



Standing Committee on Planning, Transport, and City Services

ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
Canberra, ACT 2601

26 October 2023

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE TERRITORY PLAN AND OTHER ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

The Molonglo Valley Community Forum (the Forum) is a non-political and secular group with the objective to preserve and improve the social, cultural, economic and environmental wellbeing of the Molonglo Valley and its growing community.

The Forum welcomes the opportunity to submit this EOI to the *Inquiry into the Territory Plan and other associated documents*. We wish to use this occasion to respond to the ACT Government's response to submissions received as part of the consultation on the ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project.

The Forum's [submission](#) to this process made two key recommendations to the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD):

1. Introduce a **"Mixed Use Design Guide"** to improve the quality of mixed-use development in the ACT.
2. Bring forward the proposal in the *Molonglo Valley District Strategy* to **upgrade the Molonglo Group Centre to "Town Centre" status** within the ACT centres hierarchy, to reflect the district's increased forecast population.¹

As outlined in the below extracts from the two consultation reports, EPSDD rejected both recommendations:

Not supported.

The design guides will sufficiently cover considerations for mixed use development.

[Territory Plan Consultation Report](#), page 55.

*Typically, a town centre offers employment opportunities and provides higher order retail facilities, offices and consulting rooms; cultural, community and public administration; entertainment, educational, religious and residential facilities. **Molonglo should not be upgraded to a town centre until it has been developed to provide these services.***

[ACT Planning System Consultation Response Report](#), Appendix A, page 3.

¹ canberratimes.com.au/story/8117760/call-for-town-centre-status-as-molonglo-valley-to-house-50-more-people-than-planned/

Now that the design guides have been released, the Forum accepts that the new planning system has the potential to produce better outcomes for mixed-use development. However, these improvements will depend on considered and consistent decision-making from EPSDD for all future development applications on mixed-use sites. The Forum will be closely monitoring this process to see whether the positive words in the design guides are translated into the real world.

On the issue of the Molonglo Group/Town Centre, the Forum maintains its original position. Group centres do not develop into town centres of their own accord. The Territory Plan contains a range of rules relating to matters such as parking, commercial floor space and shop size restrictions that apply specifically to group centres which stop them from growing to the scale of a town centre. The same rules that prevent Erindale, Kippax, and Coleman Court from becoming town centres will also limit the growth of a future Molonglo Group Centre.

Despite what the final *Molonglo Valley District Strategy* claims to be planning for in the long term,² a Molonglo Group Centre will not develop to provide the employment opportunities, the higher order retail facilities, the medical, cultural, community and public administration services, or the entertainment, educational, religious and residential facilities that would enable it to be classified as a town centre. The rules in the Territory Plan, old or new, will not allow that to happen.

This approach has Territory-wide implications. Limiting the Molonglo Valley's major centre to the scale of a group centre while simultaneously increasing its ultimate intended population will force future residents to travel outside the district for their basic day-to-day needs. This will produce more and lengthier car trips, longer commutes, higher greenhouse gas emissions, require more expensive transport infrastructure, and compound the existing pressures on the facilities of the neighbouring Belconnen and Woden Town Centres.

In line with decade-old recommendations,³ the Forum believes that the ACT Government needs to proactively plan for a Molonglo Town Centre now, rather than hoping that it will slip past the rules of its own Territory Plan and happen by accident at some undetermined point in the future. The latter approach is self-evidently unjustifiable, unsustainable and undesirable, and should be rejected.

Convenor, Molonglo Valley Community Forum

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² *Molonglo Valley District Strategy* (EPSDD, 2023), pages 12, 21 and 30.

³ *Molonglo Valley Stage 2 Group Centre and Environs Planning and Design Framework – Urban Design Component* (Hames Sharley, 2012), page 217.