



Covering:
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2018-19 ACT BUDGET PRIORITIES

Friends of Hawker Village Incorporated is a voluntary community group active within the four suburbs around the Hawker Group Centre. 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.

We have 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.

In last year's Budget consultation, 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.

Provision of bus shelters along Coulter Drive and on Gillespie Street, northern side, near the intersection with Springvale Drive – These bus stops, which are used regularly for local services and by people catching the bus to work, offer no protection from the elements. In wet weather, cold weather, windy weather and extreme heat, bus passengers are provided with nothing more than a bench. Improving basic comfort for waiting passengers is an important aspect of encouraging residents and visitors to use ACTION bus services.

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.

On 6 June 2017, the Chief Minister advised:

The ACT Government remains committed to active travel upgrades to improve Canberra's suburban infrastructure and has allocated a further \$4 million over four years to deliver missing community path network links in identified priority suburbs within the ACT. This will include pedestrian refuges, pram crossings, cycleway and age-friendly walking and cycling improvements.

This does not include any reference to significant increase in funding for maintenance of existing footpaths, a major problem across all older suburbs. Issues raised with Fix My Street, such as two concrete slabs raised dangerously in the footpath on Beetaloo Street, across the road from KFC Hawker, have elicited the information that they would be put on worksheets for the next financial year, i.e. this year. Months later, the hazard is still there. This suggests to us that funding for this problem of ageing footpaths across the ACT is inadequate. Likewise, there has been no response to the request to improve conditions for bus travellers, another part of the active travel programme, nor to upgrade the playground in Ellen Clark Park.

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.

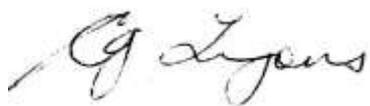
Firstly, our experience with the planning system in Canberra is that the staff do not have the capacity or resources to perform their tasks at best practice. An example is their inability to visit sites when assessing development applications. This leads to appeals from residents who know the area, thus 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.

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. 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 Government 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.

We repeat our request that the three items carried over from last year's request be made priorities in the 2018/19 Budget.



Colin Lyons,
Convenor
Friends of Hawker Village Incorporated

24 Oct 2017