

Mr Andrew Barr MLA
Chief Minister
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Chief Minister

RE Implementation of the 2015 Woden Town Centre Master Plan

We are writing about the implementation of the Woden Town Centre Master Plan and the opportunity light rail Stage 2 provides for further land use planning in the Town Centre and along the Yarra Glen corridor.

In support of your 2019 State of the Territory Business Address, we wish to work with the ACT Government to improve connectivity, sustainability, livability and ensure we have great local services close to home. We support better planning that is thoughtfully delivered – by government, business and the community working in partnership to achieve the things we all value. We're optimistic that each Town Centre can have the public spaces and community facilities needed to enable social inclusiveness for all residents.

One of the key principles in the *National Capital Plan* is an urban structure for a hierarchy of centres, with each town having a centre acting as a focal point for higher order retail functions, commercial services, offices and community facilities ... with the continued expansion of services and facilities in each town centre provided for and encouraged.

We would like to invite you to the Woden Valley Community Council (WVCC) public meeting on 3 July 2019 to discuss your ambitions for the Woden Town Centre, a major community and commercial hub for Woden, Weston Creek and the broader region in the south of Canberra. While other Town Centres have more obvious districts and catchments, the Woden Town Centre's catchment is made up of multiple districts. Population forecasts in the *ACT Planning Strategy 2018* are: Woden (49,200), Weston Creek (33,200), Molonglo (51,400) and South Canberra (40,300) bringing the catchment for the Woden Town Centre to 174,100 people by 2041.

In accordance with our funding arrangements with the ACT Government, this letter advises you of concerns in the community about the potential outcomes of some aspects of the Master Plan. We would appreciate your views on the building heights, particularly around the Town Square and the reduction of social facilities and green spaces.

The Vision in the Woden Town Centre Master Plan is:

“Woden Town Centre is a major community and commercial hub for the Woden Valley and wider Canberra region. It will be a place that attracts people to live, work, socialise and enjoy throughout the day and evenings. The town square is the central focal point for social and community activity that will connect people to a network of safe and active streets and public parks”.

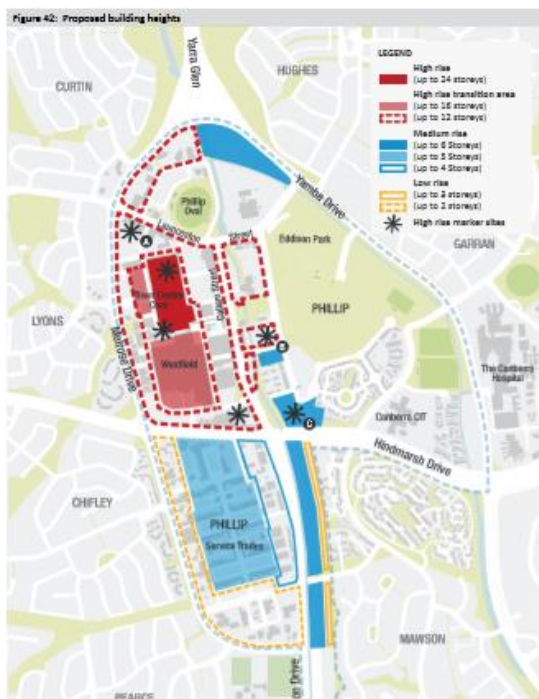
Our ambition is for the community to have pride in the Woden Town Centre and to facilitate our residents' well-being by sharing social, cultural and recreational facilities that promote social inclusion. We aim to strengthen connections between people to build a strong and resilient community. Fundamental to this ambition is the opportunity that allows members of our community to 'live, work and play', in our Town Centre through the provision of meeting places which enable people to support each other.

We are interested in your views on the zoning in Woden that provides for a building hierarchy with 28 storeys around our focal point, the Town Square, and the loss of public spaces and community facilities.

Building hierarchy

The building hierarchy provides 12 to 24 storey buildings in the CZ1 and CZ2 zones (the Precinct Code allows an additional 4 storeys) with the taller buildings in the centre of the Town Centre. This building hierarchy concept is only found in Woden as other Town Centres have mixed building heights. The following diagrams of the buildings heights for Woden and Belconnen Town Centres demonstrates the difference between the zoning in Woden and other areas of Canberra.

Woden's building heights



Belconnen's building heights



Some points to note are:

- Woden's Town Square is zoned for 28 storeys on its perimeter which will cause unacceptable shading of our public space. In comparison:
 - Emu Bank and Margaret Timpson Park have buildings of less than 6 storeys
 - Belconnen's tall buildings are judiciously placed so they do not significantly overshadow public places and residents
- Garema Place - the ACT Greens opposed Geocon's 16 storey hotel proposal saying it should be rejected as it was "unacceptable" and would "cause long-term damage" to the city.
 - 28 storeys around Woden's Town Square will have an even greater impact.
- Woden's Westfield is 20 storeys and Belconnen's Westfield is 4 storeys. Why is there such a disparity? Also note the cemetery is not identified leading to the appearance of green space.

