

2025

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY

**Woden Town Centre Working Group - Establishment
Assembly Resolution 20 March 2025 - Government Response**

**Presented by
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

On 20 March 2025, the ACT Legislative Assembly (the Assembly) passed a resolution to establish a Woden Town Centre working group to consider a range of matters across the town centre and provide a report back to the Assembly following this consideration.

The full text of the resolution is provided below:

"That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the Woden Town Centre has undergone dramatic physical and demographic change over recent years, with the construction of dozens of high-density apartment towers;*
- (b) there has been a significant loss of sport and recreation facilities from the Woden Town Centre including the basketball stadium, bowling greens, bowling alley, tennis courts, YMCA gym, pitch and putt, and the outdoor 50 metre Phillip pool and ice rink which are planned to close;*
- (c) public transport services within the Woden Town Centre have been reduced, with no services currently providing access to the supermarkets, health centre and library located on the western side of the town centre;*
- (d) there is serious traffic congestion within the Woden Town Centre, with long queues affecting Corrina Street and often backing onto Melrose Drive;*
- (e) the community has reported growing anti-social behaviour around the Woden Town Centre, including the burning of a car within the Melrose Drive underpass which has led to the closure for many months of this critical pedestrian and cycling access point; and*
- (f) homeless people are sleeping rough in and around the Woden Town Centre;*

(2) further notes that the:

- (a) new campus of the Canberra Institute of Technology is due to open this year to deliver education and training to 6,500 students; and*
- (b) the lack of holistic, coordinated planning has contributed to a significant decline in community amenity in the Woden Town Centre; and*

(3) calls on the ACT Government to establish a cross-directorate working group by June 2025, and in consultation with the community, identify opportunities to improve the town centre, including its adjacent residential communities, incorporating a holistic view of the physical, business and social aspects of the Woden Town Centre, including:

- (a) articulating the direction of future land uses, major transport networks, open*

space and activity centres within the precinct, including highlighting opportunities for the planning system to support social and economic activity;

- (b) identifying sites for an aquatic centre, indoor sports stadium and arts centre to meet the needs of the growing community in the town centre's large catchment;*
 - (c) identifying improvements to the pedestrian, vehicle, public transport and social connectivity within and through the town centre that will be required to meet the current and future needs of the community;*
 - (d) enhancing the tree canopy and biodiversity through the Woden Town Centre and surrounding areas, particularly Yarralumla Creek;*
 - (e) investigating residential towers in the Woden Town Centre to ensure they are socially and environmentally sustainable and well-adapted to the changing climate;*
 - (f) reviewing current levels of homelessness and community sector support services and identifying sites for new homelessness and community services as part of the Woden Town Centre development;*
 - (g) ensuring there are adequate sites available for public housing, for community housing and for affordable housing so people stay in their community if they wish to and there are affordable options for people moving into the area;*
 - (h) coordinating with the development of the Southern Gateway Planning Framework; and*
 - (i) providing a progress report to the Assembly by the last sitting day of 2025; and*
- (4) further calls on the Government to consider the declaration of an urban renewal precinct for the Light Rail Stage 2B corridor between the city and the Woden Valley, including the Woden Town Centre."*

2.0 RESPONSE TO THE RESOLUTION

This report fulfils part 3(i) of the resolution – *providing a progress report to the Assembly by the last sitting day of 2025.*

Parts 1 and 2 of the resolution

Parts 1 and 2 of the resolution note a range of issues impacting the Woden Town Centre.

On 29 May 2025 the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning announced an [Inquiry into the Role and Future of the Woden Town Centre in the context of a compact city](#). There is considerable overlap between the issues noted in the Assembly Resolution (Parts 1 and 2) and the Inquiry's Terms of Reference:

“Town Centres should be vibrant hubs for retail, commerce and community services, including a range of cultural and recreation facilities that provide a destination for people to come together and have a sense of belonging.

This Committee will inquire into and report on the current and future zoning needs to support the social, economic and environmental prosperity of the Woden Town Centre and its liveability to support a great quality of life.

This report will be informed by community and business input, identifying opportunities for improved planning for:

- *Social connectivity that encourages participation for all demographics;*
- *Housing, including social, public and affordable housing;*
- *Employment and economic activity, including the night-time economy;*
- *Health, education and community services;*
- *Public spaces that encourage activity and in which people feel safe;*
- *A range of community facilities/services, including cultural and recreational facilities (with a focus on an aquatic centre);*
- *Transport and accessibility, to and within the town centre;*
- *Sustainability and resilience to climate change, including by protecting and expanding living infrastructure and managing Yarralumla Creek;*
- *Aligning with relevant planning documents, such as the National Capital Plan and the Territory Plan; and*
- *Any other relevant matters”*

Development and renewal within the Woden Town Centre have been guided by the ACT Planning Strategy and the Woden District Strategy, which aim to support a compact, sustainable city with improved access to housing, jobs, and services. The government acknowledges the significant transformation underway in the Woden Town Centre and recognises the concerns raised both in the Assembly and by the community. In response, it is working collaboratively to address these issues. The government's submission to the inquiry outlines the substantial infrastructure investment being made in the area, including the development of the new CIT Woden and expanded health facilities. Members of the Woden Town Centre working group (the working group) contributed to the preparation of this [Government submission](#).

