



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES

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## Submission Cover Sheet

### Nature in Our City

**Submission Number: 50**

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Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services

## **SUBMISSION ON THE VALUE OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT TO AN URBANISING CANBERRA**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on nature and a fast urbanising Canberra.

### **About SEE-Change**

SEE-Change is a grass roots community group focused on making Canberra a more sustainable place. It is a not-for-profit organisation funded by the ACT Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate. The group's work is also supported through grants, member fees, donations, bike trailer rental and events and tours of sustainable houses. [www.see-change.org.au](http://www.see-change.org.au)

### **SEE-Change nature-based projects**

Since 2008, SEE-Change members have been involved in a range of projects that enhance open space and urban waterways, provide food security, community education and connectedness such as the:

- City Farm, Turner
- Canberra City Farm
- Jerrabomberra wetlands – a project officer runs regular working bees at the wetlands
- Banksia St, O'Connor wetland
- Dickson wetland, and
- Transition Street projects.

Here are examples of two Transition Street projects featured recently in local media.

<http://citynews.com.au/2018/on-the-path-to-bringing-people-together/>

<http://citynews.com.au/2017/gardening-grows-sense-community/>

### **Birdscaping Canberra**

In 2017, SEE-Change received an ACT Environment grant of \$43,000 for the Birdscaping CBR: bringing back birds, butterflies and bees. The grant was supported by Professor Kate Auty, the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. In her letter of endorsement, the Commissioner said "I regard this proposal as commendable ..... the work will deliver environmental outcomes and the alignment of such opportunities is beneficial to the broad Canberra and ACT community as well as the environment".

The aim of the project was to revegetate sections of urban open space along Sullivans Creek in O'Connor to attract small insectivorous birds and pollinators into the suburbs. Although Canberra's urban open space has many mature trees underlain by mown grass it lacks an understorey to support smaller species and favours larger more aggressive birds.

<http://www.see-change.org.au/birdscaping-canberra/>

Once the project was completed it could serve as a model for other community groups to continue to revegetate urban open space to create linear habitat corridors that link our waterways to bushland reserves. We have held conversations with the Lyneham Commons about replicating the Birdscaping CBR model at their site upstream on Sullivans Creek.

However, what should have been a relatively simple process to obtain approvals to commence planting 2800 native grasses, shrubs and trees along Sullivans Creek from the City Services Unit, TCCS has been a bureaucratic minefield. TCCS hone in on the maintenance/operational issues with little regard to the overarching goal of the project. This has led to significant project delays, extra administration by SEE-Change, Greening Australia and Conservation Volunteers Australia that wasn't budgeted for and potential loss of volunteer interest. For more details refer to Appendix 1.

### **Living infrastructure is vital for a warming city**

SEE-Change endorses principles raised in the ACT Government's February 2018 information paper on the Living Infrastructure Strategy, in particular: "... Living infrastructure will play a key role as the city adapts to the impacts of climate change."

This is one of the key challenges that our city faces - dealing with a warming climate and enhancing natural systems within our cities while continuing to develop.

In the rush to redevelop there is a lack of innovation and an emphasis on maximum return on investment. There are exceptions of course, the New Acton redevelopment is a good example of new built form which integrates vertical gardens and some exciting landscape associated with restaurants like Mocan and Green Grout and A Baker.

Along Constitution Avenue, attractive rain gardens have been installed. But these innovations are the exception rather than the rule.

Unfortunately new developments, like the multi-storey Nova apartments on Antill St, Dickson don't have a blade of vegetation in sight. They are composed of built materials that contribute to the urban heat island effect.

A Living Infrastructure Plan should demonstrate how we link home gardens (which comprise a significant proportion of urban/suburban habitat), to our streetscapes, parks, waterways (including our lakes) and nature reserves. The Living Infrastructure plan should be a series of live documents that are updated and adhered to.

**Recommendation 1 – the ACT becomes a partner city of the Biophilic Cities Program**

SEE-Change advocates that the ACT becomes a partner city with the Biophilic Cities Program. At present there are 15 partner cities worldwide including Fremantle, Portland and Wellington. This platform allows cities to showcase innovations and learnings and can ensure Canberra is a liveable city in a warming climate.

Setting a target to becoming a biophilic city would spur a new way of thinking about urban development by design professionals and students, developers, builders, ACT government and the community.

“Biophilic cities are cities of abundant nature in close proximity to large numbers of urbanites. Biophilic cities value residents innate connection and access to nature through abundant opportunities to be outside and to enjoy the multisensory aspects of nature by protecting and promoting nature within the city.” <http://biophiliccities.org/>

**Recommendation 2 – ACT Government to partner with community groups, like SEE-Change to introduce more vegetation/habitat/food gardens into homes, nature strips, urban and suburban areas to prepare for a warming climate.**

By creating true partnerships with community groups like SEE-Change, the ACT Government would have access to a lot of wisdom, experience and creativity and the knack of getting things done on a shoe-string.

