



**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**

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

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**Summary**

- no more high-rise blocks of flats;
- more green space and more trees, not less;
- more community and sports facilities, not less;
- a walk-in medical centre;
- more frequent bus service; and
- a hardware store.

**Woden population**

Woden is more than the town centre, it also includes the residents who live in the Valley's 12 suburbs. The population of Phillip, which includes the town centre, was about 5,000 in the 2021 census; it would be significantly higher now. In fact, the Phillip population almost doubled from 2016 to 2021, with most of the additional residents living in recently built apartment blocks.

The population of the entire Woden Valley was just under 40,000 people (2021 Census).

The role and future of the town centre directly affects the future of the entire Woden Valley population.

**Housing**

No more high-rise blocks of flats in Woden. There are at about 50 apartment towers built or planned in Woden, housing more than 11,000 people. It already looks like a concrete jungle, with very tall buildings blocking out the sky above and overshadowing the ground below. Driving into Woden is like driving through a concrete canyon.

Such an environment is not liveable, nor does it provide any amenities for the thousands of residents, crammed into tiny concrete boxes.

To be truly liveable, Woden Town Centre needs a mix of 'dwelling' sizes and a diversity of 'dwelling' types to cater for all households, including the single studio-dweller, couples or flatmates, families with several children, multi-generational households and senior singles and couples.

While a 50 sq m two-bedroom box may be acceptable to singles or childless couples, it is not at all liveable or appropriate for all these different household types and sizes. Yet that is the only type of housing available in the Woden high rises.

Instead of high-rise blocks of flats, how about the so-called 'missing middle'? At least the townhouses or terraces are only two storeys high, built on a much more human scale, and not 28 storeys.

None of the flats in Woden could be called affordable, as there's not much change from \$500,000 for a one-bedroom box.

There are also already several so-called 'build to rent' projects in Woden.

### **More green space**

All this development has resulted in a significant loss of open green space. If COVID taught us anything, it was the crucial importance of open spaces within walking distance of all residences (house or flat) to be able to get out into the fresh air and go for a walk. This is critical for personal and community wellbeing.

There is virtually no green space left in the Woden Town Centre, it's all concrete and bitumen, contributing to the urban heat island effect.

There are almost no trees left in the Woden Town Centre, just a few along Bradley St and some new seedlings planted where the old bus interchange was. A tree canopy of at least 40% is required to mitigate the effects of urban heat.

Many trees were chopped down to build the bus depot on Launceston St, and not replaced.

Woden needs an open green public space with grass, shady trees, seating, BBQs and a children's playground. Such places used to be called public parks.

More green space, more trees, more 'living infrastructure' would enhance sustainability and increase resilience to climate change.

Why not develop a public park along Yarralumla Creek? The strip of land along the creek cannot be built on (or should not, it's a flood buffer zone). It is already a major pedestrian and cycling route between Curtin and Woden, used daily by many people, from students going to school, cyclists commuting to work, dog-walkers and locals simply going for a walk. It is already vital for active travel and in the future will provide access to two light rail stops (Phillip Oval and Yarra Glen).

While Phillip Oval itself is green, it is not available to the public, as it is fenced and the gate locked. Can't even walk across it.

## Community facilities

There is a severe shortage of community facilities in Woden, whether for sports, recreation or culture. Despite the massive increase in population over recent years, Woden has lost most of its community facilities. Ironic really; the greater the number of people, the fewer facilities available to them.

Facilities lost (or about to be lost) include;

- pitch and putt golf course
- basketball stadium
- tennis courts
- bowling greens
- bowling alley
- ice skating rink
- swimming pool
- library (under review).

Meanwhile, Belconnen and Tuggeranong have their own arts centres, sports stadiums and swimming pools, even Molonglo has a pool. It is no good telling Woden residents they can go to a non-existent pool in Commonwealth Park, or to any other sports or cultural facility in, say Tuggeranong or Belconnen. The government does not tell Gungahlin residents to go to Belconnen for such facilities, so why are Woden Valley residents the only Canberrans to be treated this way?

