



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, TRANSPORT, AND CITY SERVICES
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the Territory Plan and other associated documents

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ACT Planning Changes – Planning Reflections
Red Hill Residents Group Committee – 18 October 2023

We are hearing a lot about the ACT Government's planning changes moving to an 'outcome focused' planning regime. Up front is planned urban infill to meet pressing housing needs, reducing our ecological footprint and creating a more liveable, sustainable, affordable Canberra. Some suggest that the changes don't go far enough. They cause grave concern for others.

All great cities have iconic and unique features that set them apart. Canberra is distinguished by the graceful form of the surrounding hills and natural vistas complimented by its tree lined streets and parkland. The problem with outcome focused planning is that, by definition, it is anything but specific. Good ideas are subjective and are driven by different agendas. Mixed results abound.

Cities grow and, while it is recognised that cities need to reduce the damaging effects of urban sprawl, it is also recognised that poor quality infill development, loss of green space and erosion of suburban qualities is equally damaging. Crowded blocks, changed streetscapes with the loss of trees, biodiversity and established character, and, critically, promoting an urban heat island effect engenders strong community resistance. Defective builds, oversized builds, tight builds, all contribute to outcomes that fall short of their promise. A critical factor in quality development lies with substantial requirements for onsite green space. Cramped medium to high rise development (with no space for large scale tree planting and little or no viable communal open space) and tight housing on single blocks (with reduced green space and tree cover) diminishes ecological sustainability. A legacy of loss.

Quality infill balances the demand for development in established and in new suburbs with the need for sunlight, space, biodiversity and greenery. It ensures protections for trees and green space that delivers both the housing quality and urban amenity sought. Various studies point to tree coverage (both private and tree-lined street) significantly reducing the ambient temperature during a peak heat event. The new planning regime needs to be enforced with care and with the will to ensure that it delivers an urban character having good design, space and greenery as the key elements. There needs to be enough green space, both private and public, to ensure liveability and wellbeing. It must stop the heat island effect.

In RZ1 urban zoned areas, the Government has announced that separately entitled dwellings of up to 120 squares will be permitted on any block over 800 square metres. The intention is to chart a path for urban infill with smaller, more affordable housing options with a lighter footprint. Some oppose this new policy as not going far enough in allowing redevelopment to meet housing needs. That might imply development at any cost. And there is concern with potential outcomes that feed only self-interested financial forces. Some previous dual occupancy infill development has not always held onto the best of Canberra, with an outcome seen only in the profit increase from oversized, block consuming housing, denying any sense of place. No real increase in smaller, affordable housing options with a light footprint seemed to follow.

The real test now will be to see whether the extra homes sought can be delivered in a way that responds to the challenges of a growing city without it becoming a heat island hell, biodiversity forgotten, a not so nice place to live. Residents optimistically aspire to have urban infill that delivers on the promise of both affordability and better urban amenity with clear rules that protect green space and tree canopy coverage, keeping the iconic character, and ensuring the ecological sustainability of this unique place.