



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND URBAN RENEWAL

Ms Caroline Le Couteur MLA (Chair), Mr Mark Parton MLA (Deputy Chair)

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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Planning for the Surgical Procedures, Interventional Radiology and Emergency Centre (SPIRE) and the Canberra Hospital campus and immediate surrounds.

Submission Number: 07 - Garran Residents Association

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The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Planning and Urban Renewal
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Ms Jongsmas,

**Garran Residents' Association submission to the
Inquiry into Planning for the Surgical Procedures, Interventional Radiology and Emergency Centre
(SPIRE) and the Canberra Hospital campus and immediate surrounds**

The Garran Residents' Association (GRA) thanks the Committee for conducting the inquiry into Planning for the Surgical Procedures, Interventional Radiology and Emergency Centre (SPIRE) and the Canberra Hospital campus and immediate surrounds. The Association appreciates the opportunity to make a submission and contribute to the discussion concerning the planning of this important project that will provide a vital service to all Canberrans as well as people in the surrounding region.

There is unreserved support for Canberra and the surrounding region having access to high quality hospital facilities. Furthermore, there is an undisputed, and critical need to expand the Canberra Hospital's capacity and to update its facilities. In this regard, the Government's significant election commitment of \$500 million to invest in SPIRE to in part address these matters is promising, if somewhat overdue.¹ This large investment in the critical foundation of our health system demands rigorous analysis to ensure that the money is well spent and will support the needs of, and services provided by, a tertiary referral hospital. It is therefore deeply disappointing that we feel that the process of site selection for the SPIRE building and planning to date has not been adequate, transparent or consultative. This indicates a lack of consideration of accessibility, connectivity and safety at the interface of the region's major hospital with the residential suburb of Garran in the "extensive planning and feasibility work" and "due diligence" for SPIRE.²

There is a wide range of views within GRA on the proposed SPIRE building and it would be impossible to comprehensively encompass the full diversity of views concerning the inquiry's terms of reference in one submission. In this regard, this submission will cover the broadly agreed areas of concern for residents.

¹ ACT Labor (2016), *ACT Labor's Ten Year Health Plan*, Authorised by Matthew Byrne for ACT Labor, available at: https://www.actlabor.org.au/media/42971/10_year_health_plan_final.pdf; ACT Labor (2016), *Canberra Hospital - \$599 m Infrastructure Investment*, Authorised by Matthew Byrne for ACT Labor; ACT Government (2019), *SPIRE Centre set to transform The Canberra Hospital* [Joint press release], 28 May, available at: https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/act_government_media_releases/meegan-fitzharris-mla-media-releases/2019/spire-centre-set-to-transform-the-canberra-hospital; and Evans, J., (2019) 'Canberra Hospital's intensive care unit could run out of beds from October, senior planner reveals', *The Canberra Times*, 18 February, available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-02-18/canberra-hospital-icu-bed-shortage/10819798>; and Stanhope, J. (2020), 'Government neglect makes the hospitals sick', *Canberra CityNews*, 29 January, available at: <https://citynews.com.au/2020/200030/>.

² Legislative Assembly of the ACT (2018), *Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 1 November 2018, p. 4667 (Meegan Fitzharris, Minister for Health; ACT Government (2018), *Future proofing our health system: major infrastructure investment continues at Canberra Hospital*, [Joint media release], 12 December, available at: https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/act_government_media_releases/meegan-fitzharris-mla-media-releases/2018/future-proofing-our-health-system-major-infrastructure-investment-continues-at-canberra-hospital.

a) SPIRE site selection and development of Master Plan and Canberra Hospital Precinct Plan

There has been a lack of scrutiny of the current proposed site for SPIRE. Moreover, Minister Stephen-Smith has repeatedly advised that the current proposed location of SPIRE is “not for negotiation”.³ This is both confusing and disappointing. SPIRE’s location has been proposed and publicised in two different locations previously, with the last location change being announced by media release on 12 December 2018 (it is not yet known if the content of the media release was actually reported in the media). When the first two locations were announced, there was adequate opportunity for the concept and proposal to be discussed in the public arena, which is to be expected considering the level of financial investment and critical services to be provided by SPIRE within TCH. However, as the scope of SPIRE changed over the years, it has acquired the new “not negotiable” location, without the opportunity for review and analysis despite it being “the biggest investment in health infrastructure since self-government”⁴. In this regard, the GRA notes that the Commonwealth Parliament justifiably determines that all Commonwealth public works estimated to cost in excess of \$15 million must not commence until the work has been considered and reported on by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works. Therefore, why hasn’t the ACT Government, as a matter of due diligence, referred the SPIRE proposal to an Assembly Committee for scrutiny prior to the present inquiry which has been generated by a petition to the Assembly and prior to the site being declared “not negotiable”?

