
Submission on the Inner North and City District Strategy



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About Greater Canberra

Greater Canberra is a community organisation that advocates for a more liveable, sustainable and affordable Canberra. We believe that forward-thinking urban planning and the encouragement of connected medium density communities is vital to ensure that future Canberrans can enjoy social and economic equality and a high quality of life.

Our members come from all over Canberra, and from a variety of backgrounds - both renters and homeowners, from different stages of life, different levels of wealth, and different occupational and professional backgrounds.

This submission was drafted by inner north residents Aymon Wuolanne, Edward Smyth, Matthew Bowes and Lucy Gramenz. Questions on the submission can be sent to greatercanberra@gmail.com.

Involvement in the Missing Middle Canberra Coalition

Greater Canberra is a signatory and strong supporter of the [Missing Middle Canberra](#) open letter, which draws together a range of Canberra organisations to support sensible planning reform. The letter notes that Canberra currently faces a dual housing crisis: an affordability crisis, which is exacerbated by a severe shortage of both private and social housing, especially in our most in-demand suburbs; and a climate crisis, which is exacerbated by our current sprawling suburban form, which leads to increased greenfield development and increased transport emissions.

We, along with our co-signatories, have drafted this letter due to our deep concern that Canberra's current planning policies severely stifle the development of medium density housing, and so are deeply inadequate to meet the demands of these crises. The letter calls for a number of universal zoning policy changes to be implemented as part of the new Territory Plan, which we recommend the ACT Government consider in full. The proposed reforms would make a significant impact to our city's ability to tackle our housing and climate crises, and should be implemented as a priority, and integrated into the assessments conducted as part of this and other District Strategies

Summary of Recommendations for the District Strategy

1. Invest in a stronger blue-green network by greening, re-wilding, and pedestrianisation of existing waterways and nature corridors in the Inner North, especially where these are used for active transit.
2. Better integrate Braddon with the City by incorporating Braddon into the City Plan.
3. Incorporate, rather than limit, residential units alongside commercial and retail uses within the City Centre.
4. Investigate the potential of using existing EPIC land for future urban infill projects.
5. Support public and active transport by combining increased active and public transport investment with urban intensification around key transit corridors.
6. Plan for future growth in the Inner North by using the upper bound of population projections as the basis for the final District Strategy.
7. Zone for increased mixed-use development across the Inner North, especially along the light-rail corridor.
8. Rejuvenate local centres by investing in local amenities and allowing for more residential development in the vicinity.
9. Investigate innovative and space-saving new models for community and recreational facilities in the Inner North, including vertical schools.

Better District Strategies

In general, the District Strategies lack sufficient detail or explanation of their goals to provide guidance on the future of the areas they are intended to design.

The maps detail multiple areas of potential housing growth but provide no clear timeframes on when the proposed future investigation areas will be developed or how the additional dwelling will be included. Nor do they provide any guidance on what process will be involved in investigating these areas and what the criteria to determine their suitability will be. Without this required detail the District Strategies add little value to the Territory Plan and are merely commitments to plan for further plans in future.

We are further strongly concerned around the disparity between the relatively low number of dwellings projected as being necessary in the district strategies, and the strong population growth the ACT has seen over the previous several years. Notably, the annual rate of dwellings being planned for across the ACT by 2063, if achieved, would represent a halving of the current rate of annual dwelling growth in the ACT. We note that there are strong reasons to plan for more rather than less population growth given the high costs in terms of rising rents, displacement, and environmental degradation if our planning rules don't properly accommodate the number of homes necessary within our existing urban area.

Blue-Green Network

Canberra's inner north is fortunate to have excellent access to green areas, and can act as a great example to the rest of the city in how green corridors can co-exist in close proximity to medium density development. Moving forward, as the inner north population grows, it will be important to invest in maintaining and protecting these green areas, while also allowing for more housing density to meet housing demand.

Initiatives and Recommendations

We particularly note the initiative concerning the enhancement of the green network to provide greater amenity and connectivity, and suggest two key focus areas in this regard:

- **Initiative 1, 5:** The strategy should aim to marry renewed investment in re-wilding and native vegetation with better pedestrian access pathways in green areas, to help expand tree coverage and native environmental traffic, while creating pleasant new pathways for residents to enjoy and use to get around.
- **Initiative 1:** The strategy should focus on greening existing waterways in the inner north, to create more attractive and environmentally beneficial public meeting places and active transit corridors, rather than the current concreted waterways and underutilised spaces.

Economic Access and Opportunity Across the City

The Inner North district is projected to make up a major part of the ACT's population growth over the next few decades. Living in the inner north has many benefits for future residents: our district is a major employment hub for the ACT, has daily key services and amenities in close proximity to homes, and provides excellent public and active transit options.

