

2024-25 Budget Submission

Who we are

The Belconnen Alliance of High Apartments (BAHA) is a collective group of executive committees representing thousands of owners in the Belconnen Town Centre (BTC). The members meet monthly to discuss strategic issues that affect all owners, and to bring about positive change to benefit the thousands of people that call the BTC home.

Crime is rising, people feel unsafe

There has been a significant uplift in crime within the BTC that needs to be urgently addressed. The population of BTC has grown where a relatively small land area has the same population as a large suburb. Due to the rise in opportunistic crime following large-scale development, residents of the BTC now feel unsafe and are growing frustrated with the ACT Government, specifically with law enforcement. The ratio of police officers on the beat is not consistent with the population size of BTC and as a result, reported crime goes unanswered and residents now feel unsafe in their own buildings.

Residents pay high rates and taxes – what is Government doing?

There is a perception from residents that their rates and taxes are not being well spent on the vital and necessary services that makes living in BTC attractive. The BAHA has met local Minister Tara Cheyne and other ACT Government representatives to discuss concerns, including safety and security, and have provided feedback around the lack of action that is being undertaken to address this. The BAHA recognises that the issue is complex, and a broad strategy needs to be considered across the continuum including social and support services, law enforcement/compliance and the criminal justice system.

People will vote with their feet if this issue is not addressed

Noting that the success of the BTC lies in attracting residents to live in the area, if crime is not addressed by the ACT Government, the population will be impacted. People do not want to live in an area where they feel unsafe, and word travels quickly. Any perceived lack of action by Government will be reflected in citizen sentiment at the next election. Residents have been raising concerns with their local members for years. The time to act is now.

Hear the issues from our residents:

Cirrus:

- Cirrus was first occupied in September 2021 (218 apartments + 5 commercial units). Security measures provided by the developer were next to none. Even the lift security (eg fob access) wasn't activated in one tower until 4 months after the occupancy certificate was issued. This was due to builders continuing building and fit outs in the common areas, while compromising the security of residents. The Executive Committee spent more than **\$35k** on security guards during this time.
- Over the past year (2023), we have focused almost entirely on measures to improve security within our budgetary means, including:
 - **\$40k** worth of security cameras
 - **\$37k** for more secure lock housings on all storage cages

- **\$15k** for striker plates on all outward swinging doors to eliminate the chance of doors being jemmied open, including repairing and replacing damaged fire exit doors which were jemmied. The commercial unit owners also installed striker plates after several security incidents resulting in theft of equipment.
- **\$3k** to shift the car park roller door exit sensor to minimise accidental or unnecessary openings of the roller door.
- Decreased how long the carpark roller door stays up when cars enter, but unfortunately the speed of the roller cannot be increased due to the developer installing the cheap drive motor, which means there is plenty of time after a car enters for a pedestrian to walk in and up the ramp unseen.
- **\$5k** spent to improve security of bicycle storage: The loading dock and bicycle storage is open and fully accessible 24/7 to the public. There have been many bicycles stolen. The Exec Committee has repurposed a storage room in the basement for more secure bicycle storage.
- **Approximate spend on additional security measures to date: \$140,000**
- Unfortunately, trespassers still easily access our above ground car parks by waiting and walking up the car park ramp after a car enters. Theft from storage cages and cars has dropped right off since we upgraded the storage cage lock housings, but damage to cars was reported during an incident over Christmas and New Year.
- Unfortunately, due to the developments choice of system (cheapest on the market), we are facing a **\$125k** bill to change the fob access system to a more secure, trackable, fire compliant fob system.
- Mail/parcel delivery is not secure, and we have parcels stolen daily from the foyers. Unfortunately, the foyer doors are not lockable, and to provide for a fob access arrangement we would be looking at in excess of **\$80k** to upgrade the glass doors and opening system.
- We have priced a commercial parcel locker system (**\$25k** to install and annual subscription of **\$4k**), but the Executive has decided not to proceed with this option at the moment.
- **Approximate POTENTIAL spend on additional security measures to meet occupants' expectations: \$230,000+** (we may put these potential security upgrades to the AGM next year, but we already have plenty of criticism about the body corporate levies being too high.
- We keep a log of incidents, which, I am pleased to report, has decreased since the new storage cage lock housings were installed and extra Cameras.
- **We have received little support from the Police. In fact, every incident is reported to the police with footage captured by our cameras and provided on a USB, but the police have been witnessed by our building manager throwing the USB in the bin. We have not had any follow up visits on site.**
- We have had excellent support and intervention from Westfield Mall management, as our immediate and closest neighbour. We share security incident footage with them and they have put in additional patrols through the Cirrus side car parks.
- The reality is, there are no provisions in the building codes to provide for security in apartment buildings to protect occupiers. Something in the ACT planning code would be helpful in at least ensuring buildings meet a minimum standard of security. Unfortunately, occupants expect a higher level of security in an apartment tower than if they were living in an independent dwelling (house on a street), but the

reality is, no apartment building can be made thief proof: just letting a delivery driver up into the lift system by “buzzing them up” compromises security.

