



ACT
Government

Missing Middle Housing Reforms

Draft Plan Amendment 04 Supporting Report

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Executive summary

This supporting report was prepared by the Territory Planning Authority (the Authority) to support Draft Major Plan Amendment 04 (DPA-04). DPA-04 proposes to amend the provisions of the Territory Plan that relate to subdivision, consolidation and redevelopment in the residential zones. This supporting report outlines the proposal, the proposed amendments to the Territory Plan and the relevant planning context.

This supporting report outlines a proposal to implement missing middle housing reform into the ACT's planning system.

'Missing middle' is a term used to describe the range of housing options between a detached single dwelling and high-rise apartment buildings. Australian cities, including Canberra, have traditionally provided the former and more recently the latter. This had led to a lack of housing choice, particularly for people who cannot afford or do not desire to live in a traditional home. For this reform proposal, missing middle is defined as multi-occupancy (dual and tri-occupancy), townhouses, terrace homes and low-rise apartments (up to three storeys).

Locally, the [ACT Planning Strategy](#) 2018 sets a target to provide 70% of new dwellings within the existing urban footprint. This will allow more people to live closer to services, employment and amenities. To continue to increase housing supply and provide greater choice for an expanding population, the ACT will need to densify existing residential areas. Missing middle housing is the best option as it increases housing choice whilst being compatible with existing residential development, and limits the need for new greenfield development and urban sprawl.

To achieve greater housing choice and supply within existing areas, two key reforms are proposed to the ACT planning system. The first is through DPA-04 which proposes amendments to the subdivision, consolidation and residential redevelopment provisions of the Territory Plan. The second is the introduction of a draft Missing Middle Housing Design Guide (draft MMHDG).

The ACT planning system seeks to deliver high-quality built form outcomes for the residents of Canberra by utilising flexibility to encourage design innovation. The [Territory Plan](#) is the key planning policy document that regulates all development in the ACT through zoning and setting requirements and outcomes.

Supporting the Territory Plan in the ACT planning system are the [design guides](#). The design guides provide design guidance for proponents and the Authority in preparing and assessing development applications. As part of the implementation of the missing middle housing reform, the Authority has developed a draft Missing Middle Housing Design Guide (draft MMHDG).

The draft MMHDG, which provides design guidance to achieve best practice design for missing middle housing typologies, has informed the proposed changes proposed in DPA-04. These design-led amendments aim to encourage a diverse range of housing to be built and for high-quality design outcomes to be achieved, particularly in RZ1 and RZ2 residential zones.

In delivering this, DPA-04 proposes amendments to the [Subdivision Policy](#) and the [Residential Zones Policy](#) of the Territory Plan. Consequential amendments are also proposed to be made to the [Subdivision Specifications](#) and the [Residential Zones Technical Specifications](#) to provide guidance to proponents and the Authority when assessing development applications.

If approved, DPA-04 would remove barriers to development and redevelopment of missing middle housing, particularly in RZ1 and RZ2 zones. It would support a more flexible and responsive planning system, by providing additional development capacity within our existing suburbs. The changes will also support the

residential zones to respond quickly to population growth and market demand, and to be less reliant on land release in greenfield areas to provide land for new housing.

1. Introduction

Draft Plan Amendment 4 (DPA-04) is an Authority-initiated major plan amendment made under the section 60 of the *Planning Act 2023* (the Act). This supporting report addresses the requirements set out in section 55 the Act.

This supporting report provides background, planning context and supports the DPA for consideration by the public, government agencies and the Legislative Assembly. For context, please read this document in conjunction with DPA-04.

The report (including attachments) meets the requirements of the relevant documentation and accessibility standards, including Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

1.1 Background to the proposal

The ACT's population is currently around 470,000 people and by 2050, the population is expected to reach almost 700,000 people. To support this anticipated population, it is anticipated that the ACT will need to provide 30,000 new homes by 2030 and up to 100,000 new homes by 2050.

