



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, TRANSPORT, AND CITY SERVICES
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Planning Bill 2022

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The obsession of the ACT Government with density is harming the fabric of the city, with green backyards teeming with native birds, blue-tongue lizards and so on replaced with concrete inhabitable by nothing except the odd introduced sparrow looking for scraps to eat among discarded rubbish. It will result in more people using the same over-crowded roads, especially as the light rail seems to have mysteriously failed to actually increase the density and frequency of the public transport network as exemplified by the last major changes to the bus network.

Of course, the fetish for density—or a ‘compact city’ to use another catch-phrase—would not matter so much if the ACT Government did not share the fixation and mania for continued large population growth. This continued expansion, ‘Big Australia’ makes no sense from a sustainability perspective. Indeed, the counterproductivity of our high rate of population growth can only be unrecognised by an act of wilful blindness, something which many are only too eager to partake in. Dense, heavily-paved cities with black roofs and the only substantial green space being provide by the verges will provide a nightmare to live in once the effects of climate change are more heavily felt. Denser development will also promote a greater amount of polluted runoff to enter our waterways, features that have not exactly been superlative when it comes to water quality or the resulting useability.

One thing that should be considered in any estate development or large-scale development is the effect on the city’s water supply. The chance for the Cotter Dam to be enlarged came as the result of the 2003 fires: it would be interesting to speculate on whether it would have been allowed had the fires not happened. Furthermore, it was easier to expand the Cotter reservoir anyway as it was situated in a pine plantation. Elsewhere, many politicians and campaigners who claim to hold sustainability at the core of their hearts seem remarkably loath to consider the two things that would help secure our water supply in the face of an uncertain future climate: expand the number of dams, and reduce our rate of population growth.

Consequently, a limitation on the total growth in development commensurate with a secure water supply should be instituted. And the ACT Government should remind the Federal Government of its own obligations to sustainability in this respect, and inform it that the reckless pursuit of population growth will have dire impact on the sustainability of our cities, not to mention accessibility of services, continued infrastructure wear and maintenance costs, and so on.

The design of new suburbs seems to have been intended to reduce the amount of open space as much as possible. In particular, sports grounds are noticeable by their absence. Where put in, they are clustered around schools which serves mainly to remove any obligation to provide schools with their own open space. Casey, Moncrieff, Forde, Throsby, Wright and Coombs, and Denman Prospect and Whitlam as built so far all lack ovals of sufficient size to allow Australian Rules or Cricket matches. An oval of this size should be provided in all new suburbs. It will make them actually accessible to people living within the suburb by reducing the distance of travel and removing the need to cross arterial roads.

Residential blocks need to retain a certain proportion of ground that is unpaved. Fifty percent would be a good start. Many new developments reserve what little outdoor space they have left for paved patios or decks. These share the same problem as overgrown houses do in providing an area that is excellent in absorbing larger amount of heat than a

better surface would and in retaining said heat long after it should have dissipated—thereby creating warmer days and especially warmer nights. These areas are also excellent in preventing water from reaching the soil, which not only harms

The ‘al fresco’ seems to be a loophole that manner developers use to effectively add an extra room to the house. These should be included in the house footprint, or at the least, excluded from any consideration of open space.

Blocks should be large enough to allow the planting of at least one tree without interference with service lines.

For developments, or at least single-occupancy ones, where a new house is replacing the original, the total area of the block excluding the footprint of the house or houses including garages should not be reduced by more than twenty percent. Ten percent would be better, especially for single-occupancies. The fact is that no-one actually *needs* a house of 300 square metres, especially since families are if anything smaller than they used to be. The original set-back between the rear boundary of the block and the closest portion of the house should also be preserved by 80 percent or greater, this way allowing open space in backyards to actually exist. Certainly, in newer suburbs where blocks are typically less than 520 square metres, a size limit to a single occupancy of something like 170 square metres plus a garage for a four-bedroom house would be reasonable. People only need giant houses because they think they do, and no-one’s welfare will be unduly impaired by restriction to a less ridiculous size.

Dual occupancies should be limited to no more than ten percent of existing suburbs. This should allow a reasonable amount of growth without resulting in the demolition of every tree not within government-owned land.

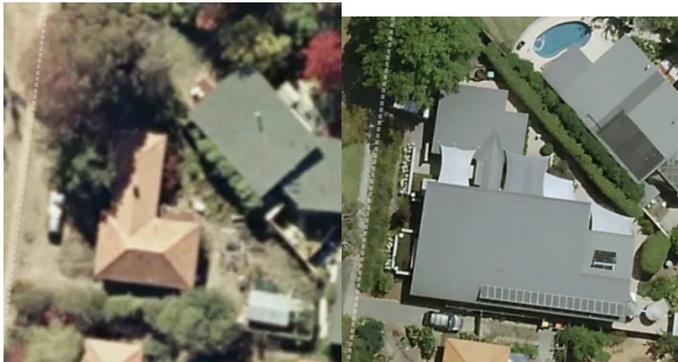
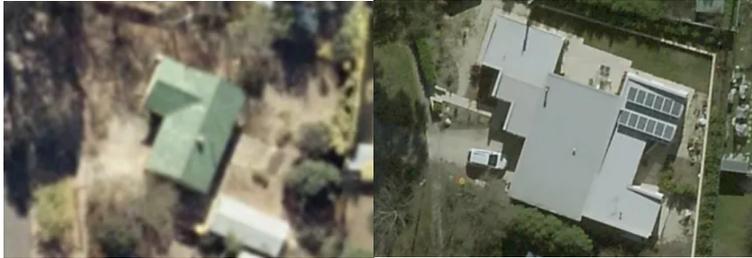
In new suburbs, single-storey and double-storey duplex and terrace housing should be considered, especially for RZ2 and RZ3 areas or higher. These will not have the inefficiencies of multi-storey developments with their common areas, underground garages and lifts to address the attendant accessibility issues. It will eliminate the side setbacks and so allow a slightly densified pattern in various areas while still preserving many of the advantages of detached housing such as accessibility, privacy and ability to have decent-sized front and backyards.

Heritage considerations need to be made more pertinent. While the suburban housing of the 50s, 60s and 70s probably would not win too many architectural awards, it should not be difficult for new houses in established area to match them rather than the common boxy eyesores with their grey rendered walls reminding one of a concrete industrial water-tank or something from the Siegfried Line.

One change that needs to be made architecturally is a total ban

To provide some examples of the detrimental outcomes that have been produced under the current planning laws, this submission will provide a series of examples of houses, mostly single-occupancy, that would not have been built were the commitments to maintaining Canberra as a green, sustainable Bush Capital actually taken seriously. It will also show the houses they replaced, to show the extent of the destructive impact that has been repeated many times through this city.





I rest my case.