

Your local voice



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City and Gateway - Urban Renewal Strategy Discussion Paper
Strategic Planning
Environment & Planning Directorate
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Comments on the City and Gateway Urban Renewal Strategy Discussion Paper

The Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) offers the following comments on the above Discussion Paper. As this paper has not been the subject of a presentation to the WCCC the following comments are based on only partial canvassing of our members' views. A member of the WCCC committee attended a presentation at the PDF when this discussion paper was presented in outline so the comments here also reflect a discussion of the paper by the WCCC Committee.

All parties recognise that urban renewal and better transport are strategic priorities for the ACT Government. In addition the links between this particular element of urban renewal and the Light Rail Project is acknowledged notwithstanding major concerns previously expressed by WCCC regarding both the strategy and implementation of the Light Rail project.

General Comment

As most visitors to Canberra arrive by motor vehicle Northbourne Avenue is the most important gateway to the Capital and one which consequently has a major influence on a visitor's first impression of the city.

The WCCC feels that this is a very important reason to adopt a strategy which enhances a visitors experience as entering a city which has a reputation of being well planned with a "Garden City" atmosphere in terms of landscape quality. As Canberra is the National Capital this entrance has national as well as city significance.

The adjectives used in the 'Vision' of the city are very strong and on the whole

acceptable and laudable. Even taking into account the establishment of ground breaking urban villages the suggestion that this project alone could achieve the stated aims may be difficult to achieve. This may sound like a negative comment from a community perspective but based on historical precedent they realize that a 50 year vision will face many pitfalls along the route not least the possibility of several changes of government. As a consequence we would like to see an immediate emphasis on excellence of design in both built form and landscaping which could be an example to carry forward.

We note the 'Action' suggestion that more flexibility in the planning system is needed. The community is wary that unless the current complicated system is reviewed a further layer of complexity would be viewed as a step backward. In some cases it is already difficult for the community to make meaningful comment on projects and this would be exacerbated by any increased in regulation and/or legislation

Comment on Specific Elements and Actions

- The concept of a 'funnel' effect with wider building setbacks at the northern end of Northbourne Avenue narrowing as one approaches the city is seen as a positive method of building anticipation plus placing emphasis on the importance of the destination – the City Centre and its more intense urban character.
- A variation in the setback depth at specific locations along the route would add interest and avoid the 'tunnel' effect which is prevalent in other major Australian cities. We would not like Northbourne Avenue become a tunnel- we can do better!
- The suggested prioritization of planning and investment in urban villages along Northbourne Avenue begs the question of reduced expenditure in other areas of the city. Specifically the Town and Group Centres and in particular those in the southern areas of the city. Whilst concentrating economic activity in one area of the city might result in a vibrancy that may be replicated elsewhere this is a gamble. Moreover it is a gamble that may suck the vibrancy from other areas if the general economy of the city does not grow at a sufficiently fast rate.
- Comprehensive transport solutions are mentioned with an emphasis on pedestrian and cycling activities. The need for adequate parking is also mentioned as being important but there is little mention of the traffic generated by new residential and commercial development along the route. Canberra is a city that currently operates on the basis of the major travel to work mode being the private car. The whole workforce of this new development will not live in Gungahlin. Therefore unless there is major restructuring of the public transport system from other areas of the city traffic chaos could result.
- The development of Northbourne Plaza between the Sydney and Melbourne buildings should enhance the development of a link between the two sides of the city and also provide a focus for social activity. The query is 'where will the traffic be rerouted?' More information would be appreciated.

Summary

WCCC feels quite strongly that the retention of the bushland character of the city is very important and should be considered in every project and at every stage of the implementation of this very ambitious plan. This carries across all the elements which make up the vision from the design quality of the buildings to the quality of the landscaping and the interaction with the transportation options.

The community is willing to embrace innovation with the strong proviso that other areas of the city not be neglected in terms of both planning quality and economic stimulus and viability. If this balance should not be achieved then having one part of the city being vibrant could result in the remainder becoming both physically and economically neglected.

We recognize the value of an enhanced entrance to the city for visitors that could result in an increase in both tourist numbers and satisfaction with a flow on to the general Canberra economy. The challenge then remains to improve access to tourist attractions in terms of parking and public transport.

This is a big vision and WCCC recognizes that change will be incremental and suggest that considerable public consultation will be required particularly at significant decision points.

Thank you for agreeing to accept comments from the Weston Creek Community Council at this stage.

Pat McGinn
Acting Chair
Weston Creek Community Council
3 April 2016