As noted one of the key barriers to enhancing public open space are the bureaucratic processes of the City Services Unit, TCCS. Their current method of dealing with community groups results in significant delays and would demotivate all but the most resilient volunteers.

SEE-Change has the capacity to lead a transformational change in the relationship between the ACT Government and community to help them deliver their living infrastructure strategy.

Yours faithfully,



Edwina Robinson  
Executive Officer

Contact: Edwina Robinson, Executive Officer, Room 4, Downer Community Centre



## APPENDIX 1 – Birdscaping CBR

SEE-Change was successful in applying for a grant of \$43,000 to undertake planting of 2800 grasses, shrubs, groundcovers and trees along a section of Sullivans Creek between Macarthur Ave and David St O'Connor to provide habitat for small birds. The following eight conditions were imposed on SEE-Change when applying for the grant by the Urban Community Group and Volunteer Coordinator, Transport Canberra and City Services.

1. All garden beds and habitat logs shall be located above the 1:100 year flood line to minimise the risk of material from the garden beds ending up in the SW channel. SEE-Change is to investigate this location. All gardens beds shall also be located a minimum 5m setback from the Storm Water channel to allow maintenance machinery access to the channel.
2. TCCS require a Landscape Plan be submitted for final approval providing details such width of proposed garden beds, spacings between the garden beds, distances of garden beds to the storm water channel and cycle path, the relationship of the garden beds to existing trees, evidence that all proposed garden beds are well clear of all utilities. Please also provide understorey planting densities and species, tree species densities and locations. A spade cut edge is required to the boundary of all proposed garden beds in this location.
3. Design of the proposed garden beds shall comply with TCCS Design Standards for Urban Infrastructure.
4. SEE-Change shall co-ordinate Community Consultation for the proposed works which align with TCCS requirements. Community consultation material and content shall be submitted to TCCS for endorsement prior to public circulation.
5. SEE-Change shall maintain the garden beds including watering, dead plant replacement, spade cut edge, weed removal, litter removal and mulch replacement for a minimum period of two years. SEE-Change shall advise how volunteers will be engaged and supervised to undertake these works.
6. SEE-Change shall submit to TCCS a detailed maintenance plan for the first two years and also for future maintenance requirements.
7. TCCS may be able to assist with the delivery and placement of mulch and logs if the proposal is approved. This shall be dependent upon availability of staff and materials and operational workloads.
8. TCCS will require a detailed works plans and risk assessment for all proposed on ground works.

In December 2017, Greening Australia commenced growing local native plants for the project which would be ready to plant in autumn 2018. Early in 2018 SEE-Change commenced on-site community consultations with Purdon Planning with 100% support from people who dropped into the two sessions and gathered emails of people interested in taking part in planting working bees. Then late in February 2018 a significant flood came through Sullivans Creek where water reached the underside of the bridge on both David St and Macarthur Ave and emergency services staff were called out.

The SEE-Change Executive Officer, Edwina Robinson, inspected and recorded the flooding on the day to see how it might impact the birdscaping project. Edwina has six years of experience in retrofitting wetlands along Sullivans Creek and in the Ginninderra catchment and believes that a significant amount of the flooding was due to the increase in impermeable surfaces in the catchment due to increased development activities.

A follow-up site visit with TCCS staff indicated a reluctance to allow us to plant and mulch above the 5m setback from the stormwater channel. This was because they were concerned if a similar event came through that the mulch would be mobilised causing additional flooding downstream. This is

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despite having a nearby playground that is heavily mulched and the nearby Lyneham wetland is mulched to its Top Water Level.

Planting without mulching would prove problematic in Canberra's harsh climate – where thick layers of mulch act to reduce weed occurrence and keep soil moisture in the ground and keep running grass like couch at bay. We had factored obtaining free mulch into our grant. The other alternative would be to install erosion control matting (usually made of coir which is biodegradable) but we had not budgeted for this item into our grant expenses.

Our hope of creating a corridor of shrubby vegetation linked to nearby wetlands and stands of trees for small birds was eroding as TCCS staff wanted us to plant higher on the site (closer to existing houses).

Based on this site visit, we consulted with water engineers from the ACT Government and were advised that our proposed planting wouldn't exacerbate local flooding. We obtained the contour line that was suitable to plant above. This sent us back to the drawing board and a reimagining of our project.

We came up with a proposal that we felt was strong – to create a birdscaped area adjacent to the Sullivans Creek bike path and across from Turner Primary School and above potential flooding. This would be a win-win for the community, not only would the project attract local volunteers but it could be used for a nature-based educational resource for the school.

Our landscape architect drew up what we considered an exciting landscape plan that showed paths, open areas, planting and bee hotels for this birdscape across from the school. SEE-Change staff conceived of the idea of making this project more appealing to a range of groups by incorporating a yarn bombing element to the project. One volunteers told us this would make it more likely for her to come to a working bee with her young children as they could get involved in making pom poms whilst she got to plant.

