



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Environment,
Planning, Transport and City Services

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Petition 002-25: Hawker Village shops redevelopment

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Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services
ACT Legislative Assembly
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Submission to the Inquiry into Petition 002-25: Hawker Village shops redevelopment

To the committee,

I have been a long time resident in Hawker and the condition of the shops is such an important issue to the community, so it is great to see this being looked into; several of our local MLAs have also been very responsive to correspondence over this issue, which has been commendable.

I note Minister Steel's decision to refuse the application, and to send the project "back to the drawing board". It remains to be seen if another proposal is forthcoming. Whatever eventuates, and I think the strong response to Ms Barry's petition demonstrates this, there is a strong desire for proper community consultation about any redevelopment. Furthermore, that this be conducted by the ACT Government and not be left to the proponent/s of any redevelopment.

Woolworths did conduct some consultation, and I'm not knocking that, but this cannot be a substitute for the Government to independently discern community attitudes. This is because the conflict of interest for a development proponent to be engaging in community consultation on their own project is manifest. Particularly when it would have likely been contracted out, and - therefore - for those actually conducting the process, Woolworths is the customer, not the public.

I would offer some wider submissions which I hope might be considered. For instance, in the current cost of living crisis and the prominence afforded to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)'s inquiries into the conduct of the big two supermarkets, that the ACT Government should take market power into consideration when approving new and expanded supermarkets.

Put simply: that the Government should not be acting to further entrench the duopoly of Coles and Woolworths. As *The Canberra Times* reported last year - in 2009, Canberra had 13 Woolworths supermarkets - we now have 20. We used to have 8 Coles stores, we now have 13. This has come directly at the expense of smaller, community grocers, such as IGAs (which have declined from 28 to 17). And we can see now from the current cost of living crisis that such expansion of the two giants is making the community materially worse off.

Woolworths already has a large store at Belconnen and Kippax (the latter likely to expand even further when that centre is eventually redeveloped). Hawker is also proximate to two Coles stores within a similar distance (Jamison Centre and Belconnen). Is the thing the community needs even

more, larger supermarkets owned by the big two who have treated both suppliers and the public with disdain?

No doubt shoppers will be assured “greater choice” at a redeveloped store with a larger footprint. However, this risks the viability of the small businesses at the Hawker centre. The centre currently has two bakeries, and the Woolworths Metro does not include one. Is it likely that both small businesses would survive a new, expanded Woolworths offering fresh baking in-house? Similarly concerns exist for the deli the Woolworths would likely also contain.

Larger centres can support a large supermarket alongside small businesses, but Hawker is not a large centre. It is a medium sized centre and always has been. There is clearly some desire for a refresh, but residents have long been clear what they like about the centre - easy accessibility, availability of parking (where else is there 5 minute parking just metres from the supermarket door?), the co-location of medical services, the outdoor amenity, the community feel.

The aborted proposal around 2011 to build 4-6 story buildings on the two main car parks in the face of community opposition was because of exactly this; that residents are clear about what they value about the shops’ character and do not want “redevelopment for redevelopments’ sake” or any proposal that will overall make the centre worse off.

To that end, it would be helpful for the committee to provide clarity on what exactly the criteria are by which the Government will judge any future proposal? Is it, as the Minister indicates, to do with whether or not there are apartments included? Is it about community consent? How is this to be measured? Is it to do with the public good, in respect of ensuring that residents have access to a range of traders? Is there a public interest in maintaining a balance between small and larger businesses?

The concern stemming from the direct approach Woolworths made to the ACT Government to acquire the carpark is a fear that the community gets “cut out” of this process, as compared to a development proposal which the government itself was undertaking. Therefore, it would be encouraging to see the committee look into what standard of consultation is required in these circumstances; a guarantee of a Government-led consultation on a redevelopment proposal gives residents confidence that they are an integral part of the process, and not an afterthought. And this, respectfully, should be the case regardless of who the proponent is.

Yours sincerely

Dion Jones
Hawker resident

