



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Environment,
Planning, Transport and City Services

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Petition 002-25: Hawker Village shops redevelopment

Submission number: 065

Submitter: Victoria and Clara Hill

Date authorised for publication: 22 May 2025

Inquiry into Petition 002-25

Hawker Village shops redevelopment

Ms Victoria Hill (23 year resident of Weetangera) Address: [REDACTED] Mobile: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]	Ms Clara Hill (30 year resident of Scullin) Address: [REDACTED] Mobile: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]
---	---

Media release:

The Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services has announced it will be undertaking an inquiry into Petition 002-25: Hawker Village Shops redevelopment.

‘The ACT Government has now outlined its future plans for the Hawker Village Shops redevelopment site,’ said Ms Jo Clay MLA, Committee Chair. ‘Given this information is now available, the Committee is seeking the views of the community in relation to the future of the local shops and how this redevelopment will play out.’

A Ministerial Statement regarding the future of Hawker Village Group Centre is attached to this email, and Terms of Reference for the inquiry are available on the inquiry webpage: Inquiry into Petition 035-25: Hawker Village shops redevelopment - ACT Legislative Assembly.

Information about how to make a submission is available on the Assembly website

<https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/get-involved/guides/submissions>

Submissions close on 17 April 2025

Firstly, in regards to the above highlighted statement, I question the notion that the government has shared with the community specific plans for the Hawker Group Centre quote:

“outlined its future plans for the Hawker Village Shops redevelopment site”

As I understand the government has stated a strategic plan for the overall approach to group centres across Canberra. However, my current understanding is the community has only been shown a proposal for Hawker group centre, solely created and designed by Woolworths.

- No detailed government plans have been presented to the community for the future of the Hawker Group Centre.
- No government consultation has been undertaken for the Hawker Group Centre.
- No promotion to the community by the government that consultation was taking place by Woolworths.

Our concerns around the consultation process were compounded when discovering that the company running the consultation was Communication Link. A company known to work closely with ACT government.

THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY
ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY
Ministerial Statement
Update on Hawker Group Centre

As part of our submission we would like to highlight specific issues around Minister Steel's statements to the Assembly. We have a number of concerns which we would like addressed by this Inquiry.

"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. "

We know that a shop owner, that owned multiple shops at Hawker, which he has now sold to Woolworths (the whole block in front of the supermarket) had been approached 100's of times for years, by many different individuals wanting to rent a vacant shop at the Hawker centre – both for short term and long term rental lease. The owner would not rent it.

There was a deliberate manipulation of the Hawker Shopping Centre not to be able to thrive, one example of this was the lack of maintenance to these shops.

From what we see with revitalisation in other shopping centres across Canberra, it's the small businesses that create the dynamic and the incentive to come to those centres. For example, the new exciting businesses in Scullin, Cook, Florey, Aranda and now the upgrade coordinated by the government of the Evatt shops.

*"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."*

We have a number of concerns about the above statement, specifically the government's approach, moving forward on any further plan for the Hawker Shopping Centre, in requesting Woolworths to be providing the input for the future plans of Hawker. For Woolworths to coordinate the masterplan of the Hawker Shopping Centre after the direct sale of the land?

Why is this seen as appropriate to hand over the development to a private company to coordinate? "Woolworths to engage meaningfully with the community"? Knowing that they have a vested interest in purchasing land.

In this inquiry we should be looking at the overall approach by the government about the direct sale of public land.

Should the government be asking the community to feel that they should be granting Woolworths the “in good faith” message?

We now know from the recent federal inquiry that Woolworths priority is buying land, to keep competitors out. Clearly this could also be considered as a land grab?

Why would our government be thinking that we should give them the “in good faith” message and why could we possibly believe that Woolworths will give us the best outcomes for any plans to our Hawker Group Centre?

“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.”

What does the Minister mean by “human scale housing”, can we please have an explanation about what is meant by “similar to European cities”?

“We have heard from many Canberrans that they want to see renewal at their local shops, including the existing privately owned buildings”.

