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# Submission on Weston Creek District Strategy

Greater Canberra, March 2023

## About Greater Canberra

Greater Canberra is a community organisation advocating for sensible planning reform to enable a more affordable, liveable and sustainable Canberra. This submission was drafted with the input of Greater Canberra members who live in Weston Creek. Any questions about the submission should be directed to [greatercanberra@gmail.com](mailto:greatercanberra@gmail.com).

## Summary

In this submission, we outline our recommendations with regard to the Weston Creek District Strategy. In general, we are concerned that the District Strategies as drafted lack sufficient detail or explanation of their goals to provide guidance on the future of the areas they are intended to design. While these strategies identify multiple areas of potential housing growth, they provide no clear timeframes on when the proposed future investigation areas will be developed or how the additional dwelling will be included.

With regard to this district strategy, we specifically recommend:

1. Implementing zoning reform to support housing supply in the district
2. Better documenting and enhancing blue-green connections
3. Planning for stronger economic development
4. Enhancing public transport connections for new housing development
5. Develop more diverse housing options
6. Allow for additional housing near the Weston Creek group centre

## Recommendations

### 1 - Implement zoning reform to support housing supply in the district

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. As such, the letter calls for the following policies to be implemented in the new Territory Plan:

- Legalise more private, public, and community-owned duplexes, terrace-houses, and townhouses by upzoning current RZ1 areas to the RZ2 standard, and allow this low-impact housing to be subject to similar streamlined development approval requirements as existing detached homes.
- Rejuvenate local centres and allow for more terrace-housing and low-rise apartment buildings, by upzoning current RZ2 areas to the RZ3 standard.
- Reform the CZ4 local centre zone to more easily allow for apartments above local shops, increasing the height limit to at least three storeys, while reserving ground floor space for commercial use.
- Enable more sustainable housing designs and reduced housing costs for the increasing number of Canberra families who don't own a car, or only own one car, by reducing mandatory parking requirements to 1 car space per home, across all residential zones.

These 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.

## 2 - Better documenting and enhancing blue-green connections

The extent of Weston Creek's blue-green network is larger than indicated by the map in the district strategy (many existing urban space green links are not shown in the network). These spaces are highly valued by Weston Creek residents, and their retention and improvement will be key to retaining natural amenity with additional infill development.

**Recommendation:** Expand the extent of the documented blue-green network, and commit to improving these spaces across the district, especially where additional development is likely.

## 3 - Planning for stronger economic development

Most of the small businesses in Weston Creek are service businesses serving the immediate Weston Creek community. Some also cater to Molonglo Valley residents, as that district currently has limited available commercial sites. As more businesses eventually develop in Molonglo Valley, businesses in Weston Creek will lose customers, potentially putting their viability at risk. To grow Weston Creek's predominantly service oriented small businesses, Weston Creek will require more residents, especially living in close proximity to local centres and the group centre.

**Recommendation:** Plan for additional residents in Weston Creek, which will underpin the customer base of its local service businesses and allow them to grow, even as patronage from Molonglo residents fall.

### 4 - Enhanced public transport connections

Weston Creek is reasonably well serviced by its rapid bus connection to the city, however it lacks rapid links to other major centres, most critically Woden. While the Draft Strategy flags potentially expanding the rapid network to link Weston Creek to other parts of the city in the future, it is difficult to imagine future governments prioritising these links given the very weak population growth planned for the area.

**Recommendation:** Plan for additional residents in Weston Creek in proximity to the rapid network to support higher public transport frequencies and additional links to other parts of Canberra.

The Strategy also does not sufficiently integrate new housing with transport corridors. Despite identifying Hindmarsh Drive as a future part of the rapid transport network, it identifies very little of the corridor as a future investigation area.

**Recommendation:** Commit to a route and likely stop placement for future rapid transport routes through Weston Creek, and plan for additional housing along these routes.

### 5 - Develop more diverse housing options

Weston Creek is well suited to development of more, and more diverse housing. It has good transport connections to other parts of Canberra, high natural amenity, and strong access to employment community facilities. Its existing housing mix is dominated by single detached dwellings, the highest proportion of any district (82%). Most of these dwellings are on large blocks, are nearing the end of their useful lives, and will need to be replaced in the coming decades. This presents an excellent opportunity for replacement with more dense dwelling types. Weston Creek also has a higher proportion of retirees than any other district (21%), and while many older residents have a strong connection to Weston Creek, there are limited housing options available to suit older people (newer, accessible, low maintenance, energy efficient).

Despite these opportunities, the Draft Strategy does not plan for sufficient new and diverse housing in Weston Creek. Far too little of the district is identified as suitable for additional housing. Large areas of existing housing in close proximity to the group centre (especially to the south and east) has been excluded from the future investigation areas. Large areas of Stirling and Rivett close to the group centre have been assessed as low suitability for new housing, with little clarity over why this is the case. It is also unclear why the area surrounding the Rivett Local Centre has not been identified as a future investigation area, while this is the case for all other Local Centres in Weston Creek.

The Strategy identifies potential infill housing demand of only 1,300 dwellings for Weston Creek through to 2063, which is too low, and is unlikely to support the population growth necessary to achieve the Strategy's Key Directions on public transport and small business.

**Recommendation:** Plan for more new housing by expanding the area subject to future infill investigation.

### 6 - Allow for additional housing near the Weston Group Centre

The draft Strategy also does not sufficiently identify opportunities for new housing within the Weston Group Centre. The Group Centre contains large amounts of surface parking, and significant numbers of older, low rise commercial buildings. It also has high amenity, as it is adjacent to parklands and densely treed open space to the east and west. This may make some locations highly suitable for redevelopment as mixed residential and commercial (similar to redevelopment of other Canberra group centres, such as Dickson).

**Recommendation:** Plan and zone for additional housing near the Weston Creek group centre.