From:	Committees
To:	Strkalj Veronica
Subject:	FW: Submisison: Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No. 306: Inquiry by the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services
Date:	Tuesday, 3 July 2012 10:14:40 AM

From: stephanie henry [redacted]
Sent: Monday, 2 July 2012 10:38 PM
To: Committees
Subject: Submisison: Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No. 306: Inquiry by the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services

Submission to the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services: Inquiry into Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No. 306 – Residential development, estate development and leasing codes.

[redacted]

Please accept my apologies: this submission is late. I hope you will consider it in your inquiry.

To begin, improving the energy efficiency of homes is a great initiative. However, tackling the target of achieving peak per capita emissions by next year, a reduction of 40% of emissions by 2020 and 80% by 2050 requires ambition to match the set goals. According to Chris Ryan, 'cities currently account for around 75% of global energy demand and 75% of greenhouse gas production' (Satterthwaite and Dodman 2010; UNEP 2011: cited in Ryan 2011). It is in the planning and development of Canberra, therefore, that the ACT must focus its energy in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Planning and development is an essential part of achieving and sustaining that reduction.
If we consider that the homes to be planned and built under the DV306 will still be standing and functioning in 2020 and 2050, the ACT government must enable the construction industry to utilise as much of the available knowledge and technology on sustainable design as we have reasonable access to. A minimum level of energy efficiency is a good idea but I consider that 6 stars is too low. Why should we simply implement the minimum standard in the Building Code of Australia? Given the rate of reduction of greenhouse gas emissions stipulated, we should be focussed on challenging our local industries to produce designs and structures that go beyond the standard, whose foresight will continue to contribute to the city's sustainability. Has the committee considered an increasing scale up to seven or eight stars by a set date? Or financial incentives for the design and construction of buildings that reach an eight or nine star rating? I realise that the Territory Plan is subject to periodic review but given the content of what has been put forward, it would be sensible to consider mechanisms like this now, to set an example and a high bar. A higher mandatory standard could have the effect of generating an exceptional local industry for sustainable design and construction, which is only going to be in higher demand in the coming years. This will therefore be of benefit to the construction industry as it stands, promoting re-skilling and encouraging talented and forward-thinking members to stay in (or move to) Canberra.
The provision of solar access for each dwelling and its calculation based on Canberra's specifications is also laudable. However, I am concerned that the minimum block size for single dwellings may be reduced from 800 to 700 square metres, with no change to the 50% plot ratio. Increases to principal private open space with the number of inhabitants seems to be a suggestion rather than a mandate. If Canberra is to become a world leader in sustainable urban planning, sustainability of individual houses and living spaces must not be set aside for the perception of more efficient land use. I would like to see a certain percentage of plot size mandated for vegetation, between 50% and 65%, and I would prefer that minimum plot size be maintained at 800 square metres. 10% of block space for planting as per the private open space provision for compact blocks, for example, is too little. The benefits to residents of having greater access to garden space and nature within the city are many. Jane Tarran explores a variety of benefits in her work referenced below, but in general they include:

- Retention of Canberra's character as a city which coexists with its landscape and with nature

- Health of citizens: promotion of mental and physical wellbeing through outdoor activity, interaction with nature as a counterpoint to working in an artificial office environment, improvement of the city environment through the detoxifying presence of vegetation, hands-on education on nutrition.

- Supply of garden-grown produce: 'a home garden of a size of 97m² (7.6m X 12.8m) could produce almost all the vegetables required for two people annually' (Ghosh), 'if all foods are grown within 100 km farm to plate travel distance, a 96% reduction in emissions is possible,' in current food transport emissions in New Zealand (Ghosh) and 'suburban residential blocks generally range less than 500m² to 1000 m² in area and this area of land could produce nearly most of the vegetable food demand for a household and could also produce surplus fruits' (Ghosh)

- Promoting biodiversity: through the protection of habitats of native flora and fauna within the suburbs and the protection of Canberra's urban forest.

- Interaction with nature normalised: promotes a greater sense of appreciation for natural environment and a greater understanding of consequences of one's actions on the natural environment.