The GRA also considers that there should have been extensive consultation with a wider scope of hospital staff, and consultation with the Garran community. We understand that there has been some prior consultation with regional users of the residential accommodation services located at the hospital. Further consideration on consultation will be discussed under section b) of this submission.

With this background, the GRA would like to note that it opposes the current proposed location of SPIRE. The Garran community is deeply concerned that all necessary risk assessments for developing a building of SPIRE’s nature next to homes and a primary school were not undertaken and publicised prior to site selection, and many questions in this regard remain unanswered. Acute psychiatric patients and drug intoxication are typically first presented at emergency departments. What measures will be taken to protect nearby homes and school children should a dangerous situation arise from violent patients? In July 2018 and September 2019 dangerous incidents occurred at the Canberra Hospital whereby people were threatened or hurt by patients, one of which had stolen a policeman’s fire-arm.⁵ How will these occasional instances be managed, especially if the patient escapes custody from Emergency onto Palmer Street? As the nation’s capital with Government bodies and foreign embassies, it is also pragmatic to consider how SPIRE will manage mass casualty situations. Furthermore, which area will be used for human decontamination situations and how will this impact neighbouring residents and school children? It is widely recognised that helicopter take-off and landing is the flight phase of greatest risk. What will the helicopter flight path be for the SPIRE

³ For example, Stephen-Smith, R. (2019), Woden Valley Community Council SPIRE Presentation, Canberra; Stephen-Smith, R. (2020), Introductory presentation at SPIRE Forum, Canberra.

⁴ Legislative Assembly of the ACT (2019), *Debates of the Legislative Assembly, 24 October*, p. 4341 (Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith).

⁵ Pianegonda, E., Bourchier, D. and Evans, J. (2018), ‘Canberra Hospital patient steals police officer’s gun, fires shot at ceiling’, *The Canberra Times*, 19 July, available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-18/canberra-hospital-gun-fired-into-ceiling/10010068>; The Canberra Times online (2019), ‘ACT man hurt bystanders while trying to escape custody in Canberra hospital, police say’, *The Canberra Times*, 16 September, available at: <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6386746/bystanders-hurt-when-accused-tried-to-escape-custody-police-say/>.

helipad? It is important for these risk assessments to be completed and mitigation measures identified before the projects commences so as to alleviate the justifiable concerns of the community.

In addition, the location will adversely impact neighbouring residences in numerous ways, including property values, liveability and amenity. These impacts cannot be underestimated or brushed aside. The Government must be a “good neighbour” and provide due compensation to those who will be significantly adversely affected.

In addition to planning for SPIRE through rigorous due diligence, genuine community consultation and democratic scrutiny, planning should have occurred within the framework of a Canberra Hospital masterplan, and a Canberra Hospital precinct masterplan. At present the community has been advised that the “final phase of the master plan development is expected in June 2020”.⁶ The completion of a TCH masterplan (whether a reworked earlier plan or a new one) and a TCH precinct should be an urgent first step. To do otherwise leads to an expensive fragmented approach which undermines the services provided and does not support those working at TCH.

Assuming that there will be no change in the current proposed site for SPIRE, GRA submits the following recommendations:

- that all necessary risk assessments for the successful operation of SPIRE be completed and publicly available prior to demolition;
- pedestrian traffic exiting SPIRE onto Palmer Street and Gilmore Crescent be inhibited.
- compensation be given to any neighbouring residence that is damaged as a direct result of demolition, excavation and construction works on the SPIRE site;
- compensation for lost property values be given to residential owners affected in Palmer St and nearby homes in Gilmore Crescent and Dennis Street;
- compensation for the installation of double glazing in immediately affected properties, from the start of the demolition phase.

b) Consultation process and ongoing mechanisms for consultation with community

Genuine consultation and communication throughout the planning and construction phase is vital. Many Garran residents are hospital staff, patients, and professionals as well as neighbours of the hospital. Members of our community have watched the hospital being built, and have lived with the continuous construction that has occurred over the decades to transform the Woden Valley Hospital as it first was, into the Territory and region’s major hospital. We know the “ins and outs” of accessibility and safety (especially around the borders of the campus) better than most. In this regard we are confident we can positively contribute through consultation processes to the development of the hospital precinct master plan and in the planning of SPIRE.