In the context of greater demand for housing and housing choice, the community has expressed a strong desire for more choice in the way they live, including greater diversity of housing types, lifestyle and transport options to support a wider range of people and households. Currently, new homes in Canberra primarily comprise of low-density, separate housing and high-density apartments which does not align with these expectations. This leaves a gap for 'missing middle' housing, defined in the ACT context as multi-occupancy (dual and tri-occupancy), townhouses, terrace homes and low-rise apartments. Filling the missing middle gap is important to meet the needs of our diverse and growing population.

Consistent with the directives of the [ACT Planning Strategy \(2018\)](#), associated [District Strategies \(2023\)](#) and the [Minister for Planning's Statement of Planning Priorities \(2024-25\)](#), the Authority has initiated DPA-04 which seeks to enable the development of missing middle housing, focusing on the RZ1 and RZ2 Residential Zones. These changes will realise the Government's aims to enable the development of new housing, greater dwelling numbers, improved planning outcomes and other benefits to the community.

1.2 Applicable land

The ACT currently has 17,663.2ha of urban land (zoned community facilities, commercial and/or residential), of which 67.6% is zoned RZ1 (11,933.00Ha) and 9.5% is zoned RZ2 (1,686.90Ha).

DPA-04 proposes to amend the Subdivision Policy and the Residential Zones Policy of the Territory Plan. These amendments will apply to all residential zones (RZ1, RZ2, RZ3, RZ4 and RZ5). However, these primarily target RZ1 and RZ2 zones as the largest residential zones with the most restrictive controls currently presenting barriers to missing middle housing.

The [Residential Zones Policy](#) of the [Territory Plan](#) (2023) articulates the policy outcomes to be achieved in all and specific residential zones as well as assessment outcomes and assessment requirements when assessing development applications.

All Residential Zones

The residential zones account for over 75% of urban land in the ACT. The policy outcomes for all residential zones in the current Residential Zones Policy are

1. Residential zones are primarily for residential developments but permit other development that complements residential uses and streetscapes.
2. Development should be of a scale and nature that recognises and responds to the zone hierarchy.
3. Facilitate development that is resilient to climate change, is sensitive to biodiversity, has good solar access, is energy efficient and promotes sustainable water use and water sensitive urban design, as well as encouraging active living and active travel.

Suburban Zone (RZ1)

The RZ1: Suburban Zone accounts for 67.6% of all urban land (11,933.00Ha) and is broadly distributed amongst all nine districts (see Figure 1).

Currently, RZ1 is typified by very low density, predominately single storey development. The current policy outcomes for the RZ1 zone also provide that change, particularly with regard to density and subdivision pattern are limited.