Wayfarer:

- Continued break-ins (almost weekly) to cars and storage cages, CCTV footage provided to Police, no follow up. Building manager reports sometimes police don't even attend, even when crime is occurring at the time on site.
- Crime is now occurring 6-7am, same people coming in and smashing windows. Residents often see culprits as they are getting into their cars for work.
- One person was carrying a machete, the building manager did not approach. Significant concerns from residents about their own safety. No follow up action from Police.
- Parcels and mail constantly stolen, residents now told to use a PO box instead of mailboxes (reduction in our own amenity within the building due to criminal acts).
- Significant costs to upgrade or replace:
 - Roller door **(\$60k)**
 - CCTV **(\$80k)**
 - Security systems **(\$50k)**
 - Signage **(\$10k)**
 - Security guards over peak periods **(\$25k)**
 - Storage cages that were damaged beyond repair **(\$40k)**
- The EC has done all it can in terms of proactive measures, we are now actively asking residents – who are completely frustrated and fed up – to raise with the ACT Government or reflect their frustrations in the next ACT election given this is a systemic issue that does not appear to be a priority.

Sentinel:

- 8 CCTV Cameras for \$16k and ongoing maintenance
- Upgrade to the security system \$61k, to identify individuals accessing the complex via phone /fob
- The following is a summary of Sentinel security measures and incidents.
 - Residents are asked to coversheet and lock cages
 - 35 cctv cameras (including 8 above)
 - striker plates on all outward swinging doors
 - the carpark rollerdoor mechanism stays open for 5 seconds, reduced from 10 seconds
- Over the past 6-7months:
 - 1 broken window for internal car access – Ground public park – CCTV Footage passed onto car owner, but no police follow up.
 - 1 broken window for internal access – basement car park – No CCTV footage – no police contact
 - 1 cage broken into basement area – no CCTV footage – no police contact.
- I get that there were bigger fish for the police to fry than this, but we seem to have run out of room and we're all living on top of each other. There was a noise complaint, but my wife and I often wondered if the music was a front to mask something else, possibly domestic violence. The more people get packed into a tiny space, the more friction there'll be, and the higher the likelihood that friction could

boil over into something nasty. I reckon it's irresponsible for the government to pack more people into Belconnen without providing more police resources. The resources we've already got aren't enough.

Dusk/republic:

- Dusk/Republic has 392 apartments but are in a precinct of about 1,100 apartments plus a hotel and extensive commercial activity and we share some costs via the Community Title Scheme.
- Below is what Dusk/Republic has done over the 3 - 4 years we have been occupied:
- Extensive upgrade to original, very limited CCTV installed by Property developer. We now have coverage of all lift foyers and most stairwells as well as driveways (over 40 new CC cameras plus upgrade to computer systems);
- Had our Strata Management company go through the expense of getting a Restraining Order against a "visitor" constantly caught on CCTV stealing and damaging property. (Police did not assist when presented with extensive CCTV activity of damage and theft ...it took "reasonable fear of personal harm" to get action);
- Modify fencing around carpark (after developer advised their original carpark was only "restricted access" and not "secure" which meant their fencing was light gauge wire and not all the way to the roof in parking basement);
- Caged the roller door motors to secure them against vandalism and forcing doors to open without fob;
- Installed Striker plates on all Ground and Roof level doors;
- Installed lots of signs advising residents of safety/security issues, including: warning of CCTV coverage, avoiding tailgating, not storing valuables in basement lockers, speed limits, no parking/standing where it blocks traffic, etc.
- Considerable efforts to get locks on Fire Stair doors - not apparently possible, so once inside access to all floors is unrestricted.
- Planning to install mobile phone repeaters in the basement so there is at least emergency call availability (multiple-storey basement car parking with large number of mobile phone dead spots). Police told us they did not want to enter car park due to lack of signal and consequently safety issues;
- Pool the 3 Building Managers (from Dusk/Republic, High Society and Nightfall) plus pay for on-site security officer (with on-site office and facilities) so that there is effectively 7 day/week, 24 hour presence as well as regular security patrols. In addition to paying for Security officers, there are overtime and other overheads for the BMs rostered outside usual working hours. Someone from this "team" regularly called out when groups of people are spotted sneaking in via roller doors opening or tailgating residents;
- Pay Wilsons to monitor and ticket vehicles parked contrary to rules and/or causing safety issues in Grazier Lane (although not very effective given widespread disdain for Wilson's authority or ability to enforce fines). Despite having responsibility for Grazier Lane as a private road, we have essentially no authority to react to vehicles blocking the lane or causing safety/security issues. Police, including Parking Police advise they consider that the Lane is not their concern;

- Secure Parcel lockers installed in Ground Floor foyers (installation and annual fees). Significant reduction in parcel thefts reported;
- Retro-fitted a secure bike/sporting room with swipe access, CCTV and locking points. Also retro-fitting timed power for safe charging of ebikes, scooters, etc. No bike thefts reported since then.

Regards,

Matthew Penny

For the Belconnen Alliance for Highrise Apartments

Representing:

- Wayfarer
- Republic
- Dusk
- High Society
- Nightfall
- Sentinel
- Altitude
- Cirrus
- Linq
- Oracle 1 and Oracle 2 Apartment Buildings