Landscape plans were sent to TCCS in June 2018 for what we hoped would be approval. This was the response to the plans by TTCS:

TCCS questions and SEE-Change responses in purple below.

- What is the proposed treatment method for the open space/ pedestrian movement areas (grass, granite, dirt or other)? SC Response: dirt paths
- Are any boulders or logs being used in the project? If so the locations of the objects should be clearly identified on the concept plans. SC Response: Noted – no boulders will be included. Logs are primarily being used for habitat purposes (to break down gradually by insects which then attract insectivorous birds. Depending upon the type of logs we source we may install one larger log (ie max 400 high from ground level and minim. 2m long) adjacent to the large open space in the main open area of the birdscaping classroom space. This could double as seating but ultimately it's purpose is for animal habitat.
- The northern site shrub beds still look close to the storm water channel. Is there evidence to show that the beds are now located outside the 1:100 year flood line and if so what is the proposed distance from the edge of the storm water channel? Can this section be reconfigured to be on the eastern side of the cycle path? SC Response: Noted we will flip this to the eastern side of the cycle path.

TCCS additional Land Managers conditions;

- A public land use permit will be required for the construction phase of the project. An online application form for a construction permit can be found at the following link [http://www.tccs.act.gov.au/city-living/public\\_land\\_use](http://www.tccs.act.gov.au/city-living/public_land_use) SC Response: Noted

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- Public consultation and written support from adjacent residents and the Turner public school is required. SC Response: will TTCS support a letterbox drop inviting residents to 1 on-site consultation (staffed by SEE-Change) + ability to send us comments electronically and ring us? Re: Turner Primary School – SC will meet with school principle or delegate & obtain a letter of support – will this be sufficient?
- All garden beds are required to have a 1.8m or 3.6m set back from any cycle/ pedestrian path to ensure an exact one or two width mowing strip. Garden bed edges directly adjacent to paths are not supported. SC Response: Noted
- Shrub beds directly adjacent to private resident block fences is not supported. A 1.8m grass mowing strip should be used in these areas. SC Response: Noted
- Open space areas (grass) for pedestrian movement should be reconfigured to allow for easy mowing maintenance (no sharp turns, intricate patterns or circular shapes). These areas should incorporate a 1.8 standard mowing strip width into the design. SC Response: Noted
- No planting within the Road Reserve. SC Response: TCCS to confirm - does the road reserve on David St finish on the western side of the footpath?
- Placement of shrub species at matured heights should consider crime prevention through environmental design (passive surveillance). SC Response: Noted

TCCS Urban Treescapes comments/conditions;

- Planting of the shrubs and groundcovers will need to be done very carefully around existing trees to reduce disturbance – particularly beneath poplars which have a tendency to sucker when roots are damaged (even quite small roots). Please choose the location of each understorey plant to avoid existing tree roots and build up the new garden beds to reduce the amount of excavation needed. Smaller plant sizes should also be used closer to the trees where tree roots will tend to be more heavily concentrated. Please also avoid planting any plants within 1m of the tree trunks. SC Response: Noted
- The proposed windbreak along the bike path is not supported as seems that this will create safety and security issues for users of the path. Also the proposed windbreak trees will need to be lifted up and away from the path to reduce obstructions and this would defeat the purpose of the windbreak as well. No new trees should be planted no closer than 2.5m from the edge of the path? SC Response: Noted
- It is difficult to see if any new trees are proposed in the main garden bed area (Northern and Southern). It might also be worth mentioning that no new trees should be planted beneath the canopy of existing trees. SC Response: Noted

We briefed our Landscape Architect on these comments to change plans so we could get approval. Then ensued emails from TCCS and phone calls that requested we have another meeting to discuss the project.

The delays, maintenance requirements and lack of a streamlined process were becoming increasingly frustrating. Not only were the SEE-Change Executive Officer and the Project Officer spending far more time to liaise with TCCS on the project than had been allowed for (grants only allow 10% of the total project costs for administration which includes grant reporting and grant acquittal) to ostensibly plant 2800 native plants for birds and bugs, our partner organisations, Greening Australia and Conservation Volunteers Australia have needed to change their work programs multiple times and chase us up.

Our four working bees with the community were scheduled for April and May 2018 – so by now the 2800 plants should be in the ground with their cardboard guards and two year maintenance started using the local community and the help of Conservation Volunteers Australia.

## **APPENDIX 1 – CONT.**

What started as an exciting project has become a bureaucratic headache. It illustrates why most people couldn't be bothered to approach the ACT Government with a special project that has multiple benefits for nature and the community. We understand why people take part in guerrilla gardening or become apathetic.

If we want to improve community involvement we need to trust community groups to do the right thing. If we want to make our city more liveable and resilient to climate change we need to set up more equitable and efficient processes for community groups to play a role in greening our city.

Stay tuned – SEE-Change, our landscape architect and representatives of TCCS and EPSDD are meeting on Monday 2 July to hopefully resolve issues and commence planting in August.