



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into ACT Libraries

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From: Matt Walsh
To: [LA Committee - ETCS](#)
Subject: Submission to the inquiry into ACT public library services – September 2018
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I'm a frequent library user and am very happy with the ACT's current library services—and with the wonderful team of librarians who work so hard and well to provide them.

I see libraries as crucial supports to an educated, civil society. To read—and these days to watch, to hear and to search for on the internet—about things beyond a person's immediate experience is a well-proven means of getting out of yourself and appreciating the wider world. Libraries help people learn about and value our world and other people, and mature into contributing citizens.

Getting more funds into the library resource budget was a valuable step and provides benefits, especially intangible benefits, to the community, well exceeding the monetary investment.

Our libraries—and the excellent librarians who work in them—do a great job. I like being able to talk with knowledgeable and friendly librarians. As a frequent user of library services, I often talk with the librarians and also make regular use of the reservations service which delivers items to the branch of my choice.

Mostly I borrow hard copy books (as well as some DVDs and CDs). I like the feel and scent of books as well as reading the print on the page. They help me relax, learn and experience worlds, lives and events beyond my everyday existence. I find it easy to hold a book, turn its pages, leaf backwards and forwards (especially when reading non-fiction) and focus on the printed word. When I can't visit a library, I do enjoy being able to access reading material on the app; but it's just not the same as a physical book.

I also like being physically inside the library buildings, walking around or sitting in the public spaces, enjoying the space, architecture and relative quiet, browsing for books and other items on the shelves and reading the newspapers. I'm grateful that the library nearest me, the Woden branch, opens late on Monday nights and on weekends. This fits my schedule as I can't always make it into a library in normal business hours. I also enjoy visiting the other branches, particularly Kingston, Tuggeranong and Erindale. I occasionally venture up to Kippax, Dickson and Gunghalin. Each space is different, each a good experience. And everywhere the library staff—these wonderful librarians—are there to assist or just chat about the books we've read. And those conversations can be unexpectedly valuable.

Our ACT libraries are brilliant just as they are: as libraries. Although some branches would appear to benefit by letting out rooms, I'd be saddened to see this happen at the expense of housing collections on site. (I note with regret that the Woden branch no longer holds the formerly excellent collection of motor vehicle maintenance manuals). To my mind, it would be a mistake to dilute library services by combining libraries with other government outreach or social services—this would lead to a dilution in library services and a loss of focus in what is currently a powerful civilising and educational tool in our community. There's nothing wrong with community hubs, but libraries need a committed space, in which the focus is on the provision of library services.

If community spaces must be developed within or next to our libraries, please do so with an eye to controlling noise! On the rare occasions I've had the privilege of being in a library at story time for the children, I've loved the excitement and drama. But these enlivening events are exceptions, not the norm, in our libraries. There are so very few quiet, indoor public spaces in

our cities. I can relax, breathe and just be in a library and in a way I simply can't in the jangling cacophony of a shopping mall. And I see plenty of other people who like to spend time in our libraries—they too seem to value this relatively quiet and calm environment.

I accept that change is inevitable over time. However sad experience has shown time and again that change occurs for the better when both incremental and carried out with an awareness of the value of what we currently have. I'm sure that somewhere it is written:

New and different

does not necessarily equate

to better.

Please let our libraries stay libraries and continue to provide the two crucial things they always have: Access both to knowledge and to other worlds of experience, and the quiet spaces in which to absorb them.

Matt Walsh

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