Part 3 of the resolution

The cross-directorate working group the working group was established in June 2025 with a two-year term.

The working group brings together representatives from across ACT Government directorates and agencies. It operates under the chair of the Southern Gateway Taskforce and is supported by Planning and Urban Policy within the City and Environment Directorate.

The working group developed a Terms of Reference which align with the Assembly's resolution and set out an advisory, information-sharing role, rather than a decision-making mandate. Since its formation, the working group has held two formal meetings, the first in July and the second in October. Members have actively collaborated out of session on targeted matters and have contributed to the development of this progress report.

The Government notes that the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning has also commenced an inquiry into the role and future of the Woden Town Centre within the context of a compact city. While this inquiry is a separate process providing its own avenue for community and stakeholder engagement, it is examining many of the same issues identified in the Assembly's resolution. Members of the Woden Town Centre working group contributed to the preparation of the [Government submission](#) and will be able to draw on the Committee's findings once they are available, to help guide its ongoing work and identify areas for future focus. Although the group does not have a decision-making role, its advisory function and cross-

government membership position it to ensure agencies remain coordinated and responsive to emerging priorities during its term.

The following outlines progress against items 3(a) to 3(i) of the resolution and reflects the purpose and responsibilities of the working group as defined in its initial Terms of Reference.

Part 3(a) – Future land use and planning system opportunities

Strategic direction for the Woden Town Centre continues to be shaped by the Woden District Strategy and the development of the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework. Collectively, these documents provide the foundation for shaping land use, transport networks, open space, and activity centres.

The working group has begun considering how these strategies can be applied to address local challenges, particularly balancing residential growth, economic activity, and community amenity.

Discussions have included the role of CZ3 land in the Territory, with a specific focus on the Phillip Service Trades Area, where there may be opportunities to encourage a more diverse mix of uses supporting employment, revitalisation, and accessibility. Input from the working group is informing further policy work in this area, and further engagement with community and industry stakeholders.

Residential growth is expected to continue in medium and high-density formats, especially near the town centre and light rail corridor. The group has emphasised the importance of maintaining housing diversity, affordability, and access to open space and essential services. These views align with the District Strategy and are reflected in the Territory Plan.

Part 3(b) – Community infrastructure sites

The working group has commenced collating and sharing information on existing and emerging community infrastructure proposals. This includes planning for a multi-court indoor sports facility on the former CIT Woden site, a private development application for a new aquatic facility at the Phillip Pool site, and early discussions on the longer-term need for an arts and cultural facility to serve the growing area.

The group's role to date has focused on ensuring information is shared across agencies and that planning for such facilities remains coordinated with broader work on housing, land use, and transport. Detailed feasibility, location, and funding considerations are ongoing. It is important to note any formal planning decisions on facilities are decisions for government and not made by the working group.

Initial analysis, informed by the Woden District Strategy, highlights the need for further investigation to determine the appropriate scale, location, and delivery models for facilities. These assessments will consider demographic trends, transport connectivity, and long-term funding and management requirements.

To support strategic planning and investment prioritisation, CED is developing a preliminary evidence-informed approach to assess current and future social infrastructure needs. This work is being undertaken in collaboration with interagency partners in the working group and aims to ensure emerging priorities reflect government objectives and evolving community needs.

This work directly supports item 3(b) of the resolution and contributes to the working group's broader role in integrated planning and delivery

Part 3(c) – Connectivity improvements

Connectivity in and through the Woden Town Centre is being enhanced by major infrastructure projects such as Light Rail Stage 2B, upgrades to the Woden interchange, and improvements to active travel links, including new bridges and shared paths along Yarralumla Creek.

The working group is helping to make sure these initiatives are integrated, improve access to services and facilities, and reflect the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors. Further, work being undertaken for the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework, is also being considered by the working group.

The group has also noted the Assembly's September 2025 resolution regarding Canberra's southern public transport network. The working group, in its advisory and information sharing role, will contribute to this work to ensure that future public transport planning reflects local needs and delivers improved access to key destinations within the town centre.

This work directly supports item 3(c) of the resolution and contributes to the working group's role in facilitating integrated movement and social connectivity.

Part 3(d) – Tree canopy and biodiversity

Enhancing tree canopy and biodiversity has been recognised as a key aspect of renewal in the Woden Town Centre. Particular focus has been given to Yarralumla Creek as both an ecological corridor and a valued public space. The group has discussed how urban renewal can incorporate water-sensitive design, increase canopy cover, mitigate urban heat, and improve stormwater management. These early conversations are helping to ensure that environmental and resilience considerations are embedded in broader planning and infrastructure delivery.

