



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON COST OF LIVING PRESSURES IN THE ACT
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Ms Nicole Lawder MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT

Submission Number: 018

Date Authorised for Publication: 21 March 2023

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WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL COMMENTS for the:

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY INQUIRY into
COST of LIVING PRESSURES IN THE ACT

DUE: 20 March 2023

Your local voice



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ABOUT WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL (WCCC)

As a Community Council we are committed to advocating and supporting the Weston Creek residents in pursuing the expectations and values that enhance and ensure their safety, well-being, and quality lifestyles. The community of Weston Creek value their unique village atmosphere, garden landscapes, and open green spaces as vital links to physical and mental well-being.

From the most recent WCCC 2022 survey, environmental issues, and climate change, planning and development, and Government distribution of amenities and resources are topics of high interest in Weston Creek. There is a general opinion that the amenities of Weston Creek have been ignored over an extended period-of-time and Council is of the opinion that there are missed opportunities for the Government to maintain an attractive, safe, and active area for residents. Additionally, there is genuine fear for the potential loss of the unique character so appreciated by residents.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) welcomes the Assembly Inquiry into the Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT. Council looks forward to observing the Inquiry as it collects evidence and works towards formulating sensible recommendations that may assist in improving the quality of life for residents who are experiencing very real financial pressures.

WCCC appreciates the opportunity to comment on the cost-of-living pressures being experienced by Weston Creek residents in particular, and no doubt will apply to the rest of the ACT.

WCCC notes the active encouragement of two local MLAs during our most recent Public Meeting for the preparation of this submission.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

The hybrid nature of the ACT Government structure (encompassing both State and Local Government functions) uniquely positions it to be responsive to the changing needs of Canberra (or groups of) Canberra residents. Such as in the current times of increased inflation in the costs of household essential goods and services combined with the changed interest rate stance of the Reserve Bank of Australia. In short: household disposable income for a significant number of citizens has reduced substantially.

Considering the number of eminently qualified individuals and organisations able to provide detailed analysis of the causes of the pressures being experienced, Council will confine its comments to providing a set of suggestions that could be incorporated into the ACT Budget in either the current Budget year, or future Budgets. These suggestions have been raised by the Weston Creek Community during our regular public meetings, Council's Facebook discussion group, as well as during informal conversations between Council Committee members and the Community.

SUGGESTED MEASURES

RATES/LAND TAX

The Community often comments that the rates/land tax burden is out of step with comparable interstate jurisdictions. Rather than prosecute the same arguments again and again, Council's view is the policy stance has yet to be accepted by a significant portion of the Weston Creek Community as being fair and equitable.

Our suggestion is the Government refers future rate increase proposals for consideration by the ACT Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission, as occurs in other Australian Jurisdictions.

GREATER ASSISTANCE FOR DOWNSIZING

Council regularly receives comments that people who no longer require, or struggle to afford to maintain larger homes, have limited options for alternative housing in an area they may have lived in for up to half a century. While the recently approved Fetherston development on Streeton Drive will provide some relief, a bit more infill development is probably required. Council suggests densification around the Weston group centre would be appropriate.

In addition, people considering downsizing often need to rely on advice from people with a vested financial interest in securing the sale of their property. We suggest:

- bringing forward already foreshadowed land releases for "missing middle" housing in the Weston Creek District to meet existing demand, and
- establishment of an independent advisory service to assist people considering downsizing of their options.

FAMILY ASSISTANCE

We have been hearing that families are prioritising their household budgets in different ways. In some families this has included withdrawing young people from organised sporting activities, citing high uniform and compulsory insurance costs. Often, once participation ceases, it does not resume. To turn these trends around, we suggest:

- the Government may like to consider underwriting compulsory insurance for sporting activities; and
- could seek some bulk discounts from providers of essential sporting equipment/uniforms.

VOLUNTEERING/COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

Local community associations, including WCCC, are under significant pressure to deliver their core offer due to the stagnant levels of support from the ACT Government, ongoing cost-pressures such as compulsory public liability insurances, reluctance of volunteers to loan personal equipment or use their own vehicles for organisation activities due to increasing fuel and maintenance costs, and the increasing competition for low cost/free meeting and storage spaces. The inflationary pressures have also seen a marked reduction in the generosity of local businesses to contribute resources to projects. Council suggests a few measures that could be considered, including:

- Government underwrite insurance for not-for-profit incorporated associations; and
- provide either fuel vouchers or Transport Canberra MyWay Credit for registered volunteers to participate in organisation activities; and
- identify underutilised government buildings that may be able to provide low-cost meeting/storage solutions for community groups.

TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE

The costs involved in operating and properly maintaining a family car have escalated dramatically over recent times. Fuel costs are up, servicing costs have risen substantially, replacement tyres have increased significantly, insurance costs have increased dramatically and parking charges have increased. Most of these are beyond the Government's direct or indirect control, but there are things that could be done in the Budget context. There may be an opportunity to incentivise certain positive behaviours such as careful driving or consideration of greater use of a public transport system that is running at less than capacity for most of the day. Two possible initiatives could be:

- reductions in compulsory charges such as driver's licence renewal fees and Motor Accidents Insurance Scheme premiums for long term safe behaviours. The revenue drop could be compensated by an increase in such charges for those who demonstrate long-term risk-taking behaviours; and
- providing a once-off incentive credit, of say \$50, to all active Transport Canberra MyWay Cards, with an objective to encourage more public transport use.

We would be happy for an opportunity to discuss this short submission with the Committee. Thank you again for conducting this important inquiry.

Yours sincerely

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