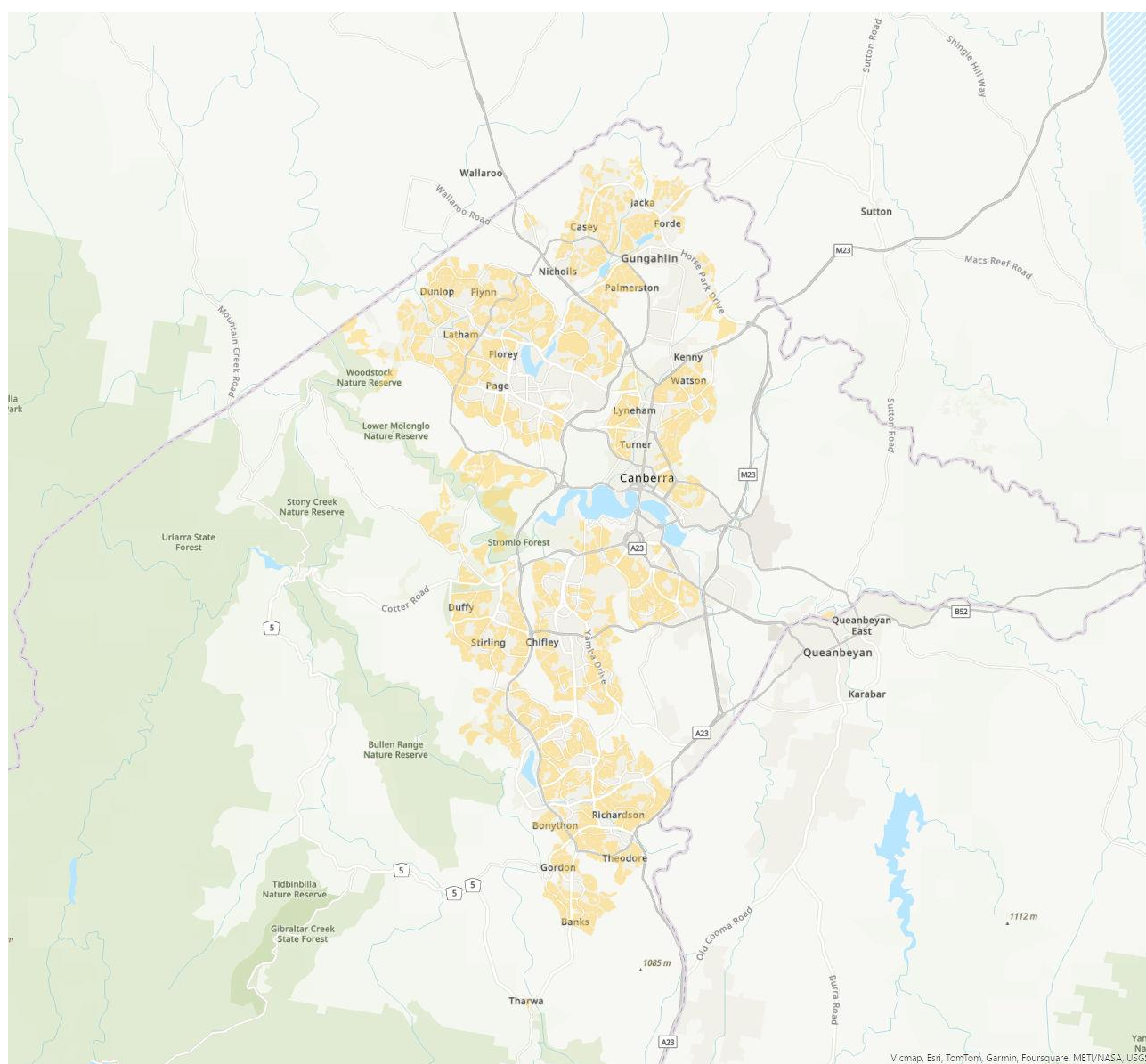


Figure 1: Current distribution of RZ1: Suburban Zone within the ACT

Suburban Core (RZ2)

The RZ2 zone accounts for 9.5% of all urban land and is in seven districts (See Figure 2). Currently there is no land within the districts of Gungahlin or Molonglo zoned RZ2.

Currently, RZ2 is typified largely as an extension of RZ1, primarily made up of low density, low rise developments. This is despite the policy outcomes seeking to deliver a range of housing choice of a mix of low and medium density housing close to local services.