It appears that the current SPIRE location site has been primarily influenced by the Building Health Services Steering Committee convened by the Minister. Specifically,

The advice from the SPIRE Steering Committee has been critical in determining the optimal location for SPIRE, acknowledging the hospital is an operational site where existing health services are delivered and will need to continue to be delivered while construction is underway.⁷

Given that SPIRE will be an immediate neighbour to homes and the primary school, and given the history of concerns raised by the community with relevant authorities over the decades about safety and traffic, it is therefore bitterly disappointing that there was no consultation with, or direct notice given to, Garran residents prior to the current site selection for SPIRE. It is especially disappointing

⁶ Debates, 2019, p. 4350.

⁷ ACT Government, 2018; and Debates, 2018, p. 4667 and 4668.

when considering that ACT Health and Silver Thomas Hanley reported the impacts on residents and the School in its ACT Ambulance Service Presentation on 15 March 2019. In particular the “traffic analysis – Palmer Street Ambulance Access”, identifies that the proposed site:

- Adds traffic activity to Palmer Street (and associated siren noise)
- Potentially adds activity along the school frontage if the secondary route shown is used.⁸

The Government should have openly communicated with those directly impacted by the proposal if there was little-to-no media coverage of the ACT Government’s media release in December 2018 (announcing the new location), and when considering some of the known impacts on the neighbouring homes and School.

Instead, the vast majority of Garran residents first learnt about the proposed location on the north-eastern side of the hospital campus at, or subsequent to, the SPIRE Project Public Forum on 26 September 2018 (10 months after the official announcement by media release).⁹ Garran residents were taken by surprise at the latest proposed location of SPIRE, as it had been previously publicised as being in the area of either building 3 or, the current helipad site up until December 2018.¹⁰ This experience has caused considerable and unnecessary distress to some within the community given the significant impacts of the proposed location. “...All developers should be good neighbours. That includes the ACT government.¹¹ The GRA therefore recommends:

- the establishment of regular and effective consultation and communication, between Garran residents, businesses and primary schools, and the appropriate Government body concerning development in the hospital precinct.

c) Project timeline

The urgent need to expand TCH’s capacity and to update its facilities has been widely recognised since 2008.¹² It is disturbing that, after many years of planning, discussion papers, reports and considerable expenditure, it has reached a political, and/or critical point requiring rushed action to be taken now on a new site, without the solid foundation of a hospital and precinct masterplan. To ensure that SPIRE is not a knee-jerk quick-fix development that does not “future proof” our health system, proper planning and consultation must occur first.

d) Vehicle access via Palmer Street and Gilmore Crescent

There is a fundamental need for emergency vehicles to have simple and straightforward access to the emergency department. People seeking to access emergency services can be distracted, drivers can be concerned for a loved one who is unwell, or they can be unwell themselves. Subsequently their driving and concentration may be compromised. It is therefore not a logical proposal for a tertiary referral hospital (which is specifically being redeveloped to increase its capability), to have its entry for emergency vehicles off a minor residential road. It is a cogent argument that the current location of the emergency department adjacent to Yamba Drive readily facilitates emergency vehicle and patient access and is robustly better than the current proposal.

⁹ ACT Government, 2018; and Debates, 2018, p. 4667.

¹⁰ ACT Labor, 2016.

¹¹ Debates, 2019, p. 4353.

¹² ACT Health, 2011, *Expanding hospital services in the ACT: an additional 400 Hospital Beds, Health Service Delivery, Public Consultation and Discussion Paper*; and Bushnell, I., 2020, ‘ACT Government’s malady of constantly playing catch-up is worth remedying’, *The RiotTACT*, 10 February, available at: <https://the-riotact.com/act-governments-malady-of-constantly-playing-catch-up-is-worth-remedying/355941>.

The proposed ambulance and delivery vehicle access to SPIRE from Palmer Street is illogical. Palmer Street is narrow and the topography inhibits visibility, especially at the intersection with residential Dennis Street. Retaining access to the campus from the main arterial roads by all hospital traffic will ensure the safety of local residential and school traffic, and reduce associated noise from sirens and delivery vehicles.