Does this mean having our shopping centres totally redeveloped by a private company?

This inquiry should also consider the true lack of government lead community consultation before the potential direct sale of public land.

- Is it acceptable for any community consultation to be run by a private company and the government to see this consultation as the true indication of what the wider community would like for the future of their shopping centre?
- Does the government think it is appropriate for Woolworths to be managing the future direction of this centre?

Woolworths, a company that clearly had a vested interest – due to the fact that were wanting to purchase large parcels of land, to build a bigger supermarket?

Please let's not believe that Woolworths intentions and priority are to create and revitalise our community.

- Is one of the major issues here about the lack of the opportunity for the community to give true feedback on how they see the future on the Hawker Group Centre? Not Woolworths/Communication Link interpretation of the limited consultation that was undertaken?

Does the government believe that the next step in the process is to ask Woolworths to come back with a plan that relates to what the governments strategic plans is – eg: housing needs.

What about these questions that the government should be asking the wider community before any sale of public land. Give the community the chance to raised or comment on what we see as fair and transparent issues that should be address around the future of this centre:

- Is it important to you as a community member to participate in consultation run by the government?
- How do we see the future of the Hawker Group Centre?
- What could be best use of this public land?
- Do you think it's appropriate for the government to directly sell public land to company without any other companies/discussion being had about alternatives to this public lands?
- How important is it to have another Woolworths supermarket in Belconnen? (We already have 5 in the Belconnen area/region)
- Are you concerned about loss of convenient surface parking?
- Would you be happy to lose this style of shopping?
- Would you rather an upgrade of the current foot print of the shops, including an updated Metro?
- Do you have any concerns, knowing how developments are created and designed by Woolworths and what those designs look like across Canberra and Australia?
- How important is it to maintain the current village feel and do you think it's will be too compromised having a full line supermarket (of 4,000 sq) with underground parking?
- Do you think a 4,000 square supermarket is appropriate for the Hawker Centres?
- Do you feel comfortable with the idea of another Woolworths when we clearly know now that we have a concerning duopoly with Coles Woolworths?
- What about the impact to local residents in regards to the increased noise and traffic?

Let's not be pretend here, that a full line supermarket would not affect our village convenient shopping style. A style that many Canberrans celebrate and welcome and fundamentally seen as why this centre is a thriving shopping option. Which is currently is.

Yes, the centre may need to have an upgrade. Like what is currently being undertaken by the government in other Canberra centres - a refresh of our current shopping centre but why should we possibly be losing the elements that are loved and appreciated with our current layout? For example the current courtyard and the traffic and pedestrian flow at the centre. It currently functions very well with a high level of traffic – foot and car.

We will now outline what key experiences.

This will include:

- Communication with ACT government representatives
- Woolworths face to face community consultation
- Communication with the consultation company used by Woolworths

Communication with ACT Government – Clara Hill experience detailed

Concerning level of detail known by one of our MLA's about the proposal Woolworth was putting forward, but none of this level of information was shared with the wider community by the government or as part of the consultation run by Woolworths.

1. Direct communication with MLA Ms Tara Cheyne

- When I asked our government representative, MLA Tara Cheyne, why the ACT government wasn't running the consultation for our Hawker Village "revitalisation", but the government was undertaking government consultation for other shopping centres across Canberra. Eg Evatt.
- And why the consultation timeframe of all face to face Woolworths Community Consultation was so minimal. 1 workshop session held at Hawker College and drop in consultation outside the shops. Both, of which I could not attend as I was working interstate.

This was the message I received directly from Tara Cheyne from her official Facebook site when raising my concerns about the above.

May 2023

"Clara Hill Hi Clara, good questions. I will try my best to explain.

The Evatt local shops upgrade was part of an ACT Labor election commitment in 2020. <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6943079/labor-promises-17m-in-local-shops-upgrades/>

Funding was provisioned for the upgrade of Evatt shops by the ACT Government through the budget process. The consultation on what people would like to see is happening now. It is an ACT Government initiative and project and that's why you've seen it promoted on our ACT Government webpages and social media accounts.