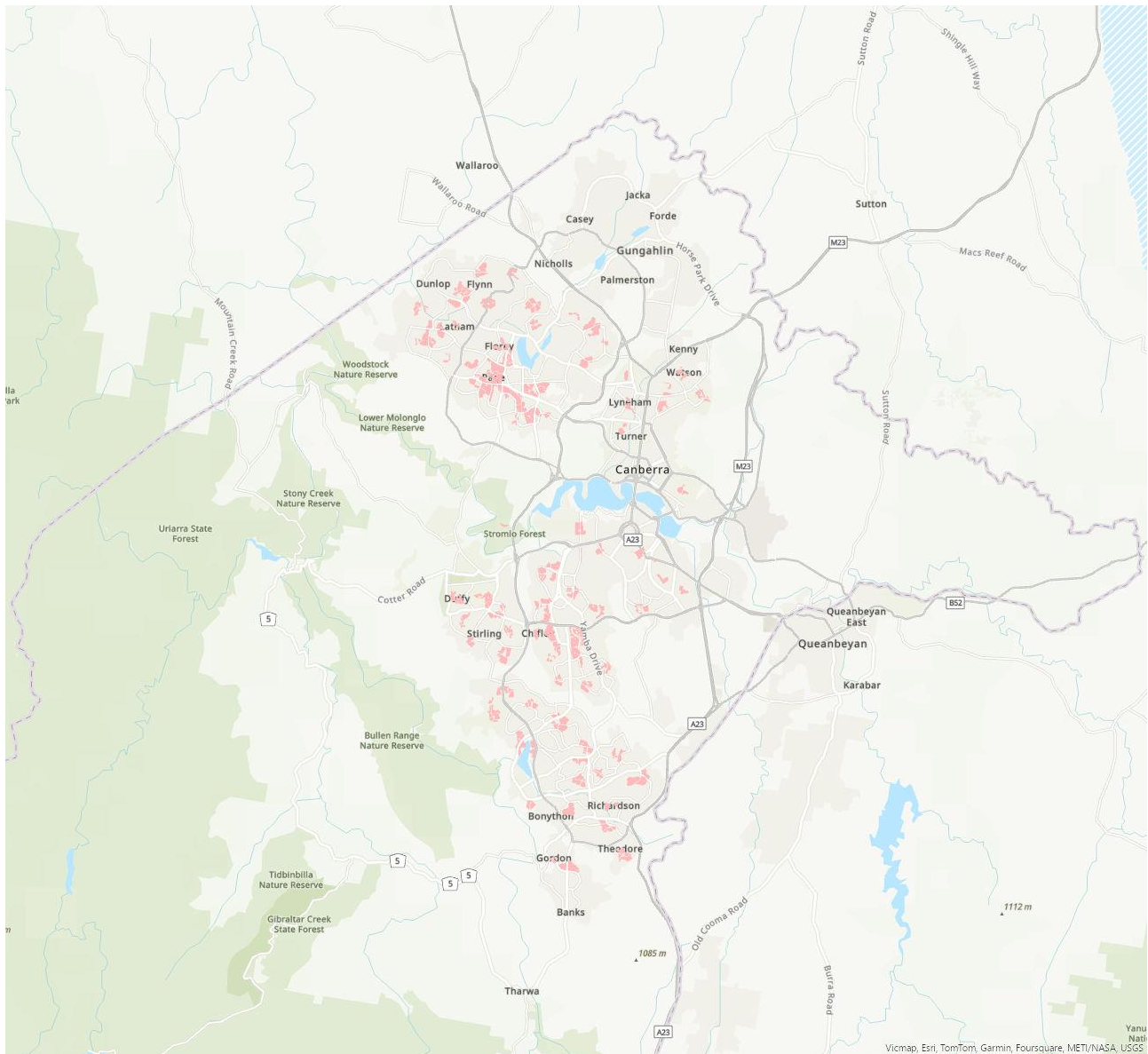


Figure 2: Current distribution of RZ2: Suburban Core Zone within the ACT

2. Proposal

This section of the report includes intent and details of the specific amendments proposed to the Territory Plan and why they are needed. The proposed amendments to the Territory Plan are detailed in the DPA document.

2.1 Need for the proposed amendment

The ACT's population is expected to reach almost 700 000 people by 2050 and to support this population growth up to 100 000 new homes will need to be built. The ACT Planning Strategy sets the aim for 70% of new housing should be built within the existing urban areas to ensure new housing is close to services, employment and public transport.

The Minister's Statement of Planning Priorities also foreshadows a need for more well located missing middle housing and the development of a missing middle design guide to guide this development. In addition, both documents state that the ACT must diversify its housing stock to provide more housing choice from the predominance of detached suburban single dwelling housing.

Underpinning this is the draft Missing Middle Housing Design Guide (MMHDG). The draft MMHDG has been developed as a new addition to the suite of existing design guides, including the Housing Design Guide (HDG), Urban Design Guide (UDG), City Centre Urban Design Guide (CCUDG) and Biodiversity Sensitive Urban Design Guide (BSUDG).

The draft MMHDG aims to clearly communicate what good design outcomes look like for missing middle housing typologies, and advocates for innovative approaches to development. The design guidance has a focus on the human scale of development, how street character and verge trees can be protected, and how denser development considers and mitigates impact on neighbours. The draft MMHDG also aims to support sustainable building practices and efficient land use, and to foster more lively and walkable communities with better access to existing amenities.