Ever since the then Woden Valley Hospital was opened in 1973, there has been significant and broad community concern about the traffic and safety at the interface between the residential part of the suburb and the hospital. This has become significantly worse in the last five years. It been well documented and regularly brought to the attention of the hospital and relevant government departments/directorates. We feel that the community's concerns have not been adequately addressed over the decades as the hospital has always had priority. The community has understood and has adapted to this situation. However, as the hospital has grown and changed from being a secondary hospital to a tertiary referral hospital, the level of traffic and corresponding concern, have grown. In this regard, the concerns have reached a point that we feel it warrants community action to ensure the safety of vulnerable people and the general community are no longer ignored or taken for granted.

Recommendation:

- that clear and simple access to the Emergency Department at Canberra Hospital be maintained via direct access from main arterial roads (ie. Yamba or Hindmarsh Drive).
- that Government and ACT Health support the petition tabled in the Legislatively Assembly on 28 November 2019 requesting there not be additional access to the Canberra Hospital via Gilmore Crescent or Palmer Street (this includes no additional access for delivery vehicles).

e) Safe traffic flow and parking in the hospital precinct

On 24 October 2019, the Minister for Health stated that “traffic analysis work is currently underway. This will be shared with the community at the earliest opportunity upon its completion”.¹³ The GRA looks forward to receiving a full copy of this information as promised and appreciates that establishing safe traffic flow in the hospital precinct is a complex matter.

Construction periods at the Hospital and increases in Hospital capacity obviously lead to the increase in traffic and pressure on the road network in the suburb.

Traffic congestion on Palmer Street, Gilmore Crescent, and Kitchener Street is a problem especially during drop-off and pick-up times at school. During these times, queuing across intersections, pedestrian crossing and carpark entries is also problematic. Keeping in mind that children are taught to “stop, look, listen and think” when crossing a road, traffic congestion and vehicles queuing across intersections limit pedestrian visibility. It also creates greater challenges for primary school aged children to judge and assess the safety of traffic movements. It is not uncommon for there to be near misses at the school children's crossings involving both parents and children, with motorists failing to stop when pedestrians are on the crossings. With these existing safety concerns, it is then deeply concerning to consider the impact that the SPIRE proposal will have from the noise generated by helicopters and emergency and delivery vehicles on childrens' abilities to safely judge traffic behaviour.

¹³ Debates, 2019, p. 4344-4345.

Previous reviews of traffic issues around Garran Primary School have in particular identified two issues from a safety perspective:

1. lack of safely accessible parking, and
2. congestion caused by parents attempting to access the limited kerb drop-off and pick-up spaces.

In addition, the inherent nature of hospital, and suburban residential, and school traffic are very different. We believe that safe traffic flow and parking can be achieved by increasing safe accessible parking for the school and parents, whilst keeping hospital traffic separate, from residential and school traffic, as much as possible.

During previous construction projects undertaken at the hospital campus and during non-construction daytime periods, parking varies between problematic to at times chaotic. For example, during the recent extensions to the National Capital Hospital, large areas of short-term parking on Gilmore Crescent (which would otherwise be used during school pick-up and drop-off, and those briefly accessing the hospital) was dedicated to exclusive use by construction workers and associated vehicles. Their vehicles overflowed into the other short-term parking areas with employers often covering the costs of any traffic infringement that was received by employees. The shortage of safe parking areas in this relatively small area immediately became a larger problem, with parents, construction workers and hospital workers parking where possible in residential streets (such as Eldridge Crescent and Hopegood Place) and at the local Garran shops. Garran has successful local shops and we would like to ensure that adequate parking is available for customers of these businesses. It is important for customers who have limited mobility to be able to park close by, especially those visiting medical practices and businesses.

Recommendations:

- Garran residents be consulted in the development of safe traffic and parking solutions for the hospital precinct (specifically Palmer Street and Gilmore Crescent);
- a robust plan for parking prior to construction be established and paired with a suite of enforceable measures;
- in consultation with ACT Ambulance Services, that an ambulance only parking area is designated near the medical practices at the Garran shops;
- parking availability at the shops be investigated and appropriate solutions provided, including whether more disabled parking could be made available at the Garran shops.

f) Community safety and environmental considerations

The ACT Government recently launched its *2019-2025 Climate Change Strategy*. Reducing emissions from transport, is a high priority and a key objective of the strategy, specifically to:

Support active travel, including the use of electric bikes, by improving the quality and safety of cycling and walking infrastructure.¹⁴

GRA would like to note that ACT Health's "Ride or Walk to School" Program also actively encourages and supports school children walking or riding to and from school. As outlined previously, the streets around SPIRE will become significantly more dangerous for children given the increase in traffic and the nature of the vehicles. This is likely to inhibit the use of active transport at a time when children

¹⁴ Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (2019), *ACT Climate Change Strategy 2019-2025*, Canberra, available at: https://www.environment.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1414641/ACT-Climate-Change-Strategy-2019-2025.pdf/_recache

could be developing positive habits around active travel that could last a lifetime, providing various other co-benefits in terms of health and wellbeing.

