



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Environment
and Planning

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into DPA-04 – Missing Middle Housing Reform

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Australian
Institute of
Architects

MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING REFORM



ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Planning and
Environment

Inquiry into DPA-04

ACT CHAPTER

January 2026

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The Australian Institute of Architects (Institute) is the peak body for the architectural profession in Australia. It is an independent, national member organisation with around 15,000 members across Australia and overseas.

The Institute exists to advance architecture, architects' professional standards and contemporary practice, and expand and advocate the value of architects and architecture to the sustainable growth of communities, economy and culture.

The Institute actively works to maintain and improve the quality of our built environment by promoting better, responsible and environmental design.

PURPOSE

This submission is made by the Institute to inform the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Planning and Environment on the development of 'missing middle' housing opportunities within the ACT planning framework.

At the time of this submission the ACT Chapter President is Shoba Cole and Executive Director ACT is Roslyn Dundas.

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MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING REFORM

To address housing needs and ensure a balanced urban environment, we must deliver diverse housing options through sustainable, master-planned developments. This includes a mix of housing types – townhouses, apartments, and other medium-density forms – that can accommodate various households at different life stages. Architecture is central to fostering community connection, promoting environmental sustainability, and ensuring efficient land use through good design outcomes.

Architects are already working to create designs that prioritise energy efficiency, adaptability, and liveability, enhancing the long-term value and social outcomes of housing projects while supporting broader housing affordability goals. It is vital the new guidelines foster the take-up of a diversity of housing options, not just allowing larger dwellings.

With over 70% of blocks in the ACT zoned RZ1, a strong government focus on enabling a greater variety of housing typologies within suburban areas is strongly encouraged. Architects can design appropriately scaled dual-occupancies, townhouses, manor houses, small apartment buildings, and co-housing to meet the growing demand from ACT residents looking to buy their first home, move within their community — or simply age in place.

The Institute welcomes the proposed changes to encourage missing middle development and have been an active participant in a range of consultations towards these changes. This submission highlights areas we think further consideration is needed. Locally led engagement is vital to the success of the proposal both in design and build phase.

Summary of Recommendations

- An immediate review of the ACT Heritage policies, and guidelines be conducted to support missing middle development in heritage areas where appropriate.
- Guidelines be developed for heritage sites, drawing on the Bluefield Housing model, to encourage densification while retaining existing building fabric and shared landscape.
- Establish a design review panel to assess complex (block greater than 2000m²) missing middle developments.
- Mandate use of architects for developments over the dwelling/hectare ratios in the Technical Specifications and for all apartment buildings 3 storeys and above, to align with NSW regulations.
- Provide a definition of Micro blocks and develop suitable guidelines to ensure high-quality outcomes for the use of this typology.
- Lease Variation Charges (LVCs) to be reviewed and updated to encourage development in line with missing middle reforms.

HERITAGE GUIDELINES AND RETENTION OF EXISTING DWELLINGS

The importance of heritage in our built environment is well established. A heritage item may be significant for aesthetic, historic, social, spiritual or technical reasons. Creativity allied with design skills and an appreciation of the original item are required for successful conservation and adaptive re-use. DPA-04 recognises the Heritage Act continues to apply, however greater integration of heritage considerations into the missing middle approach is needed to ensure greater application across the Territory.

Bluefield Housing is a concept developed by Damian Madigan from the University of South Australia. Proposed as an extension to established definitions of Greenfield, Brownfield and Greyfield, Bluefield refers to both a land definition and an infill housing model. With an aim of increasing housing diversity and choice while retaining existing neighbourhood character Bluefield concepts look to retention and adaption as an alternative to knock-down-rebuild developments. Such an approach could support increased density and housing choice in heritage precincts. Undertaking a Bluefield Housing approach can also encourage greater consideration of future heritage value. Thoughtful design can make use of existing dwelling to ensure housing of potential heritage significance (such as mid-century homes) are not lost in densification processes.

Recommendations

- An immediate review of the ACT Heritage policies, and guidelines be conducted to support missing middle development in heritage areas where appropriate.
- Guidelines be developed for heritage sites, drawing on the Bluefield Housing model, to encourage densification while retaining existing building fabric and shared landscape.

DESIGN REVIEW OPPORTUNITIES AND APPROVALS PROCESS

The ACT Government has been successful in adopting a design review panel to assess complex developments within the urban context of our city. This has seen significant improvement in the quality of multi-residential buildings since its inception. Such a review process could support the successful rollout of missing middle reforms by ensuring developments of a certain scale (block greater than 2000m²) are designed with appropriate amenity and streetscape character.

The NSW Government requires all apartment buildings of a certain scale to be designed, or signed off, by a registered architect. This has delivered a measurable uplift in design quality since inception and should be used as a benchmark for the ACT.

With the implementation of the Missing Middle Housing Design Guide, the ACT can strive for design excellence through the implementation of criteria on design delivery by mandating the use of professional services on complex projects. ACT registered architects and building designers who demonstrate proficiency in housing design and undertake continuing professional development should be eligible to deliver these professional services.

Recommendations

- Establish a design review panel to assess complex (block greater than 2000m²) missing middle developments.
- Mandate use of architects for developments over the dwelling/hectare ratios in the Technical Specifications and for all apartment buildings 3 storeys and above, to align with NSW regulations.

MICRO BLOCKS

Micro blocks (under 150m²): The ACT planning framework does not currently include Micro Blocks, with the smallest block typology being Compact Blocks (less than 250m²). Micro blocks (under 150m²) are a viable option to deliver housing density, particularly in the missing middle context. The proposed Design Guide and Technical Specifications can be updated to include the definition of Micro Blocks with suitable guidelines to be developed and tailored to ensure high-quality outcomes.

Recommendations

- Provide a definition of Micro blocks and develop suitable guidelines to ensure high-quality outcomes for the use of this typology.

LEASE VARIATION CHARGE

The current implementation of Lease Variation Charges (LVCs) should be reviewed and updated to encourage development. Even with these missing middle reforms in place there is a need to incentivise the delivery of a greater yield of housing to meet increased population need. Under the current LVC there is a risk developers will reduce the number of dwellings per hectare on a missing middle project to avoid charges – as the rate is applied per dwelling, regardless of dwelling size. To encourage an uptake of more compact and affordable housing, with increased dwelling yield, the LVCs could be reviewed to have reduced rates for more compact typologies.

Recommendations

- Lease Variation Charges (LVCs) to be reviewed and updated to encourage development in line with missing middle reforms.