Effectively, normalising a high standard of sustainable design across the building industry and ensuring that dwellings have a good supply of open space for vegetation is more likely to encourage residents to behave in sustainable ways. This could easily have a flow-on effect of reducing emissions in the ACT, above the action the government is already taking on that front.
A ratio of green space does not have to be restricted to houses and housing estates. It can be mandated for apartment blocks, shopping precincts and some industrial areas as well. Patios, rooftops, walls and atriums can all be used to provide this.

Setting a higher percentage for greenery will encourage creative compliance and the development of more imaginative ways of using space. This could also help the developments to achieve higher energy efficiency ratings (see, for example, Tarran 2011). Sustainability and access to green space could also be part of the considerations for deciding development approval and part of the zone objectives.

It is especially important to consider the availability of vegetated, green space, both private and public, in the process of infill of inner suburbs of Canberra. The unique environment of this city is especially evident there. It would be a great shame if that were to be surrendered without thought. It is a challenge to the government to maintain the availability of land and housing and to attempt to manage the affordability of homes in Canberra. The pressure to simply increase density should be resisted if that does not also account for access to green spaces. The government has a responsibility to citizens to provide an environment that contributes to wellbeing, both in the present and the future. New developments that must take place to provide affordable housing in a market under pressure are not exempted from this merely by dint of their necessity. The intrusion of higher density housing in inner Canberra should not and does not need to interrupt the ethos or environment of those suburbs.

There is a tension that exists within sustainable development approaches: one way would see higher density localities to promote more efficient use of public resources, another way would maintain lower density to promote a city whose citizens have immediate access to nature. I am in favour of a lower density city, despite the benefits proclaimed for sustainability through higher density. Limiting the number of dwellings permitted in the RZ2 zone and lowering the density of that zone I see as an overwhelming positive. Comments that the proposed reduction in density are ridiculous and will reduce density by a large proportion fail to take into account the nature of Canberra and its unique character. The potential for this density provision to lead to larger dwellings on blocks was criticised, however I may point out that such dwellings (now being replaced in many areas with expensive units catering to small numbers of cohabitants) have provided convenient and appropriate housing for some of Canberra's large student community in a rental market that is currently very expensive.

Although the challenge of creating a carbon-neutral city may seem great, it is important to remember another characteristic of cities:

> …when it comes to social and technological innovation and to revolutionary ideas and movements, the urban crucible is what Glaeser [2011] has coined "our species greatest invention" because it amplifies the vital, dynamic and creative potential of human interaction and 'collaborative brilliance' - for art, for knowledge, for prosperity, both material and social. It is this 'nourishing and flourishing' nature of urbanity to which one can attribute its continuing global success. Cities and urban life have the ability to nourish the very social characteristics that will help its citizen-species to evolve, to adapt, to innovate, to transform the conditions for life and well-being. (Ryan)

Canberra has a large advantage over other cities in this respect: we have access to some of the top thinkers in our nation, housed in the number of universities; Canberra was planned and developed as a cutting-edge innovation; the city has largely retained its character as a symbiosis of urbanity and nature and the Canberran economy is largely stable. These are great conditions to generate inspired solutions to sustainability conundrums that may then also be applied more widely.

The Territory Plan, as an instrument of planning and development policy, should reflect the ambitions of the Canberran people and should imagine Canberra in light of those dreams and expectations. There are many ways of building sustainable ideals into that policy. DV306 puts forward some great ideas to start with but should go further. Sustainable planning must also consider the home lifestyles that it will promote through its implementation, as well as the great potential of the city to become a leader in sustainable planning and development.

Thank you for your consideration.

References:

Sumita Ghosh, 'Growing healthy local food: Sustainability, Potential and household participation in Home Gardens,' presented at the State of Australian Cities National Conference, Tuesday, 29 November – Friday, 2 December, 2011, available at <http://soac2011.com.au/full-papers-list.php>

Chris Ryan, 'Eco-Acupuncture: designing future transitions for urban communities for a resilient low-carbon future', presented at the State of Australian Cities National Conference, Tuesday, 29 November – Friday, 2 December, 2011, available at <http://soac2011.com.au/full-papers-list.php>

Jane Tarran, 'Improving Canberra's Sustainability: why urban tree canopy and other vegetation matters', presented in workshop 5 of the Sustainable Future program of the ACT Department of Environment and Sustainable Development, 7 April 2009, available at <http://www.actpla.act.gov.au/topics/significant_projects/planning_studies/sustainable_future/workshop_five/presenters_menu>