The working group has further noted that enhancement of tree canopy and biodiversity is a priority that extends beyond the Woden Town Centre and is embedded in planning reforms across the Territory. Initiatives such as the Missing Middle Housing Reforms require new forms of residential development to incorporate tree planting and landscape outcomes, ensuring that infill and higher-density housing does not come at the expense of the urban forest. These requirements are supported by the ACT Government's planning system and design guides, which consistently emphasise the role of tree canopy in cooling suburbs, managing stormwater and providing habitat. Within Woden, the group has discussed how these broader policies can be applied through renewal projects, particularly around Yarralumla Creek, to integrate living infrastructure into urban development and to ensure that the precinct continues to contribute to the city-wide canopy targets.

This work directly supports item 3(d) of the resolution and contributes to the working group's role in embedding environmental resilience into urban renewal

Part 3(e) – Residential towers and sustainability

The development of residential towers in the Woden Town Centre has been a prominent subject for the working group and it is recognised that these developments are an area generating significant public feedback. Residential development is guided by ACT Government policies including the Housing Design Guide, Sustainable Building Pathway, and Climate Change Strategy which help to make sure that new developments are energy efficient, climate resilient, and socially sustainable.

Notwithstanding the issues raised around changed amenity, the working group recognises a growing body of evidence that well-designed higher density development such as mid to high-rise apartments, can yield significant benefits in precincts like Woden. Compact precincts, with mixed-use vertical communities, benefit from the integration of residential, retail, open space and cultural uses and can lead to stronger social connectivity and provide a 'vertical streetscape' that activates streets and public spaces. The use of mid to high-rise apartments also enables more efficient use of land, improves residents access to services and means retail, cultural and recreation infrastructure is within walking or cycling distance, which can in turn support more active travel and strengthen the local social interaction. The working group has emphasised the importance of good design for liveability, including solar access, natural ventilation and light, and provision of open space.

This work directly supports item 3(e) of the resolution and reinforces the working group's commitment to climate-adapted urban renewal.

Part 3(f) – Homelessness and community services

The working group recognise homelessness and anti-social behaviour are complex matters, rarely if ever isolated to one aspect of community service delivery. Nonetheless, the working group provides a useful foundation for cross-agency collaboration on identifying possible solutions and infrastructure gaps to support those in our community who are vulnerable, recognising physical infrastructure is a small component of a development solution.

Work has begun to map existing and planned community services in the Woden Town Centre. Ongoing initiatives include the Youth Foyer at the new CIT Woden campus, providing secure housing and wraparound support for young people, and the planned Woden Community Centre, which will consolidate and expand service capacity.

While the provision of services is evolving, the group has identified the need for ongoing assessment to ensure service levels meet demand and to consider whether further facilities may be required in future planning.

This work directly supports item 3(f) of the resolution and reflects the working group's commitment to inclusive and equitable community development

Part 3(g) – Housing supply and affordability

Housing diversity and affordability remain central to the future of Woden. The working group has discussed a range of supply initiatives, including annual land releases with affordable housing components, existing public housing in Phillip, and mixed-tenure and build-to-rent projects such as Woden Green and the CHC Australia–Canberra Southern Cross Club partnership. The group is focused on ensuring these initiatives are coordinated with land use, transport, and infrastructure planning to support a sustainable and inclusive town centre.

Additionally, the working group noted the delivery of additional homes within the Woden Town Centre supports the broader ACT Government objective of containing urban growth within existing urban areas rather than extending the city's footprint further into greenfield sites.

Higher-density housing in well-located centres like Woden can therefore make a significant contribution to overall housing supply. The group's discussions have highlighted that integrating affordable, public and community housing within the town centre not only assists with supply but also ensures that the benefits of proximity and accessibility are shared across different segments of the community.

This work directly supports item 3(g) of the resolution and reinforces the working group's role in embedding housing diversity into the town centre's future.

Part 3(h) – Coordination with the Southern Gateway Planning Framework

The Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework is a key tool for integrated planning along the Light Rail Stage 2B corridor. The working group is considering, and members are contributing to this process to ensure the opportunities and challenges facing Woden Town Centre are reflected in the broader corridor vision. The working group is also informed by an inter-agency catchment group addressing flood risk and drainage associated with light rail and other developments, ensuring that local resilience factors are considered in planning. As part of their forward work plan the working group will be informing consideration of the potential for a declared Urban Renewal Precinct along the Southern Gateway. Such a declaration would strengthen design-led, people-focused development, promote environmental sustainability, and support economic diversification. The Southern Gateway Framework will guide any decision, in consultation with the community.

This work directly supports item 3(h) of the resolution and reinforces the working group's role in facilitating integrated and resilient urban renewal.

3(i) providing a progress report to the Assembly by the last sitting day of 2025

This progress report is provided in response to the ACT Legislative Assembly resolution concerning the future of the Woden Town Centre and fulfils part 3(i) of the resolution.

Part 4 of the resolution

Part 4 – Urban renewal precinct

The Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework continues to guide Government consideration of potential urban renewal precincts along the Light Rail Stage 2B corridor, including Woden. Consideration of any such precinct remains ongoing, with no decisions taken at this stage.

Conclusion

The establishment of the Woden Town Centre Working Group, as directed by the Assembly, has created a foundation for cross-government coordination on the complex issues facing the precinct. While the group does not hold decision-making power, it has begun to collate information, highlight interdependencies, and encourage coordinated discussion across agencies to support more integrated project delivery.