents and the wider Canberra community. Relocation to Tuggeranong would force many residents to travel up to 90 minutes. Longer term, there is an opportunity to co-locate aquatic and ice facilities as part of a Woden sports precinct, which would allow energy-efficient systems to be shared.
54. Community members also identified the need to repurpose existing carparks and explore their potential to host new community facilities.
55. There is strong support for an all-weather basketball facility. This could be delivered as a multi-use sports centre or indoor sporting hall. In the past, Woden residents had access to basketball courts in the town centre, but these have since been lost. Reinstating courts would fill an obvious gap and provide a valuable facility for young people and families.

Transport and accessibility to end within the town centre

56. Community feedback suggests that major roads into and out of the Woden Town Centre are congested during peak hours. Public transport options serve the town centre, but better connections through surrounding suburbs are required.
57. Within the town centre, Corinna Street is a bottleneck and has proven to be a consistent point of congestion, particularly when accessing Westfield parking. Accessing the Woden Town Centre from the Molonglo Valley requires cutting through Curtin, which is not desirable as local streets in Curtin are not designed for heavy traffic.

58. The bus interchange is currently under construction. Many in the community have noted that construction has taken longer than expected and that signage is poor. The community would like to see clearer communication from the ACT Government about staging and likely disruptions.
59. Bus access to the west side of the plaza is limited. Existing bus stops are considered too far from Westfield, reducing convenience for passengers.
60. Access from Woden Valley suburbs to the town centre remains difficult on weekends due to limited bus services. This makes public transport to the town centre on weekends unreliable.
61. The community also expressed concerns about the lack of clear connectivity from the bus terminal to Canberra Hospital.
62. There is also a request for more public fast-charging stations for electric vehicles. Specific feedback from residents of the Oaks, Ivy and Trilogy apartments asked that charging stations be installed at Phillip Oval car park.

Sustainability and resilience to climate change, including by protecting and expanding living infrastructure and managing Yarralumla Creek

63. Sustainability and resilience to climate change are ongoing concerns. Protecting and expanding living infrastructure, as well as managing Yarralumla Creek, were key themes in community feedback.
64. The Yarralumla Creek corridor is a well-used recreational space for runners, cyclists and walkers. It is valued as an uninterrupted path for long-distance walking and running without the need to cross traffic.
65. The most immediate feedback regarding Yarralumla Creek is that cracked bike paths and footpaths need proper maintenance. In several places, tree roots have lifted the pavement, creating tripping and cycling hazards.
66. The ACT Government should also look at preserving the existing greenery of the Yarralumla Creek corridor. Sporting and community groups use the area for events and training, and it is important that this green space remains available for gatherings and activities.
67. There is concern that Yarralumla Creek is prone to flooding. As flooding events become more common due to climate change, additional management and flood mitigation measures are required.
68. Community gardens were strongly supported. With many residents living in apartments, additional outdoor green spaces are needed. Community gardens would provide opportunities for food growing, social connection and recreation.

69. The community strongly opposes planning by incremental changes, often referred to as “death by a thousand cuts.” A clear and comprehensive approach is preferred.
70. The district plan should be updated through a process of positive community engagement to ensure that future development supports liveability and reflects local needs.
71. Investment in facilities should focus on enhancing and expanding community use, not simply replacing what has been lost.

Conclusion

72. The Woden Valley Community Council believes the Woden Town Centre needs a clear strategic plan that coordinates land use, transport, public space and community facilities. Residents strongly oppose piecemeal changes and want an updated district plan shaped by genuine community engagement. Priority facilities include a town hall–style venue, a dedicated arts and cultural space, and an all-weather sports facility. Certainty is also needed for aquatic and ice facilities, with strong support for retaining a 50-metre pool, adding a hydrotherapy pool, and keeping the ice rink in Woden.
73. Housing growth is welcomed but must deliver greater diversity. The community has called for more family-sized apartments, single-level homes for older residents and improved rental affordability. On the economic front, Bradley and Furzer Streets are valued as vibrant hubs, but the Phillip Business District remains disconnected from the town centre and needs better integration. Residents strongly support expanding the Woden Sunday Markets and restoring essential services such as hardware stores.
74. Transport, sustainability and liveability are ongoing concerns. Congested roads, poor weekend bus services and weak hospital connections highlight the need for stronger public transport. Residents also want better lighting and safer walkways, particularly in Woden Town Square and the Melrose Drive underpass, along with shaded and weather-protected paths. Sustainability is central, with Yarralumla Creek valued as a green corridor that requires maintenance and flood management. Community gardens and small green spaces are strongly supported. Overall, residents seek a comprehensive approach that protects green assets, expands facilities and makes Woden a safe, accessible and vibrant place to live.
75. Please contact Nelson Tang, President, by email _____ on if you would like to discuss these submissions further.

Yours faithfully

Woden Valley Community Council