The Woolworths Hawker proposal is not an ACT Government initiative or project that has been outsourced to Woolworths to run a consultation. The proposal has been entirely initiated by Woolworths Group. You are right that they have a vested interest in a larger supermarket - they have been abundantly clear that this is part of their intention. They have explained in their public consultations that I've been at (and I think my post mentions this) that they did not own the site they operate on until 2021. They have also recently bought the site that houses the post office and the bakery. They want to provide a 'full line' supermarket (not a Metro) with supporting speciality stores. They believe that to do this, they also need to acquire the courtyard and the adjacent car park. This is Government land and they have stated their intention would be to approach the ACT Government for direct sale of the land to them. This is a future decision for Government. Woolworths would not submit a DA until it knew what land it had.

In the consultations, Woolworths has stated that they want to understand the community's vision and support for what they have proposed, noting that Woolworths is only proposing change to the sites currently identified in the map. They have no further developed plans at this stage.

I am not sure what the role of Wesfarmers is I'm sorry. I have not seen their involvement mentioned at all. (As I understand it, Wesfarmers once owned Coles but not since around 2018.)

Because this is an initiative about Woolworths and its intentions, it is led by Woolworths. The ACT Government is not involved in the consultation because the consultation is about Woolworths understanding the community's views on its proposal. I have attended the BCC meeting and the community workshop at Hawker College (Tuesday and Wednesday nights this week) in my capacity as a local member. I have encouraged Woolworths to publish a 'what we heard' report at the end of its consultation but I can't direct them.

I hope that makes sense. I would encourage you to attend the drop in session on Saturday so that you can speak to the representatives from Woolworths directly."

You could make contact with MLA Tara Cheyne to confirm that this was her direct message to Clara Hill.

Let's now look closely at a number of concerning comments made in the above post by Tara.

Please be mindful that these comments made by Tara were before the Woolworths community consultation was completed and their report had been finalised. This meaning that the government were well informed about what was being proposed, and from this, we can assume that the consultation run by Woolworths for the community was a tick box exercise as the government was fully aware of what Woolworths intentions were without true community input. All of these messages from Tara show that the government had a high level of knowledge about Woolworths proposal. before the community had seen any sort of proposal. No proposal was ever shown as part of the consultation run by Woolworths.

If Woolworths intention was to truly ask about what the community would like for our centre, how is it that Tara is very clear around what Woolworths intentions were with purchasing the land and creating a full line supermarket before hearing from the community?

"You are right that they have a vested interest in a larger supermarket - they have been abundantly clear that this is part of their intention. They have explained in their public consultations....."

Let's be very clear about this, there were absolutely no detailed explanation on plans/designs or discussion around the purchase on land by Woolworths at any of their public consultations.

“They want to provide a ‘full line’ supermarket (not a Metro) with supporting speciality stores. They believe that to do this, they also need to acquire the courtyard and the adjacent car park.”

What level of communication and understanding did the government have before the Woolworths Community Consultation? The below comment definitely shows that a clear design was already on the table even before the consultation was completed.

“I have encouraged Woolworths to publish a ‘what we heard’ report at the end of its consultation but I can’t direct them. “

Our MLA thought it was a fair enough position for the community to not even know what the results were from the only consultation, run by Woolworths. MLA Tara Cheyne stated, that she “can’t direct them”, therefore the government didn’t have to share these findings with the community.

Knowing that this report (numbers negate any serious true consultation) was likely going to be the basis on what the government would be making a direct sale decision on to Woolworths. Can you imagine a representative from the government is happy to say this and think it’s a reasonable position to say “encourage” but “can’t direct them” to share Woolworths findings?

This clearly shows that the government was going to view that the consultation run by Woolworths was going to be enough and the community wasn’t going to see any plans before the direct sale of the land.

Or was the government going to do it’s own consultation, rather than rely on the report by a company with a “vested interest”? The government had no intention of sharing what they clearly knew, and felt it wasn’t appropriate to make the community aware of what the Woolworths and government plans were.