DPA-04 proposes several amendments to the Territory Plan and related technical specifications to give effect to the best practice design outcomes envisaged by the draft MMHDG. Together, they will enable well located and designed missing middle housing within the existing residential zones, particularly RZ1 and RZ2.

2.2 Positive and negative impacts of the proposed amendment

The positive and negative impacts of the proposal are outlined below.

Positive impacts

The proposal is anticipated to generate a wide range of direct and indirect benefits for the ACT community, including:

- *Increased housing choice* - Missing middle housing can cater more effectively to the needs of Canberra's population within existing residential areas by offering flexible and diverse living arrangements. This helps accommodate a wider range of household sizes, ages, and income levels. and allows for the community to select the 'best fit' housing for their life stage and personal circumstances.
- *Housing availability and affordability* - Missing middle housing provides more affordable living options compared to traditional single dwelling family homes. By increasing the variety of housing typologies closer to existing services, it can serve to increase overall supply and offer alternatives to detached homes.
- *Urban vitality* - Missing middle housing can reinvigorate older neighbourhoods with underutilised land or aging housing stock. By increasing the number of homes in existing suburbs, public spaces and businesses can benefit from increased patronage while preserving the character and scale of the area.

- *Environmental sustainability* - compact housing types promote more efficient land use, and reduces the need and environmental impact of urban sprawl. Smaller homes require less energy to heat and cool, and denser development patterns make public transportation more viable, helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- *Economic development* - removing barriers to missing middle housing will support development viability, providing opportunities for the building and construction sector and providing employment of design professionals, tradespeople and associated sectors.
- *Infrastructure and operational efficiencies* - A more compact urban environment will ensure more efficient public services can benefit the public through a reduction in per capita expenditure. Public funds are therefore able to be used to benefit the community in other ways, such as greater investment in public amenities, services and infrastructure.

Potential negative impacts

While the amendments are not anticipated to generate significant negative impacts, the proposed changes are likely to be discussed with regard to the following:

- *Increased infrastructure demand* - In the absence of appropriate planning and investment, significant increases in housing density in certain areas may place put a strain on existing infrastructure, such as roads, schools, parks and public services. This may cause impacts such as congestion, overcrowded schools, and overburdened public services. This is expected to be mitigated through appropriate planning and investment in infrastructure throughout the Territory.
- *Increased parking demand* - If not appropriately catered for by new development, higher density residential housing can lead to car parking shortages, especially in areas where public transportation options are limited. This can create conflicts between new and existing residents over available parking spaces, including greater load placed on residential streets with associated amenity impacts for nearby residents. This is expected to be effectively mitigated through the assessment process, where parking and traffic impacts are considered prior to approval being given.
- *Potential for unintended gentrification* – It could be perceived that the changes may result in unimproved land values and rates increasing. However, while the proposed reforms will increase the “option value” of properties, these reforms in isolation are marginal in the context of the suite of considerations made in the planning system. Noting rates are calculated based on a five-year average of unimproved land value, any increase will flow over a considerable period of time, unless the value is reset by a lease variation pursued by the leaseholder.
- *Impacts on local character and amenity* – a key concern often raised with densification of established suburbs is the impact on existing local character and amenity. The design-led approach to the reforms has put local character and amenity at the heart of the design principles, guiding sensitive redevelopment outcomes which contribute positively to the neighbourhood character and limit impacts on neighbours and the surrounding suburb.

Policy work, in partnership with the development application process where many Government agencies, such as Transport Canberra and City Services and Education Directorate are engaged, provides an opportunity to assess individual development applications and consider any potential impacts it may have. Therefore, these potential negative impacts are expected to be appropriately mitigated through the MMHDG and key protections in the Territory Plan and supporting documents.

2.3 Amendments to the Territory Plan

In addition to the introduction of the draft MMHDG, amendments will be required to the Subdivision Policy and the Residential Zones Policy of the Territory Plan. Supporting changes are also proposed to the technical specifications (see section 3.4 of this document).

Detail of the proposed amendments to the Territory Plan can be found in section 5 of the DPA document. In addition, a summary of amendments required to realise this proposal can be found below.

