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

**ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY**

**Ministerial Statement**

**Update on Hawker Group Centre**

**Presented by  
Mr Chris Steel MLA  
Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development  
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Mr Speaker, with our population growing to 700,000 by 2050, there is critical need to continue reform to ensure there is a long-term pipeline of more homes.

Housing is a priority for me as the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development – we need more of it, where and how people want to live. No matter if they are building, buying or renting.

The ACT Government has signed up to the National Housing Accord including reforms to increase the density of homes in our city are in ‘well located’ areas, close to services and transport.

Work is already underway on the next stage of planning reform starting with major zoning changes to support more low-rise medium density in existing suburbs.

However, I’ve already flagged that further stages of reform will also be developed to allow larger-scale medium density housing in certain well-located areas close to services, shops and transport.

Similar to European cities, this is intended to support human scale housing, that will promote access to public transport, renewal of shopping centres and the public spaces around them.

This is about bringing land-use planning and transport planning together to ensure that the existing and new residents are well connected with transport, jobs and services.

Throughout this term I'll have a particular focus on ensuring that these sites are well planned and deliver better outcomes for the communities in those areas. The most obvious locations for this type of renewal are in our town and group centres.

At the election we made clear, that as part of our plan to enable the delivery of 30,000 new homes by 2030 we would be fostering more 'shop top' housing. Our local shops and group centres are the heart of our suburbs and regions. We have heard from many Canberrans that they want to see renewal at their local shops, including the existing privately owned buildings.

Enabling more housing at shopping centres is an opportunity to incentivise renewal of these ageing community hubs whilst retaining the retail services that are enjoyed by the community.

And as I foreshadowed during the last sitting, we're currently review planning controls around our local shops and group centres to encourage more mixed-use developments and 'shop top' housing with a particular focus on the use of underutilised land at group centres.

As the Government encourages more housing at shopping centres, we will also be looking for shop owners and developers to do their bit and invest in modern, well-designed shopping precincts for Canberrans.

We are also requiring new mixed-use housing and commercial projects to make improvements to adjacent public areas.

More opportunities for housing will act as an incentive for the revitalisation of local shops and group centres, including those which have currently vacant, underutilised or ageing shops.

This will be a proactive response led by Government, but the Government will also consider industry-led proposals.

When we're approached for the development of these sites, careful consideration must be given to how any improvements meet these policy objectives and the broader community interest.

One of the proponent-initiated proposals to be examined at the start of this term has been the Woolworths direct sale application at the Hawker Shopping Centre.

The *Planning Act 2023* sets out the circumstances in which the Government could approve a direct sale of land. It is important for group and local centres to grow and change to provide opportunities for employment, housing, and recreational facilities for the local community.

The Belconnen District Strategy also identified that the Hawker group centre has the potential to provide 500 jobs by 2050. The District Strategy identifies Hawker group centre as one of several centres that the Government might consider for possible centre initiatives, which may involve future planning and investigations to support the ongoing viability and role of centres as a central community meeting place.

For these reasons, careful consideration is being given to the direct sale application at the Hawker Shopping Centre.

I wanted to update the Assembly that the Government believes that the current proposal is not considered to have met the strategic objectives, policy setting or community benefit for key, mixed-use commercial group centres we expect.

It also does not meet the outcomes outlined in my Statement of Planning Priorities, the District Strategies, and the Government's 2024 Election Commitment relating to an additional 30,000 dwellings by 2030 including more shop-top housing as part of centre revitalisation.

The proposal is only for a two-storey retail/office development, with basement parking and no associated residential development.

Last week the Government advised Woolworths of the above and allowing them an opportunity to consider a revised proposal that more closely aligns with the strategic objectives, policy setting and community benefit expectations before a formal decision is made on the direct sale.

EPSDD wrote to Woolworths to clarify the position and expectations outlined above and offered to meet with the proponent in good faith, to provide reasonable opportunity for a revised proposal which more closely aligns with the Government's and community's expectations for the site. The Directorate

has also asked Woolworths to engage meaningfully with the community on any revised proposal

Separately and independent to the direct sale application, ESPDD is undertaking the following studies at the Hawker Group Centre as part of the Group and Local Centres program to support more housing and better shops.

This includes investigation report stage 2 (subsurface investigations) and statement of requirements being prepared, with requests for quotes (RFQ) from suitably qualified consultants to be released to the market this quarter. This assessment will also include remanent trees and potential contamination present including from a former dry cleaner identified in earlier investigations. Preliminary financial feasibility assessment – tenders received are currently being assessed with a consultant expected to be engaged in the coming weeks to undertake the assessment of a number of sites within group centres across Canberra including at Hawker.

Parking surveys will also be undertaken at Hawker and at a number of other group centres across Canberra and align with Transport, Canberra and City Services requirements.

ESPDD's assessments are expected to be completed by 30 June 2025.

The information obtained through EPSDD's work at Hawker and other centres will inform the Government if the land should be sold, and assist in deciding if any sale should occur through a market or direct sale process. This includes

consideration or any amended proposal by Woolworths for the Hawker group centre.

Should the Woolworths direct sale eventually be supported, the above studies will also help inform the future release of any appropriate land at the Group Centre not accounted for within that sale.

The Government is committed to support more housing and better shops across Canberra, however we have the right policy settings in place, to make sure that any proposed development meets the strategic objectives of the Government, while also improving outcomes for the communities where this type of development will occur. That includes more homes, better access to public transport and services while contributing to a revitalised commercial precincts and public spaces that makes our suburbs a better place to live.

ENDS