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## COVERING PAGE, SCULLIN, WEETANGERA AND HAWKER

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### 2019-20 ACT BUDGET PRIORITIES

Friends of Hawker Village Incorporated is a voluntary community group active within the four suburbs around the Hawker Group Centre, namely Page, Scullin, Hawker and Weetangera. These suburbs are now 45-50 years old and many of the residents are now elderly. They have been able to downsize into the many townhouses constructed in these suburbs over the 1980s and '90s. It is acknowledged by the ACT Government that senior citizens need regular exercise to maintain health and that walking is an important element in this exercise.

In the 2016-17 and 2017-18 Budget consultations, we sought, amongst other things:

**Prompt, regular maintenance and repair of ageing footpaths** – The Government's desire to encourage active travel is not reflected in the current lack of funding provided for existing infrastructure. Our footpaths are now hazardous and we seek better funding for better maintenance along with a public education campaign to reduce damage from parking and driving on footpaths.

**Updated playground equipment in Ellen Clark Park, Weetangera (between Belconnen Way and Smith Street)** – The existing playground equipment is very aged and minimal in its appeal to children. Greater use of this facility would be encouraged by its being updated with the addition of equipment suitable to young children. **This is particularly important given the R22 zoning and gradual loss of usable green space on nearby residential blocks through densification.**

We appreciate the tight Budget situation of the ACT and would like to take this opportunity to raise areas of considerable expense to the ACT Government which seem excessive in the current Budget situation and which we consider could be reduced to allow provision of badly needed services.

We repeat our request that the items carried over from the last two year's request be made priorities in the 2019/20 Budget. Our other suggestions are listed under the Survey Questions.

- What services do you believe are most important for the ACT?

#### **Efficient town planning and development processes.**

Our experience with the planning system in Canberra is that the staff do not have the capacity or resources to perform their tasks at best practice. An example is their inability to visit sites when assessing development applications. This leads to appeals from residents who know the area, thus leading to delay and expense for both the developer and the ACT Government.

Likewise, the introduction of flexibility through the Merit Track has added to the complexity of assessing development applications. The vagueness of the criteria results in outcomes that are often in conflict with the Rules that have been created to ensure quality and safety. The Code Track is much less expensive to implement as it simply requires assessment as to compliance. There is less room for complaint by local residents if the Rules are set at best practice and are adhered to, regardless of pressure on Government from vested interests. The merit track is probably the greatest generator of wasted time and effort at huge cost to all parties. At the very least, criteria should be read in the context of the rules and with specific regard to the zone objectives, and preferably with much tighter wording of the criteria. Merit appears to be interpreted by the developers as something in the eyes of the beholder with the result that wholly inappropriate developments are dramatically changing the character of our suburbs without any mandate from the community to do so. These suggested changes might save a lot of money and produce better outcomes. Arguably, the current approach appears designed to create complexity and discourage complaints

Thirdly, the use of private certifiers creates extra cost to Government when faults are revealed, such as the recurrent water ingress to multi-unit buildings caused by inadequate water-proofing. Private consultants are always compromised in their decisions by the need to ensure their future income above all else. Giving a result favourable to the developer will usually result in further job offers; giving an unfavourable result will make the developer look elsewhere for a certifier next time. This is a reality of human nature. The expense associated with creating a Government agency to allocate independent certifiers will, most likely, be offset by reduced faults and complaints requiring legal action.

Finally, financial concessions to developers and the issues highlighted recently by the Auditor General constitute obvious opportunities for Budget savings.

### **Maintenance of public facilities throughout our suburbs.**

South Belconnen has been fortunate in that our suburbs were designed at a time when active travel was recognised as essential and footpaths were provided that connect through the suburbs as well as along the roads. Because of their age, these footpaths are now deteriorating, exacerbated by tree roots and heavy vehicles driving over them or parking half on the footpath and half on the road. The reality is that older residents do not have the flexibility to avoid injury from tripping on uneven footpaths and are, therefore, discouraged from walking in public areas.

Likewise, our open grassy areas are no longer maintained and are becoming unusable with clumpy grass and bare patches. Green areas are necessary to help offset the heat island effect, especially as the climate warms. Mowing, weeding and cleaning have been neglected for some time and our suburbs are looking scruffy.

- How can the ACT Government deliver current services more efficiently or in ways that better meet the needs of our community?

Conduct publicity programs to highlight the damage done to footpaths and nature strips by parking on them, explaining the costs involved and the need to maintain these public facilities for the practical benefits of active travel and water absorption and drainage not just so they look nice. A current example of the damage caused to footpaths in our area can be seen from the construction of medium

density housing in Shumack Street, Weetangera, where the concrete footpath has been badly damaged by the builder's heavy trucks. It is quite unsafe for pedestrians. Further, any such education campaign should focus on the need for nature strips to be grassed to permit water absorption and the need to keep curbside gutters clear of leaves and other debris.

- Are there particular services that you think the ACT Government should stop delivering or should deliver in a different way?

The current fragmented approach to repairing footpaths seems highly inefficient and uneconomic. A cost-benefit analysis should be conducted to determine the overall expenses associated with the costs of outsourcing relative to the quality of the final product. The old saying "You get what you pay for", if true, in this case suggests that there is not enough funding for adequate maintenance of existing facilities plus allowing for profit-making by the contractors. It is not clear that any quality check is performed on the finished work to ensure that the ACT Government is getting value for money.

- What new ideas, services or programs should the ACT consider to meet emerging or evolving community needs?

Think in a whole, broad picture way, acknowledging that everything interacts. At present, we seem to have two competing priorities – housing a growing population and dealing with climate change. Yet the current process of densification in existing suburbs is leading to an increased heat island effect which is not being acknowledged. Turning a blind eye to these conflicts will not make them go away – we have to deal with them more intelligently. Further, the more people we have, the more emissions they will create, which makes it even more urgent to cut the effect of housing on climate.

Current transport ideology seems unchanged from the past with a focus on public transport that serves people going to work but ignores the needs of those who travel to different locations at different times of the day. Discouraging the use of private cars will not be successful if it simply reduces the options for people to lead an active and involved life by doubling, tripling or quadrupling travel time and making it greatly inconvenient to reach destinations.

Thank you for this opportunity to express our concerns and ideas.



Colin Lyons,  
Convenor  
Friends of Hawker Village Incorporated

29 Oct 2018