Residential Zones Policy

Changes to the Residential Zones Policy include:

- Redefining the naming and policy outcomes for all residential zones to differentiate the zones and better target suitable development and redevelopment outcomes within the zones
- Permit suitably designed apartments in RZ1 to increase housing choice
- Removal of assessment requirement that limits secondary residence to a block greater than 500m² to provide greater housing choice
- Removal of an assessment requirement that limits co-housing to blocks greater than 1050m² to facilitate more innovative missing middle development
- Adjusting assessment requirements for heights in metres and storeys across all zones. Height in storeys will be in the Territory Plan with height in metres moved to the technical specifications. This shift will control height while reducing pressure on floor-to ceiling heights of developments. The changes across all zones will support the appropriate scaling of height across zones.
- Standardise site coverage assessment requirements for single dwellings
- Removal of block density assessment requirements that limit the number of dwellings and minimum block sizes for redevelopment. This will largely be determined by how a proposal meets the relevant design provisions of the Territory Plan and design guides and supported by the dwelling density targets outlined in the Residential Zones Technical Specification

Importantly, changes to the naming of the residential zones are proposed, to better describe the types of residential development outcomes to be achieved, reflecting the housing typologies likely to be delivered in each zone. These naming changes are set out below.

Existing Residential Zone Names

RZ1 – Suburban Zone

RZ2 – Suburban Core Zone

RZ3 – Urban Residential Zone

RZ4 – Medium Density Residential Zone

RZ5 – High Density Residential Zone

Proposed Residential Zone Names

RZ1 – Suburban Zone

RZ2 – Suburban Density Zone

RZ3 – Residential Transition Zone

RZ4 – Urban Residential Zone

RZ5 – Urban Density Zone

Figure 3 – Existing and proposed naming of residential zones

Subdivision Zones Policy

Changes to the Subdivision Policy include:

- Changes to the assessment outcomes to ensure blocks which subdivide are suitable for additional development

- Removal of assessment requirements that create barriers to consolidation for co-housing development
- Removal of assessment requirements which create barriers to subdivision and consolidation in RZ1, particularly removing the restriction on subdivision and allowing unit-titling on blocks greater than 600m².

2.4 Changes required to the technical specifications

The technical specifications are not part of the Territory Plan but are used as guidance by the proponent and the Authority in the preparation and assessment of development applications. The technical specifications describe one way in which the relevant Territory Plan provisions can be met or set out reasonable parameters for more subjective provisions.

As the technical specifications are not part of the Territory Plan, they are not amended by DPA-04.

Despite this, the consequential amendments proposed to the Subdivision Specifications and the Residential Zones Technical Specifications are summarised below and a detailed version of the amendments are provided to view with DPA-04.

Residential Zones Technical Specifications

The proposed changes to the Residential Zones Technical Specifications include:

- Set target dwelling densities for different types of multi-unit housing in RZ1.
- Remove minimum dimensions of private open space of single dwelling developments to rely on minimum proportion specifications.
- Reduce the minimum private open space specifications for multi-unit developments in RZ1 and RZ2 from 40% to 30%.
- Align principal private open space requirements for multi-unit housing developments across all residential zones.
- Alter building height limitations (in metres) across all residential zones to reflect changes in the Residential Zones Policy.
- Alter building envelopes by slightly increasing the starting point where measurements are taken.
- Standardise upper floor level front setbacks with lower floor level front setbacks for single dwelling and multi-unit housing.
- Reduce side setbacks and increasing rear setbacks for multi-unit housing in RZ1 and RZ2.
- Increase the angle in which solar building envelopes are calculated for multi-unit housing from 31° to 45°.
- Amend building separation and privacy specifications for multi-unit housing across all residential zones to be more prescriptive on separation between walls with windows and to principal private open spaces.
- Reduce the minimum dwelling floor area of studios (from 40 to 35m²) and 3+ bedroom dwellings (from 95 to 90m²).
- Reduce the minimum dimensions of secondary bedrooms (from 3m to 2.7m).
- Remove maximum building depth specifications to provide greater flexibility in design outcomes.
- Consolidate storage requirements for multi-unit housing.
- Decrease minimum planting area requirements from multi-unit housing in RZ1 and RZ2 (from 35% to 30%).
- Increase minimum tree canopy coverage requirements for tree canopy coverage that applies to multi-unit housing developments in RZ1 and RZ2 (from 15% to 20%).
- Remove specification for a minimum of one car space per dwelling to be roofed.