Facilities which are desperately required to make Woden Town centre more liveable for its thousands of residents, as well as the residents of the Valley's 12 suburbs, include;

- an aquatic centre with a 50m pool;
- an indoor multi-purpose sports stadium;
- an arts centre, suitable for events such as arts exhibitions, theatre and musical performances, live music, and community functions;
- a community centre available for use by community groups; and
- an outdoor space suitable for markets, summer theatre or music performances and seasonal community celebrations (think; Easter egg hunts, Mother's/Father's Day events, Christmas carols)

A cultural centre would also have the effect of stimulating the so-called 'night-time economy': eg after attending an exhibition or performance, patrons could then party on at nearby restaurants and bars (of which there are quite a few in Woden).

Such facilities would improve social connectivity and encourage participation in a variety of activities by all demographics.

It should not be forgotten that these facilities would also be for the approx. 35,000 residents of the 12 suburbs that comprise the Woden Valley.

## **Health**

Woden is the only town centre that does not have a walk-in medical centre for minor illness and injuries.

While the Canberra Hospital is located in Woden, patients are actively discouraged from attending for all but life-threatening illness or injury. Even if the patient does attend the hospital, he or she is likely to be there for hours before being seen.

I am unaware of any doctors in the Woden Valley who bulk bill.

Belconnen, Dickson, Gungahlin, Tuggeranong and Weston Creek all have walk-in medical centres. Why doesn't Woden?

## **Education**

With all the additional residents of the high-rise blocks of flats in Woden, surely some of them will have children who need to go to school.

As far as I am aware, Garran Primary School is the only school to be expanded to cope with increased enrolments.

The rest of the Woden Valley schools would be at or near capacity. So where will these children go to school? Will existing schools become overcrowded, with insufficient facilities?

While there are many plans for new high-rise blocks of flats in Woden, there are no plans to expand the existing infrastructure, such as schools, to cope with the increased population.

## **Transport to the town centre**

Woden is currently a transport hub for the southside, with Rapid buses connecting to Civic, the Inner South, Tuggeranong, Weston Creek and Belconnen (via Civic), and local buses through the Woden Valley suburbs.

The new bus interchange on Callam St is further away from the shops than the previous bus stops. This means it is a longer walk from the shops to the bus stop for people carrying groceries (usually women), including pregnant women, women with young children and prams/strollers, the mobility impaired and the elderly. How can a longer walk possibly be described as improving pedestrian access?

The path to the bus stop is now through the new CIT, so shoppers will have to push their way through 6,500 students as well. This may be intimidating to some older or less mobile shoppers, just as gangs of local youths were at the former bus interchange. In short, it will reduce liveability for Woden Valley residents.

Local buses from the surrounding suburbs to Woden run twice every hour. This is not frequent enough. Even three buses an hour (ie every 20 minutes) would be a great improvement.

When the tram finally arrives, my greatest fear is that local buses will be cancelled, just as they were in Gungahlin. The tram will take twice as long to travel between Woden and Civic as the current Rapid buses. Passengers from Weston Creek and Tuggeranong will be forced

to travel on the bus to Woden, then change to the tram to Civic. Local buses from the surrounding suburbs will be cancelled (the draft EIS states 'minimal interaction' between the local buses and the tram stops).

### **Woden Master Plan**

Whatever happened to the Woden Master Plan (WMP)? Has it been replaced by this new Inquiry?

Under the WMP, the land along both sides of Yarralumla Creek was to be retained, restored, protected and enhanced as part of the so-called blue-green network. Nothing's happened.

There was also supposed to be connectivity corridors between urban parks, open space and nature reserves in the Woden Valley, eg Oakey Hill, Mt Taylor and Farrer Ridge. Again, nothing's happened. These reserves and their connectivity corridors must be preserved for all animal, bird and plant species, and not just the threatened ones, such as the gang-gang cockatoo. All are part of Canberra Nature Park, and must never be developed;

### **Hardware store**

Can we please have a hardware store in Woden? There isn't one.

Since the last one closed, to be replaced by McDonalds, Woden Valley residents must travel to Tuggeranong or Fyshwick for the most basic of household hardware and tools.

A hardware store is as essential as a supermarket.