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Planning System Reform Project: Comments from ACT For Trees Inc

At your invitation to comment on the Planning Reform Project, ACT for Trees' responses are submitted for your consideration.

I have also attached ACT for Trees' earlier submission to Ms Jacqui Lavis, Director, Strategy Planning and Policy Branch) ACT Planning & Land Authority) following our attendance at the public meeting on Tuesday 5 July 2005 to discuss the Planning Reform Project.

A review of the Planning System Reform Project is very important task to undertake at this time when Canberra is face by the four key issues: urban redevelopment, revitalising Civic Centre, school closures and protection of the landscape setting of Canberra as the Nation's Capital.

OUR RESPONSES

The reform package contains a number of new initiatives. In particular, the proposals for Development Assessment Tracks that indicate in advance the level of assessment that development applications will have to undergo for code and development approval (Part 7.2). While this will require further work to clarify the assessment tracks to be followed for the many different kinds of development projects, **we strongly support more assessment of higher impact proposals that could adversely affect planning and design outcomes.**

While there is provision for enquiry panels for EIS (Part 8.3), **enquiry panels should also be established for high impact urban development projects with the emphasis on economic viability, sustainability and urban design outcomes.** These enquiries should be open to the interested public and could provide an alternative and better procedure for public consultation. There should a requirement for developers of the major building projects to prepare and submit impact assessments and/ or economic viability studies with their development application.

We are concerned about the recent demise of the Planning Advisory Committee, and no provision the draft bill for its replacement. In the bill **the Land Agency Board is retained with " at least 5, but not more than 8 members" Part 43 (42).** Other cities have Planning Committees to give independent advice to their Planning Authority and to their Minister. If the meetings of the Planning Committee were open to the public they would also have an important role of informing the community about planning and design matters.

The period of three weeks prescribed for public comment and consultation on major development project is far too short. Some of the problems that ACTPLA and developers experience with public consultation could be overcome **if the public were consulted at an earlier stage of a project.**

Public consultation must involve more than wish lists of community and unreal expectations about what can be achieved. Community goals and expectations often contradict each other, and from experience of recent forums are never thoroughly evaluated or talked through. ACTPLA must find ways to improve the process of public consultation, **including more focus on trade-offs that have to be made** to achieve agreed futures. This should give the community a better understanding of the particular planning and management strategies that must be pursued over a long period to achieve sustainable and better built urban environments.

In all this there is the question of real public participation in planning and development decisions as a continuation of the public consultation process. We believe this can be done at the local level, but requires formal arrangements using perhaps, the **Minister's earlier proposal for Community Planning Forums** approach and the selection of those who will have responsibility for reporting final community decisions back to the Minister and accepting responsibility for the planning outcomes in their particular areas. Professional backup, support staff and funding may be required for the CPF's if they are to be effective;

Canberra urgently requires more informed discourse, research and design effort into the entire issue of integrated planning and urban design. Planning and design control is required over the whole process. However this is unlikely to result in better environments without the skills of good urban designers, and the appointment of **a chief architect and/or a design committee to exercise a mediating role in the approval process.**

Keith Storey
On behalf of ACT for Trees Inc

7 August 2006