- Adjust parking rates for multi-unit housing to be:
 - In RZ1 and RZ2:
 - » One car parking space per dwelling
 - » Plus an additional car parking space for every five 2-bedroom dwellings
 - » Plus an addition car parking space for every three 3+bedroom dwelling
 - » Three motorcycle spaces per 100 car parking spaces.
 - In RZ3, RZ4 and RZ5:
 - » One car parking space per dwelling
 - » Plus an additional car parking space for every five 2-bedroom dwellings
 - » Plus an addition car parking space for every three 3+bedroom dwelling
 - » One visitor car parking space per five dwellings.
 - » Three motorcycle spaces per 100 car parking spaces.

Subdivision Specifications

The proposed changes to the Subdivision Specification include:

- Reducing minimum block sizes for RZ1 (from 400 to 350m²), RZ2 (from 350 to 300m²), RZ3 (from 325 to 275m²) and RZ4 (from 300 to 250m²).
- New RZ1 blocks to be either street facing or front a path or open space
- Limit the location and size of consolidated RZ1 blocks, which varies between 2,000m², 2,500m² and 3,000m² based on location.
- Adjusting minimum block size specifications across residential zones to generally increase the proportion of mid-sized and compact blocks that are permitted.
- Other wording changes to clarify specifications that are intended to only apply to estate subdivisions rather than small-scale subdivisions.

3. ACT planning context

This section of the report addresses how this proposal and DPA-04 would give effect to the key documents of the ACT planning system, including the Minister's Statement of Planning Priorities, the ACT Planning Strategy, any relevant district strategy and how it would be consistent or inconsistent with relevant planning outcomes contained in other government strategies and policies.

3.1 Statement of Planning Priorities

The Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development's, 2024-2025 Statement of Planning Priorities serves as a guiding document for the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate for the coming period. As one of the fastest growing cities, Canberra is estimated to reach a population of almost 700,000 by 2050. Strategic planning to meet the needs and demands of our growing community is essential to sustain and enhance the city's current quality of life.

The planning priorities focus on delivering diverse housing choices close to shopping centres and travel networks such as public transport and active travel infrastructure, to create a better-connected, accessible, and sustainable city.

This proposal directly responds to key priorities including:

- Enabling diverse housing choices and the missing middle
- Achieving a design focus and implementing the New Planning System

3.2 ACT Planning Strategy

The ACT Planning Strategy 2018 (the Planning Strategy) aims to recognise and incorporate the social, economic and environmental changes occurring in the city. The Planning Strategy reflects and integrates the vision and directions of the community and other ACT Government strategies, particularly housing, transport and climate change.

The proposal directly responds to the identification of this area for 'urban intensification' in the Planning Strategy, which also seeks to deliver 70% of new housing within the existing urban footprint. The proposal aligns with the Planning Strategy in this regard by increasing the flexibility and capacity of existing residential zones to deliver more diverse and efficient housing, in response to community preferences and anticipated demand for housing.

3.3 District Strategies

Introduced in 2023 as part of the ACT's new planning system, district strategies capture the distinctive character of each district and how the city will change and grow over time.

The District Strategies set out the community's views on future planning priorities to help manage growth and change in the district while protecting the things the community values most.

The District Strategies identifies change areas where urban change will occur. Planning for these areas will also be progressed to support the development, including high-quality transport-oriented development on public transport corridors and in close proximity to local amenities, such as centres.

The District Strategies has five big drivers and targets for the district and the proposal is considered against these in

Table 1 of the district strategy (Table 1 below).

