



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND URBAN RENEWAL

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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.

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Combined Community Councils of the ACT

Belconnen • Gungahlin • Inner South • North Canberra • Tuggeranong • Weston Creek • Woden Valley

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

The Combined Community Councils of the ACT (CCC) welcome the construction of the SPIRE Centre on the Canberra Hospital (TCH) campus but have major concerns about the chosen site, behind the main hospital buildings, opposite the Garran Primary School and fronting minor suburban roads. An important consideration is that TCH is the primary acute-care hospital in the region and will inevitably need space to grow as the population grows.

The proposed SPIRE Centre provides an opportunity to carefully plan the campus to interface efficiently with existing services so as to achieve better health outcomes and, thereby, better staff morale.

Some critical issues are:

- Direct ambulance access from the major road (Yamba Drive) is more efficient than from minor suburban roads;
- The design must ensure efficient and effective patient flows and interface with existing services;
- A master plan covering the campus, neighbouring streets and the Garran Primary School is essential before any development occurs;
- Genuine consideration of the impacts on the surrounding residents is needed; and
- Provision for efficient parking and traffic flows;
- Provision/retention of adequate green spaces around all the buildings for their known beneficial effects;

- Identification and preservation of space for future acute care expansion;
- Staff involvement to ensure the best health outcomes and to build morale.

Planning

A Precinct Plan for the hospital site is required to determine the best layout of the hospital for ambulance access, patient flows between wards etc., interfaces with existing services, parking, traffic movements, and to minimise impacts on the surrounding residents. The Palmer Street site for SPIRE was chosen, prior to either a Precinct or Master Plan being developed, on the basis that it would minimise disruption during construction, rather than for producing optimal health outcomes. This is no way to make the best decision for the location of the SPIRE building.

Access

TCH has many advantages, a significant one being its central location in Canberra and its access from the north-south and east-west road corridors. The 24-hour Emergency Department is currently located on Yamba Drive, a main arterial road that is easily accessible from all directions. Moving the ambulance access to a single-lane residential street, at the rear of the complex and opposite a primary school with 40km/h speed limits, is a very poor solution. In truth, it is not a solution.

Traffic

Many Garran residents have expressed concerns about SPIRE being located on Palmer St, including:

- **safety** of the community (especially children) due to the 24-hour ambulance movements on Palmer Street, a residential street adjacent to the Garran Primary School;
- **student drop-off** at the school, a long-time problem with already heavy morning traffic;
- **traffic congestion** on Kitchener St, Gilmore Cres and Palmer St which provide the main entrance to Garran and Hughes from Hindmarsh Drive.
- **parking shortages;**
- **noise** from the helicopter pad (on the nine-storey SPIRE).

Location

The SPIRE building is more than an Emergency Department, it is the hub of the campus. It will include medical imaging, a surgical inpatient unit, an intensive care unit, an acute cardiac care unit and a mental health short stay unit. Patients are likely to access this building for multiple reasons (e.g. imaging and surgery) so its location is critical for efficient and effective patient flows across the campus. Achieving hospital-wide patient flow and, ultimately, improving outcomes and the experience of patients, requires an appreciation of the hospital as an interconnected, interdependent system of care.

Whilst this has, no doubt, been considered in the planning, CCC doubt that the proposed site will be as successful as required. The long-term benefits of ambulance access and patient flows from delivering SPIRE on the centrally-located Building 3 would be significantly more effective, despite potential greater disruption during the renewal phase.

Providing for the Future

The Master Plan for the area should also include surrounding locations, such as the 5.5 hectare former high school/CIT site. These buildings were constructed in the 1960s by the Commonwealth and are structurally sound. Demolition of these buildings prior to the development of a master plan reduces opportunities for addressing the growing health and related education requirements in the area.

This site also has space for courses, research and student accommodation. In addition to the buildings, the site has a gym, access to playing fields and is within walking distance of the Woden Town Centre which is on Canberra's main north-south public transport alignment.

Utilising the former CIT site would allow for growth in the capacity of acute care services on the main hospital campus into the future. Developing that site now for other purposes, and the revenue that would bring, will reduce future options for expansion, thus inevitably increasing costs of development in the future.

Transport

Parking, traffic congestion and public transport access have been continuing issues at TCH. These issues need to be investigated and resolved through detailed traffic modelling and planning prior to construction of SPIRE. At times of major natural disasters, accidents with multiple casualties and infectious disease outbreaks, emergency departments are on the front line and often require great access and additional capacity to accommodate a sudden massive influx of patients. It is not apparent that the Palmer Street ambulance access is the better site for mass casualties.

Consultation

The decision-making process undertaken prior to the 12 December 2018 announcement of the Palmer Street site has not been explained. There has been a lack of consultation regarding the site for the emergency building which has caused dissention within the community. This has resulted in the ACT Government establishing the Local Community Reference Group. It is not clear how the ACT Government will ensure the Group represents the community's views, given the SPIRE site is not included for discussion.

Conclusion

In the 2008-09 Budget, the ACT Government released the *Your Health - Our Priority* initiative under which the Emergency building was to be centrally located on Building 3 with access from



Yamba Drive. Significant planning was done for this site which included a medi-hotel, a training and education precinct, and the ANU medical school. In the 2016 election, the emergency building was moved to the current helipad site and named SPIRE. In December 2018, the former ACT Minister for Health issued a media release announcing that SPIRE would be built between Hospital Road and Palmer Street. This continual change of mind does not inspire confidence.

Yours sincerely,



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On behalf of the Combined Community Councils of the ACT
Email: 

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