Social facilities

The Master Plan found that the Town Centre plays an important district and regional role, providing essential facilities and services for the Woden Valley, Weston Creek and the broader region. We believe the following assets are required to improve connectivity, livability and provide great local services close to home:

- **Community Centre** – the priority is to provide accommodation for Woden Community Service to deliver their important programs for disability, mental health, aged, families etc ...
 - we acknowledge the ACT Government’s commitment to a new community centre and understand the preferred site is on the east side of Callam Street.
 - there is also the need for a Community Centre to be utilised by the broader community
- **Arts Centre** –The Government should purchase Borrowdale House which is in an ideal location on the Town Square for an arts facility, taking advantage of passing people and the activity that thousands of apartments in the area will generate. This would be a people’s centre.
- **CIT** - there are several options for a campus including the Callam Offices or using existing empty office space in Lovett Tower or Bank House. The Master Plan and the 2015-16 Budget measure state that if a new development is realised, it is likely to reconsider the style of development, one example being a small community campus co-located with a community services hub in the town centre.
- **Sport and Recreation facilities** – there is a shortage of these facilities across Canberra
 - The ACT Government’s 2015 Indoor Sports Facilities Study found that ‘current demand is driven by a shortfall of available facilities to support competition and lack of access to courts for training. In addition there is the pending loss of 3 courts in the Woden Basketball Stadium and the 1 court at CIT Woden which, if the Woden Town Centre is to be a focus for higher density living, is an issue for creating a contemporary urban precinct supported by a range of sport and leisure facilities’.
 - The 2015 Woden Town Centre Master Plan also found that there is demand in the longer term for additional recreation uses such as tennis courts, multi-indoor courts, upgrades to the existing parks, community gardens, an off-leash district dog walking area and active recreation/exercise spaces.
 - There is no zoning for sites for these community facilities in the Town centre.
- **Aquatic centre** - analysis of aquatic centres for the district found there is demand for a single aquatic centre in the medium to long term
 - there is no resolution of the future of the existing run down private 50 metre pool and ice skating rink site. We are concerned that we will also lose these facilities.
 - Yes we do acknowledge that there will soon be the Stromlo Aquatic Centre which will only bring the broader Woden/Weston Creek/Molonglo area to the same situation as other areas of Canberra.

Social and recreational facilities are important to our community as they have the ability to bring people of all ages together and provide opportunities for activity and social inclusion. They can inspire and motivate individuals while also fostering community pride. The above facilities have wide support from the community in the south of Canberra.

We emphasise the need for a land use plan to ensure future social infrastructure is appropriately located and connected.

Woden Town Park (Arabanoo Park)

Unfortunately, green spaces are also closing in Woden and are not being replaced.

We have lost the central green courtyards in the Alexander and Albemarle buildings, the pitch n putt site and the Athllon Drive corridor to high density development.

We are creating a great concrete heat island in the Town Centre without the necessary green space and trees to ameliorate the impact of this heat island.

The Master Plan finds that the Woden Town Park is not well used and does not have direct pedestrian access from the centre across Callam Street. It lacks both a good physical and visual connection between the Town Square and the Town Park, which reduces the likelihood of visitors.

Instead of providing access to the Park and investigating options to activate it for the community, it has been rezoned.

We are alarmed that the Park is now on the land release program with the likely further loss of a reducing green space where there is so little now.

The community is concerned about the loss of the Woden Town Park and the lack of connected green public spaces - See the black dashed lines in the park which identify the loss of the park and the black triangles which show the cemetery.



While the majority of the community welcomes development they want it to be done well.

We are concerned that we are creating a dormitory Town Centre with thousands of residents in high rise towers who will have limited ability to walk to facilities due to the lack of green spaces, community/cultural facilities, higher education, and indoor sports facilities in the Centre.

In light of the commitment to light rail and the proposed level of densification, we request that an integrated transport and land use plan be immediately developed, in partnership with the community, to identify sites for public spaces and social infrastructure to provide places for social inclusion in Woden.

The WVCC would also appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss our concerns and ambitions for our community. Please let me know if you are available to attend our public meeting on 3 July 2019, I can be contacted on 0420 533 809 or at president@wvcc.org.au.

Yours sincerely

Ms Fiona Carrick
President
Woden Valley Community Council

Tom Anderson
Chair
Weston Creek Community Council