Table 1- Big drivers and target of the district strategies

Big driver	Targets
Blue-green network	More nature and retaining water in the city Expand liveable blue-green network connections
Economic access and opportunity across the city	More jobs accessible to home
Strategic movement to support city growth	Reduce car dependence More active transport
Inclusive centres and communities	Greater activation of group and local centres Improve community wellbeing
Sustainable neighbourhoods	Greater housing choice and affordability to meet community needs More inclusive and fair communities

The proposed DPA would effectively respond to the targets articulated, principally for 'Sustainable Neighbourhoods', 'Inclusive Centres and Communities' and 'Strategic Movement to Support City Growth'.

3.4 Other government strategies and policies

The proposal also would respond to the following government strategies.

Canberra's Living Infrastructure Plan: Cooling the City (2019)

The proposal seeks to achieve the targets articulated in the *Living Infrastructure Plan* by ensuring new developments provide sufficient accommodation for canopy trees and other green infrastructure. By ensuring new development can contribute towards the ACT's urban forest, the proposal will serve the aims of the Plan to manage drought, heatwaves and urban heat, while also providing residential amenity and beneficial habitat.

ACT Climate Change Strategy 2019-25

The proposal will effectively contribute towards to the realisation of key priorities including planning for a compact and efficient city to improve access to public transport and active travel options, reduce travel distances and reliance on private car use.

4. Consultation

This section of the report outlines consultation undertaken with the local community and relevant entities who may have an interest in this proposal, and upcoming consultation on DPA-04.

4.1 Consultation on DPA-04

In the development of the missing middle reforms, extensive engagement has occurred with industry for the development of the draft MMHDG including engagement with a dedicated Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and Pool of Practitioners (POP). This has included consultation during the development of the proposed changes to the Territory Plan, which have been informed by the MMHDG.

The draft MMHDG and DPA-04 will be released concurrently for public consultation to ensure the Canberra community is appropriately informed to understand how the good design guidelines reflected in the MMHDG have informed the changes to the Territory Plan.

4.2 Consultation on draft MMHDG

Extensive industry and agency consultation has been undertaken in developing of the draft MMHDG.

External stakeholders

Co-Chaired by ACT Government and the ACT Government Architect, the TAG and POP consists of membership from peak construction industry organisations including ACT Property Council of Australia, Australian Institute of Architects, Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, Building Designers Association of Australia, Green Building Council of Australia, Planning Institute of Australia, Housing Industry Association, and the Master Builders Association of ACT.

Engagement with the groups has occurred in October and December 2024, with additional engagement planned for late-February 2025. This engagement with design and building professionals is assisting in finalising the proposed missing middle housing reform ahead of broad community engagement.

Feedback from the TAG and POP groups suggests a high level of support for the development of the MMHDG and for reform to the planning system to promote more missing middle housing across the ACT. However, industry advises that high interest rates, high construction costs, Lease Variation Charges, existing lease conditions and other regulatory approvals required are significant barriers to development.

ACT government agencies

A series of internal consultant-led stakeholder workshops has occurred that included representatives and technical experts from EPSDD, Transport Canberra and City Services, Suburban Land Agency and the ACT Government Architect.

The purpose of the workshops was to assemble the draft MMHDG, test the principles and guidance of the draft MMHDG, proposed planning system reform and to discuss potential assessment pathway options.

EPSDD has engaged closely with ACT Government colleagues with an interest in housing policy, including Treasury, Transport Canberra and City Services and the Suburban Land Agency in the development of the missing middle reforms.

4.3 Next steps

Following consultation, the Authority will consider all comments received on both DPA-04 and the draft MMHDG. The Authority will then consider any amendments to DPA-04 and, unless withdrawn, prepare a consultation report and provide it to the Minister for action and referral to the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee.

5. Conclusion

The missing middle reforms are proposed in response to a demonstrated need for increased housing supply and choice to provide housing for a growing population.

The relative impacts of the DPA were considered and the proposal is consistent with, among other things, the Planning Strategy, the District Strategies and the Minister's Statement of Planning Priorities. This supporting report also discussed potential positive and negative impacts, and outlined that many have already been or will be mitigated by current and future guidance, policy work and processes.

Ultimately, these reforms are key in allowing for a compact and efficient city that caters to the changing needs and demands of the community and makes efficient use of urban land for housing. This will provide the opportunity for more Canberrans to live closer to employment, services and amenities.