



5 December 2022

Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services
ACT Legislative Assembly

Dear Committee Members

Inquiry into Planning Bill 2022

The ACT Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Inquiry into the *Planning Bill 2022*.

Our key areas of focus include:

- Design Vision for Canberra
- Compact City and Delivering on the Missing Middle
- National Capital Design Review Panel & Design Quality
- Timeliness of approvals.

Design Vision for Canberra

We have a once in a generation opportunity for a better planning system that facilitates certainty, equity, affordability, sustainability, housing choice, active transport, and design quality for a compact city. A planning system that not only sets the minimum standard but the bigger picture design and sustainability aspirations for our city. It is unclear what the longer-term design vision is for Canberra and where this is articulated.

Compact City and Delivering on the Missing Middle

We would like the new planning system to deliver on the housing 'missing middle' to enable better access to affordable appropriate housing typologies, enable aging in place, and increase densification in older suburbs.

The planning system can facilitate a compact city with housing choice and affordability (especially in older areas with relatively large block sizes) by expanding exempt developments to include multi-dwelling developments where the multiple dwellings inclusive of carparking are designed as a cohesive single residential form (Eg duplex, manor house, multigenerational residential typology) that would otherwise comply with the exempt development criteria.

Industry workshop information sessions have revealed that while the District Strategies incorporate areas identified for future increased densities, these will not be implemented in the revised Territory Plan. Instead, proponents will have to submit territory plan variations which take a long time and are expensive. The aims of the Demonstration Housing Project which are part of the Government's Housing Choices Policy are supported by the Australian Institute of Architects. However, our members' on-the-ground experience with the Demonstration Housing Project has been that this process has taken 5 years, delivered limited outcomes, and involved harassment of residents and architects. Further government support is needed to deliver policy outcomes including 70% of new housing to be within Canberra's existing footprint.



National Capital Design Review Panel

We have been calling for the National Capital Design Review Panel to have legislative weight so that action on their advice can be implemented to achieve innovative and good design outcomes.

Good design is referenced throughout the planning reform documentation. The design principles, however, that appear only to be referenced by the DRP and the design guides, do not seem to have legislative weight required to deliver on this aspiration. We would like to see good design principles defined in the planning system so that everyone - the community, proponents, development application assessors, Design Review Panel and Administrative Appeals Tribunal - are all working to the same principles and that these principles have regulatory effect.

The industry workshop information sessions have highlighted that EPSDD intends to implement training for staff and the development industry to support deeper understanding of design outcomes. The Institute supports this initiative, with appropriate engagement with the profession, as extensive training will be fundamental to the success of the new outcome-focused system.

Interrelationship with DRP and Chief Planner – Checks and Balances

It is recommended that the:

- Chief Planner must consider the design advice of the Design Review Panel for all Significant Projects and Territory Priority Projects
- Chief Planner must consider the design advice of the Design Review Panel for all projects referred to the Design Review Panel.
- Chief Planner can provide development approval contrary to entity advice if it is satisfied that acting contrary to the advice will significantly improve the design outcome to be achieved in accordance with the design advice of the Design Review Panel.
- For Territory Priority Projects that are not subject to ACAT appeals, the DRP provides the appropriate professional checks and balances to ensure high quality design outcomes for the city.

Approvals

Planning reform should facilitate fast and efficient approvals for projects that deliver good design and planning outcomes aligned with government policy including District Strategies. Currently approvals for demonstration housing (to achieve government policy outcomes) have taken 5 years.

Areas identified for future/ potential development in the District Strategies should not require unduly lengthy approvals processes to achieve government policy outcomes (ie a more compact city). It does not appear that the proposed system will improve timeliness of approvals.

