



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Environment,
and Planning

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the Role and Future of the Woden Town Centre in the context of a compact city

Submission number: 075

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To: LA Committee - Environment <LACommitteeEnvironment@act.gov.au>

Subject: Enquiry into the Role and Future of the Woden Town Centre.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this matter. I'm happy for my name to be published with this submission.

The apparent lack of any overarching vision for the Woden Town Centre (WTC) in recent decades has been alarming. Ad hoc, piecemeal development which seems to benefit developers rather than the community has left us with a sad, desolate, and disconnected urban space, a shadow of its former self and a contrast to Town Centres elsewhere in Canberra. It is NOT a destination, but rather a dormitory outpost, from/ through which people travel to other parts of Canberra. WHY??

It's time to get serious about Woden, to reverse the neglect and give it some love. We need a vibrant Town Centre, as outlined in the Territory Plan, which involves *real* town planning, and which puts community first. In short, it's time to put the 'beating heart' back into the WTC.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES:

Where is our Arts Centre, our Community Centre, our theatre, community meeting rooms, music venues? We must be the only town centre in the ACT with none of these things. It's vital to rectify this if we want a vibrant town centre for the future.

There's been talk of building a Community Centre on the eastern side of Callum St, but why has the building on the northern side of the Town Square been vacant for decades? The perfect location, wasted. At the very least, Woden Community Services should have been given part of that building when they were evicted from Callum Offices.

And as for the Callum Offices: why are they up for sale? An iconic example of 80s brutalist architecture, just left to rot, another shameful waste of public infrastructure which has so much potential. John Andrews was a world renowned architect, it should be the jewel in the crown of Woden's public infrastructure.

Meanwhile the new CIT has been repeatedly touted as the answer to our problems, but we're kidding ourselves if we believe that, it has shown no sign of life thus far.

RECREATION:

The concrete to green ratio in the WTC has become seriously unbalanced. We have no lake to beautify, cool, and provide recreational space. Pocket parks have been lost or neglected, many sporting facilities have been demolished, and green space is sadly lacking in the concrete jungle of apartment towers and a rapidly growing population. This is a serious fail of urban planning, particularly as our climate changes and the heat island effect worsens into the future.

So for our future physical and mental health we need more green space for people (especially apartment dwellers) to exercise, walk their dogs, play with their kids, grow vegetables etc. A few potted trees atop an apartment building just doesn't cut it. We need the restoration of our lost sporting facilities, eg indoor basketball, bowling alley, pitch 'n' putt. Then there's the pool: the Phillip Pool debacle is the latest nail in our recreational coffin; a 50 metre pool is a MUST for our growing population. Better still, a decent indoor/outdoor aquatic facility to last us well into the future.

STREETSCAPE/AMENITY:

Where to start? Zoning? This looms *large* over our Town Square, sadly. As if we didn't have enough problems here already (wasteland, anyone?), the zoning allows for ridiculous heights on all sides! At the very least, the northern side should remain at its current height for maximising sunshine (and minimising wind), or you might as well just forget any sort of life at all in the Square. (The disaster that is the nearby Grand Central towers is a prime example of why this is critical: the CIT precinct is overshadowed and windy for most of the day.) Meanwhile, Westfield has been allowed to shut down all commercial activity OUT to the Town Square, and this needs to be rectified if we want any life in central Woden.

The new West Plaza and CIT precinct has not lived up to expectations either, with overshadowing, blank walls (Youth Foyer), very little prospect of commercial activity, and a road right through the middle! Why? Our second large public space wasted! Both these large public spaces need opening up with cafés, bars, music venues, restaurants, so that the community can gather and give it life, day and night. This in turn will make these spaces safer for us all. Give our community a reason to come to Woden! Imagine West Plaza with regular markets, community events, concerts, cultural gatherings.... what a difference that would make to the life of our community.

TRANSPORT/ PARKING:

Decent traffic modelling around Woden could improve traffic flow, reduce congestion, and improve access for pedestrians and cyclists. Corinna Street is a good example of bad urban planning: that disastrous southern roundabout for starters. The library and Health Centre are difficult to access, with parking problematic. Access to/through the WTC from the West is difficult for everyone, including active travellers. And why on earth is there no parking for students at the CIT?? Public transport at the CIT will not suit many, eg those with children or with jobs or other commitments to get to/from in a hurry.

CONCLUSION:

It's time to put the community first in Woden, to rejuvenate the WTC for our physical and mental health, and to bring life back to our community's heart. We need to invest in public infrastructure, improve streetscapes, safety, and recreational opportunities, and restore pride in our town centre. It needs to be a destination. In short, we need to resuscitate our 'beating heart'.

Jude Dodd