Members of our community have requested that SPIRE be an environmentally sustainable and healthy building which adopts a wide variety of “green building” tools and resources related to healthcare.

GRA’s other concerns in relation to community safety and environmental considerations have been covered in other sections of this submission.

Recommendation:

- establish proper bike paths in the residential areas around the hospital, (especially for school children making their way to and from Garran Primary School and Sts Peter and Pauls Primary School from part of the suburb near Hindmarsh Drive) as well as for hospital staff and allied health service employees. These bike paths should connect with the main bike-path network in Woden.
- that the SPIRE building be built to high environmental standards.

g) Impact on surrounding residences, school and community facilities

GRA’s concerns under this section have been covered in other sections of this submission.

h) Impact on existing hospital and emergency infrastructure and services

The GRA believe that medical professionals and allied health services are best placed to comment on this part of the terms of reference. However, the GRA notes that:

SPIRE, due to be completed in 2024, will only deliver 148 beds, about a third of the number originally planned, and almost a decade late, “by which time it is estimated an additional 400 beds will be required over 2017-18 bed numbers based on current growth estimates.”

“In short, if SPIRE was operational today it would be fully utilised and a further two similarly sized hospital bed supply projects would still need to be delivered by 2024 in order to meet currently estimated growth in demand for hospital beds.”¹⁵

In this regard, the GRA hopes that the Government, ACT Health, Major Projects Canberra and the Building Health Services Program Strategy Steering Committees¹⁶ have thoroughly and adequately consulted with the Hospital clinicians and unions to address their concerns, forecast capacity and need, while also ensuring that the impact on existing hospital and emergency services are not negatively impacted during the building and construction of SPIRE. In this regard, we hope that clinicians are and continue to be confident that they will be able to perform their duties to the highest standard, and that they are provided with high quality facilities that enable them to fulfil their duties.

i) Management of impacts on the safety of the community

Redevelopment and daily functioning of the Canberra Hospital should not and cannot be planned in isolation from the Hospital’s surrounds, especially when the safety of the local community is

¹⁵ Bushnell, I., 2020.

¹⁶ Or current equivalent body.

concerned. As mentioned previously the GRA requests the establishment of effective consultation, and open line-of-communication, between Garran residents and the appropriate Government body concerning development in the hospital precinct. Through regular consultation and communication, the significant impacts of the Hospital on the safety of the local community can be raised and hopefully, adequately addressed.

j) Helicopter access and impact of helicopter and emergency vehicle noise on surrounding residences and school

The GRA appreciates that helicopter access is a vital part of the hospital's critical care services. This necessary service generates noise during take-off and landing, and during hovering and wait periods. The proposed new location of the helicopter pad on the top of the SPIRE building will clearly impact neighbouring homes, and the neighbouring primary school's learning atmosphere and playground. The community still has a number of significant unanswered questions about the helicopter access and its impacts. What will the helicopter flight path be for the SPIRE helipad? In the case of an emergency with the helicopter itself, where will the emergency landing area be? Where will the "overflow" for the helipad be? (Currently it is Garran sports ovals and and/or the Philip District Playing Fields). What impact will the downdrafts from the helicopter have on homes and the school and its' playground? It is important for relevant risk assessments to be completed and mitigation measures identified and communicated to the local community. Discussion and recommendations in this regard have been made in other sections of this submission.

Recommendations:

- In partnership with the Garran Primary School Board and the Education Directorate, develop and implement noise pollution mitigation measures, such as double glazing. Thereby ensuring that the educational experiences and outcomes of Garran Primary School students are not compromised or negatively impacted.

Conclusion

Thank you again for this opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. We trust that the inquiry will bring about much needed change in the current and future planning processes of the Canberra Hospital.

Jennifer Berget

For and on behalf of the Garran Residents' Association

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