“Woolworths would not submit a DA until it knew what land it had. “

There was no respect for the community to possibly have an alternative opinion, for example, that they would rather have an upgraded centre, developed on the shop foot print.

“The ACT Government is not involved in the consultation because the consultation is about Woolworths understanding the community’s views on its proposal.”

We now that it wasn’t about community views on what we were want the centre to be, because Woolworths was not going to undertake any development, unless they got the direct sale of the land.

Fundamentally, I really think it’s a big stretch to think that the government were hands off and not involved when you read the level of detail shared by Tara.

- Can the inquiry please investigate at what level the government had engaged with Woolworths on Woolworths’s proposal?
- Were they briefed on plans? Who attended the briefings?

I had a meeting with MLA Peter Cain at the Hawker Centre, and he spoke about a presentation given to him by Woolworths about their plans.

MLA Peter Cain informed me about plans he saw 5/6 months before the community. Interestingly he'd seen plans but the community hadn't.

- The community didn't have this opportunity to hear this level of detail before the direct sale of land.
- A Woolworths consultation took place at which no plans were shown. No one from the community had any idea of what was on the cards.
- Do we really think it's reasonable to think that the only government consultation comes after the sale of the land?

An investigation is required by the inquiry around what level of communication the government had with the chosen company running the Woolworth consultation, Communication Link. Communication Link works for ACT government on key projects.

It seems from the level of information that Tara had, that there was at a higher level of information shown to the government, compared to what was given to the wider community at the time of consultation. In no way was it "*they have been abundantly clear that this is part of their intention*". It was not clear what Woolworths intention was at the community consultations.

Nothing was "abundantly clear", as no proposal was discussed on any level at the Woolworths workshops or Drop-In sessions. More detailed plans were only presented via a website once a Canberra Times article was published, highlighting the concerns around the level of true community consultation.

Woolworths Community Consultation - Victoria Hill

I attended both the in person Drop-In consultation outside the Hawker supermarket and the workshop run by Communication Link/Woolworths at Hawker College.

The Woolworths representative from Sydney, Tony Pratt when asked questions by the community members was disrespectful, abrasive and evasive.

Here are some examples of responses by Tony Pratt when asked what Woolworths was planning to do.

He responded “we’re not doing anything here until we know that we’ve got the direct sale of the land’.

When he was asked by another resident whether the development could be two storeys he replied “anything is possible”.

It was pointed out to Tony Pratt that the development could be done on the shop footprint considering what Woolworths currently owns with their current supermarket and the block of shops in front of their supermarket. He dismissed this approach and his message was very clear, that they were only interested in a full line supermarket and therefore a direct sale of all the land. He mentioned something like 4000 m², bigger than the full line supermarket Woolworths has at the Belconnen Mall.

At both consultations, at no point was the community shown any plans or a detailed proposal.

We were only given the information about Woolworths wanting the a direct sale of land being requested from the government but no details what so ever were shared about the development to the community at any of these sessions.

Specially concerning at the Hawker College Workshop was the lack of true intentions of what Woolworths was planning for the whole shopping centre.

The residents of Belconnen already have multiple Woolworths supermarkets, full line and Metro.

The supermarket at Hawker enables especially the elderly and mothers with young children to park safely and shop efficiently.

The impact of a full line supermarket at the Hawker shops will impact all the residents that live near it with noise impact having not been considered.

The level of traffic of large delivery trucks down a number of residential streets. For example Springvale Drive and Belconnen Way where there are houses on either side.

Hawker has not been designed as a commercial centre for the proportions of a development of this size envisaged by Woolworths.

At the Drop-In session, the questions asked by the representatives were whether people would like a better Woolworths. People replied that they’d like a deli or a bakery. They were not advised that their whole shopping centre was going to be altered, including the loss of the car park, courtyard and convenient walkways.

Woolworths only added plans to their website, from pressure from the media articles. Woolworths or the government was not prepared to share plans before a direct sale. (their hand was forced by media pressure).

