

SUBMISSION TO ACT BUDGET 2019/20

Dear members of the ACT government,

I am a member of the Vintage Reds retired union members' group, but submit this short page of concerns about housing on my own behalf.

I was glad to see the news reports on the ACT government's housing strategy. Without seeing the detail, we can only hope that the government is able to move on the proposals as soon as possible.

My most fundamental request from the strategy is for more public and social housing, and for more options in addition to the usual single-family house or unit.

It is clear from overseas research that "housing first" works to reduce all manner of other needs among those who access government social services. For a territory government like ours with a population which has high expectations but an income which can't easily fulfil them all, this should light up a few buttons.

In addition, I would like to see forms of affordable housing which make community building easier. At the moment, the zoning and building regulations combine to give us mainly spec-built blocks of flats and enormous single-family mansions. It's a bad combination in an environment with a lot of people under housing stress.

Housing solutions such as Common Ground and cohousing seem to me to be very effective in allowing connections between people to grow in very enriching ways. But often it takes a huge investment in labour to get each group's plan off the ground. I am happy to see that the Common Ground model is being replicated; I would like to see in addition some investment from the ACT government into cohousing development. This would be as uncomplicated as finding a developer to commit to building more of the same kind of plan if one were to work well. My own experience includes living in such a development, built by just such a developer (Wonderland, in Boulder, Colorado).

I think that many of the pitfalls around trying for social and affordable housing have been shown. We know about social housing units set aside, with payments to the developer, but then none remaining for the social housing pool once the first owner sells. We know about the differences in building quality when different forms of investment are used (build to rent being one example which seems to improve results).

We also know about investors (local as well as overseas owners) leaving housing units unoccupied, to the detriment of housing availability, as well as the ill effects on the other occupants of the building or street.

All these examples seem to point to the necessity of having a greater involvement of government, rather than leaving important housing decisions to the for-profit market.

There has been quite a long period of inaction on these matters from the ACT government. I look forward to seeing your strategy in place, and hope to see more decent and innovative affordable housing on the ground soon.

With best wishes,

Anne Gunn