

TO: ACT Government

Comments for the
2024 – 2025 ACT BUDGET CONSULTATION

Your Say Conversations

CONCERNED RESIDENTS OF WESTON CREEK
1-31-2024

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the **ACT GOVERNMENT BUDGET CONSULTATION 2024 – 2025**. Managing the Territory's finances and ensuring resources are put to their most efficient use is vital to ensuring the ACT is a safe and well-equipped place to live, work and play.

As long-term, involved residents of Canberra we offer the following comments against the Government's core areas of responsibility including: health and community well-being; house and home; community support, social inclusion, and safety; environment, climate, and transport; jobs, sports arts culture and entertainment

HEALTH AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

Easy access to health and medical services needs to be a priority for all of Canberra. From personal and family experience (with extended family and 3 generations living in Canberra), the following points need attention and monetary allocation to encourage healthy lifestyles and to provide medical treatment when necessary.

- A **hydrotherapy pool**. The Government previously promised that the Stromlo Pool would have a therapy pool, but it is not of a temperature to be classified as such. Those wishing to do rehabilitation exercises in Weston Creek have to compete with swimming lessons, pool closures and general high demand. A promised pool in Tuggeranong will not meet growing demand alone.
- **Easy and affordable access to General Practitioners (GPs)** Many people cannot make an appointment or cannot afford one. Cost of living pressures need to be addressed via: Greater bulk billing; No fees for follow up appointments for the same condition; and significantly reduced, or no cost, for screening and/or diagnostic tests.
- **Specialist treatment and care**. For the ACT Health Plan to meet its goals the Government needs to attract experts in all fields to the ACT. It is not acceptable that ACT residents have to travel interstate for their health care.

HOUSING AND HOME

Having been actively involved in the Planning Review and Reform process, it must be said that we have been left underwhelmed for the future of planning and development. The **Weston Creek District Strategy** had many missed opportunities, examples include: lack of options for aging in place; lack of clarity around potential and future development areas; lack of environmental and liveability considerations; and innovative ideas for revitalising the district such as mixed-use developments.

Of note the February 2023 release from the Chief Minister Treasury and Economic Development Directorate that population data for Weston Creek between June 2021 and June 2060 is going to have a population increase of 1,149 people. It is hoped that the ACT Treasury will continue working in consultation with the Australian National University's school of **demography**, and the estimates are further refined to inform Budgets.

Cost of living pressures are taking their toll in Weston Creek. Rates are considered very high and increase more than CPI (being considered the highest in Australia). It is timely for the Government to consider a justification measure or process such as occurs in NSW.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT, SOCIAL INCLUSION, AND SAFETY

In June 2023 it was pleasing to see the announcement of investment in police recruitment. A feasibility study to assess potential requirements for future police station facilities in the Woden and City districts.

However, it continues to be disappointing that a **greater police presence** in Weston Creek appears to have fallen on deaf ears. Tailgating, burn outs and driving across parks and green spaces is of concern and must be followed up in a timely and thorough process. With the growing ACT population, we believe a new police station is required for the Weston Creek/Molonglo area.

ENVIRONMENT and CLIMATE

Smoke from bushfires and burn offs need to be monitored. The medical and long-term health impacts can be negative. Some residents are forced to relocate at various times due to poor air quality. Air quality in urban areas is an international health issue. Analysts are critical of poor collection and suggest better monitoring. Geographically Weston Creek has unique topography, making it a sensible location for an **air quality monitoring station**. Monitoring the air quality and sustainability is critical to measure exposure to hazardous substances in the air such as smoke, pollen, and dust in real time so that residents can best plan their daily activities.

We have for a long period of time been involved in campaigns to support the protection of green spaces, parks, and gardens. The group centre precinct is an identified heat island and as such we do not understand why **Weston Blocks 3-5, section 75, (affectionately known as Coolo Park)** has not been publicly reverted to its original, green open space zoning, and rehabilitated in line with resident's wishes.

The **Western Edge** area bordered by the Murrumbidgee River and Weston Creek including Chapman, Duffy, and Rivett, should be protected. As residents, we do not see any logical reason for development of this area.

The **blue-green corridors** need **protection from feral and free-ranging domestic animals**. Weston Creek is experiencing an increase in roaming cats and foxes and these animals are causing serious damage to native wildlife population. Neighbours have lost chooks and we have discovered dead birds in our garden. A local fox even walks up the street! These issues need greater attention.

Additionally:

- Protection of urban open spaces and green spaces.
- In 2022, the ACT Government initiated the '*Connecting Nature Connecting People*' ... *that will deliver urban cooling, habitat protection and community amenity*). Spaces affectionately known to residents as Cool Park (Weston Blocks 3-5 Section 75) and De Sallis Park should therefore be protected for liveability and future generations.
- Powerlines to be underground to avoid collapse and sparking and a danger.
- Careful plantings of fire-retardant species.
- Regular maintenance of shared spaces including park mowing.
- Well-advertised information for the community including general information, resources, risk assessments, preparation plans and guides.
- Greater emphasis in the Planning Act and associated documents for the human right to a healthy environment, environmental protections, and community consultation.

TRANSPORT

The current public transport arrangements are subject to frequent public comment, that could easily be classified under the heading of “lacking clear strategy”. Considering the \$200m plus annual operating contribution from the Territory finances that is appropriated to the public transport task, the lack of clear independent governance arrangements would appear to be a considerable gap. In addition, the considerable additional investment such as shifting to electric buses and future light rail stages would appear to be challenging the relevant Directorates. We recommend the Budget include modest seed funding for the standing up of an advisory committee comprising expert and community representation to provide the Directorate and Minister with a “fresh set of eyes” over both the operations and future planning.

JOBS, SPORTS, ARTS, CULTURE, AND ENTERTAINMENT

We acknowledge and appreciate the 2023-24 Budget allocations to: upgrade of C5 Cotter Road to Mulley Street cycle paths; design work for new playing fields in Molonglo; and upgrades to Arawang netball courts. Updates on the progress of these would be appreciated.

Our family and neighbours remain frustrated by the lack of **sporting facilities** in Weston Creek and some sports clubs are unable to meet demand. It is pleasing that the local tennis club has received funding and will undergo extensions. The area nearby would be suitable for a sporting precinct in addition to the Scouts, skate park and ovals. Inclusion of basketball facilities would be appreciated.

As an island within NSW, the ACT needs to engage and communicate effectively with **cross-border towns**. There appears to be missed opportunities for infrastructure projects such as connecting roads. Economic/employment partnerships could be facilitated with cross-border communities such as Queanbeyan, Yass, and Tumut.