Unfortunately, the inner north's high rents, low vacancy rates, and house prices are currently locking many Canberrans out of these opportunities. These factors are also reducing the economic vibrancy of our local shops and businesses by limiting their access to nearby patrons and workers. Put simply, unless our district can sustainably provide abundant housing to meet demand, it is not doing its part to advance economic access and opportunity in the ACT.

Initiatives and Recommendations

We note that there are a range of opportunities to reform the inner north's current highly restrictive planning regime, that holds back the local economy and limits economic opportunity in the district:

- **General:** Braddon should be better integrated with the Civic centre by incorporating this part of the inner north into the City Plan, rather than being considered only in the context of the broader Inner North District Strategy.

- **Initiative 2:** We strongly recommend against arbitrarily restricting residential development in the City Centre.
 - With regard to retail development, we recommend that the Strategy incorporate learnings from the experience of Dickson and Braddon, where residential development combined with ground-floor retail has created a more affordable suburb along with a thriving retail environment.
 - With regard to commercial office-space, we believe there is strong potential to allow co-location of office and residential buildings within the denser parts of the inner north, and that this co-location allows for a more sustainable and connected city for those who want to live close by to their work.
- **Initiative 5:** We recommend further investigation of the use of part of the EPIC land to allow for residential development, noting the significant size of the current area and the lack of significant economic or environmental value for much of this land.

Strategic Movement to Support City Growth

Given the proximity of the inner north to many key job-centres and amenities within the ACT, and the plethora of existing transit options - including the light rail corridor - this district strategy represents a golden opportunity to craft a vision for a more walkable and sustainable Canberra.

Initiatives and Recommendations

- **Initiative 1:** We recommend continued densification along light rail corridors, with additional support for missing middle density in the streets within walking distance to rail.
- **Initiative 4:** Any strategy increasing public transport capacity should consider future population growth as large scale projects often take time to implement.
- **Initiative 5:** We support implementing active travel routes upgrades that minimise active commuters interaction with car traffic. The residents on the east side of Northbourne have no direct active travel route to the city and further south, without cycling next to Northbourne traffic, which reduces many people's confidence in the safety of active transport. This would benefit many residents in the denser areas of Braddon and Dickson, as well as Ainslie, Downer, Hackett and Watson.

Sustainable Neighbourhoods

Canberra will continue to grow as more people choose to move here, we can either accommodate the growth or this pressure will increase rents and prices across the city. The inner north is called home by many newcomers to the city, it is sought after because of its proximity to the city, to the ANU, and for good public transport connections. We are deeply concerned that the change areas under consideration may not be sufficient, and that the timeline to enact change in these areas is very unclear.

Initiatives and Recommendations

- **Initiative 1:** We note that the population projections for the inner north are likely to be revised upwards significantly between this draft and the final version, and that the consequences of 'over-planning' for new homes are significantly less than those associated with the current under-planning.
- **Initiative 1:** We appreciate that further analysis to identify housing needs is a short term priority, and we expect that the proposed change areas will not be sufficient to meet the housing growth forecasts outlined in the draft strategy. Any population forecast will have a very wide margin of error, and only planning to accommodate the forecast figure is planning to fail. We strongly recommend that the Directorate considers the upper end of plausible population growth estimates when determining future housing needs.
- **Initiative 1:** The proposals for mixed use hubs in the Northbourne corridor are welcomed. Historically, in almost all towns and cities there was no separation between residential and commercial uses, this is only a relatively recent feature of our cities. We could see great benefits from allowing more areas of our city to have mixed uses; if an area is dense enough to support a coffee shop or a bakery then why should it be forbidden?

Inclusive Centres and Communities

Greater Canberra believes that community infrastructure, local centres and amenities are not only the lifeblood of the communities they serve, but are critical to realising the Government's vision of a green, sustainable and inclusive Canberra. As the inner north grows it will be critical to have the appropriate community infrastructure and amenities to support its population. However, a lack of future infrastructure should not be taken as an excuse to stymie development. Instead, we believe the government should accept the need to be, occasionally, reactive and should embrace innovative solutions to get more amenities on a smaller footprint of land.

Initiatives and Recommendations

- **Initiative 1:** Local centres not only provide access to amenities and shops within walking distance, but are also hubs for public transport and focal points for community events. This allows those living near a local centre to live sustainably and connected to the community. We strongly recommend a more aggressive approach to zoning and developing potential local centres. Furthermore, we believe living near a local centre should not be a privilege held by only a few. For a truly inclusive community centre, upzoning in the vicinity must be allowed. The Government should consider a minimum zoning around local centres of RZ3 and greater when suitable.

- **Initiative 3:** We encourage the pursuit of innovative models for community and recreational facilities. Schools are a vital part of any community, yet the forms of schools that are currently built in the ACT take up a very large amount of land. We recommend that the Government considers urban forms for schools that are common in many cities across the world, where vertical space is used more effectively. A great example is the new vertical Brisbane South State Secondary College which won a 2022 Australian Institute of Architecture Queensland award.