Communication with Communication Link company – Clara Hill engagement

Martine Bilen, Communication and Engagement Officer

- Martine stated that it would have been a good idea to promote the consultation by Woolworths by placing posters at the location.
 - No posters or direct information was shared with shoppers at Hawker about the consultation
- Martin stated that no paid promotion across social media or at the Hawker location itself.
 - Why was it decided that no social media was created to inform the community about the future change to the centre?

See below emails I received from Martine.

How were individuals that shop at Woolworths meant to find out about this Woolworths lead consultation when limited information was provided – eg no posters or advertising of this consultation was promoted around the Hawker Centre?

We are sure that other submissions will highlight the deficient statistics referred to from the consultation in the Woolworths Consultation Report.

Email correspondence from Martine to Clara

Date: 1 September 2023 at 11:34:34 am ACST

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: Feedback [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: Consultation process Hawker Shops

Good afternoon Clara,

You are correct, there was no paid promotion across social media or at the Hawker location itself.

Poster at the Hawker location are something that have been raised with us by a few people who attended the engagement activities and I agree, in hindsight we could have looked at placing posters at the location.

We are currently in the process of finalising the consultation report. This will be published to the project website for public access.

This report will include the number of people who participated in engagement activities as well as how many submissions were received.

Is there a time that would be convenient for me to give you a call? I am happy to talk through anything else you would like to cover.

Kind regards,

Martine

Martine Bilen

Communication and Engagement Advisor

From: Clara Hill [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, August 31, 2023 3:11 PM
To: Feedback [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Consultation process Hawker Shops

Good afternoon,

Can you please advise me when:

A consultation report that captures what we have heard through each the consultation method will be published to the dedicated website for the community to view - [woolworthshawker.com.au/](https://www.woolworthshawker.com.au/).

I heard that you'd only engaged with around 200 people in the drop in sessions. You do realise that 1,000s of individuals in the wider community use this shopping centre?

Can you also address please - where were the posters or messaging at Woolworths that shoppers could have seen about this opportunity for consultation?

Do realise that the neighbouring suburbs that were informed are not the only ones that shoppers come from. So for those who live in Higgins, for example, and are not part of BBC or the below community organisations you highlighted had no way of being part of this consultation as how would that have found out...????

No government sponsored advertising on social media - as per Kippax consultation, Evatt shop consultation. What because Woolworths was running the consultation, the government could be hands off in making sure the wider community knew about what is being planned by Woolworths at Hawker shops or being part of the consultation process???

Sorry you could have seen it in the weekly Canberra brochure....was that the only publication that you promoted it in? Where was it advertised in social media. Did you do any paid advertisements?

With the online submissions- will be know the number that did complete this engagement as well?

Do you believe this is enough of a cross section to make an informed decision?

Also, I'm not sure if you deliberately didn't see my message about me ringing you on several occasions and you not returning my calls...!!????

Thank you

Clara
 [REDACTED]

General comments to be considered by the inquiry:

- This is about the total destruction of our current shopping centre as we know it.
 - Loss of open air carpark
 - Loss of courtyard
 - Loss of buildings (modern heritage)
 - Loss of easy shopping
 - Human scale and open air shopping centre – currently at Hawker

Let's not forget this is a large piece of public land/s and it might be more beneficial for the community not to have another large Woolworths but that land to be used for something else.

Tell us why we can't have an upgraded Woolworths and housing on the same shop footprint?

Allowing the direct sale of the land gives Woolworths the control of the overall design of our centre?

A master plan created by Woolworths for the Hawker Shopping Centre without government consultation?

If one wants to do a big shop (rather than the very convenient 10 minutes to whip around grab a few bits) then one can shop at large supermarkets in Belconnen Mall, Charnwood, Kippax, Jamison - all located in Belconnen.

At the time of "Woolworths community consultation" we received no guarantee that there would be a government community consultation process before the direct sale of the land.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter for the community, and for the future generations of our society.

Clara Hill

Victoria Hill