

# WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

*- Your Local Voice -*

Email: [info@wccc.com.au](mailto:info@wccc.com.au)

Website: [www.wccc.com.au](http://www.wccc.com.au)

Phone: (02) 6288 8975

Fax: (02) 6288 9179

ABN: 52 841 915 317

PO Box 3701 Weston Creek ACT 2611

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Spatial Plan ACTPLA  
20 Challis Street  
DICKSON ACT 2602

To whom it may concern

## **Towards the Canberra Spatial Plan**

The Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) has been actively involved in Weston Creek as a consultation conduit for the local community since 1991. Over the past 8 months we have discussed issues surrounding the recovery and rebuilding of Weston Creek after the 18 January fires. In May 2003 we hosted a large meeting of around 240 people at which Ms Dorte Ekelund presented information on the Spatial Plan, particularly in the context of the Stromlo Forest.

The WCCC is a non-political, voluntary lobby group representing the residents of Weston Creek and is an informed, active and pragmatic contributor to public debates in Weston Creek. Our website ([www.wccc.com.au](http://www.wccc.com.au)) has further details about the WCCC.

In Weston Creek our community is very active in the affairs of the ACT Government and this has reflected in the degree of engagement in reviews and studies being carried out post 18 January.

The WCCC therefore is presenting the attached submission on the third stage of the Spatial Plan as a reflection of the concerns of residents and puts in front of government the agenda of the people of the Weston Creek district for their future.

Yours sincerely

(signed)

Jeff Carl  
Chairperson, Weston Creek Community Council.

**Submission of the  
Weston Creek Community Council  
on the document  
*Towards the Canberra Spatial Plan***

**OVERVIEW**

Residents of Weston Creek, through the efforts of the Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) have been very active participants in the various consultation processes on planning matters that the ACT Government has conducted over the last two years.

Throughout this period, our community has been very aware of the stagnation that has occurred within our district over the last decade or so as a result of a steadily decreasing and aging population. During this time we have experienced mergers and closures of local schools and colleges, increased vacancy rates in our local shopping centres, and a steady decrease in public transport services and community facilities.

Our community has realised that in order to maintain our existing facilities and services, the population of Weston Creek must be maintained at existing levels, or preferably, the population must increase. We also understand that the age profile will have to change and the district needs to attract younger couples and families with young children so that enrolments in our local schools are at least maintained. That said, we realise that with smaller projected household sizes, our local population will probably never approach the 30,000 residents who lived in our district in the 1980s. To achieve this aim of population stability, the community accepts that some urban development/consolidation must occur either within or around our suburbs, but there is no single view on how this might occur.

The results of the firestorms of 18 January 2003 are still keenly felt within our district and this event has focussed local attention on urban renewal. The destruction of the forested areas in the Stromlo and on Narrabundah Hill has resulted in a large proportion of local residents losing the very lifestyle that attracted them to our district. Furthermore, the trauma experienced by large numbers of residents has meant that they are not able to effectively participate in far-reaching consultation exercises such as the present one.

Growth Concepts 3 and 5 of this third stage of the Spatial Plan will change the very nature of the non-urban areas surrounding our district, whilst Growth Concept 4 will change the character of the urban area within our district. Members of the Weston Creek community believe it is both unfair and unwise that the Government expects a heavily traumatised community such as Weston Creek to make quick decisions that will have far-reaching consequences on our individual lifestyles for at least the next 25-30 years. We have not yet recovered to the stage where we are ready to make these sorts of decisions.

Notwithstanding this fact, the WCCC has tried to glean meaningful comments from members of our community, but we realise that a significant number of residents will be discontented and feel disenfranchised by the present consultation process.

## **POPULATION PROJECTIONS**

Until recently the WCCC had not queried the population statistics and projections provided in previous discussion papers for the Spatial Plan consultation process. However at the forum held on 6 September last, a document was provided by Dr Craig which challenged the projected 2032 population estimates.

The *Towards the Canberra Spatial Plan* discussion document estimates a population of 389,000 in 2032, but the five Growth Concepts contained within this document envisage that Canberra will capture more of the growth from the sub-region than is currently occurring. If this happens then it is stated that the city may grow to exceed 500,000 residents by 2032. While acknowledging this additional growth could occur, the WCCC feels that a more conservative figure somewhere between the two extremes is likely to happen. A more realistic measure would be an increase to say 450,000 residents.

The ACT's population in 2002 is stated in the latest Spatial Plan document as being 321,819. A population of 450,000 means just over an extra 128,000 people, and if a reduced household size of 2.4 persons is applied to the whole of this increase, then only 53,409 new dwellings would be required.

We note that in Growth Concept 5, a total of 71,000 dwellings could be provided without developing the Molonglo area. We also note that Growth Concept 1 provides for 47,000 new dwellings with minimal urban redevelopment.

A further major consideration is that the changing demographics will result in a larger percentage of older retired people in the ACT. This should produce a lower income per capita, a desire to be close to facilities and a demand for smaller blocks.

The question that needs to be answered by the Spatial Plan is whether dwellings that meet these criteria for an aging population can be best provided on greenfield sites or by selected redevelopment and infill. We feel that this question requires closer examination.

## **GENERAL VIEWS**

In principle the WCCC is presenting some of the views of the residents of Weston Creek. These views have been expressed at various public meetings held over the course of the current year, as well as in interviews with some 700 residents at local shopping centres and comments received via email and telephone.

As stated in our comments on the concurrent Non-Urban Study, many residents of Weston Creek are opposed to any residential development within the Stromlo area because this area played a pivotal role in their recreational pursuits and lifestyle choices. However some residents are agreeable to see small-scale, appropriate residential

development providing the previous green character is replicated and a substantial area is maintained for recreational purposes.

There is widespread support within our community for continuing residential development within Gungahlin to ensure that it is a viable township. This development should proceed whilst taking into account as far as possible the environmental concerns expressed in the discussion document. We appreciate that this will be a fine balancing act, but a study of the Biodiversity map provided in the document appears to indicate that the land suggested for development in Growth Concepts 1, 3 and 5 does not encroach on the land marked as endangered ecosystems. The land already committed in Lawson, Dunlop and Bruce should be developed.

Growth Concept 2 is not supported since the implications on ecosystem destruction in NSW are not known, and there will be very little economic benefit to the ACT. This Growth Concept also has substantial costs associated with the supply of services and facilities to a population that resides outside the ACT's borders and is not subject to ACT Government revenue raising measures.

It is noted that the redevelopment/infill suggested in Growth Concept 1 would yield 47,000 dwellings which represents a good start to the 53,409 required if the population should rise to a median level of 450,000 persons. If this growth were tempered slightly, and with some contribution from Gungahlin and Lawson etc, the projected dwelling target could again be reached without major greenfield development.

Regarding Growth Concept 3, there is little support within the Weston Creek community for the development of land in West Murrumbidgee as there are major environmental concerns including that of water quality. Further this is an area which should be part of a Bushfire buffer or fire minimization area. This Growth Concept appears to encompass all of the present recreation areas that are adjacent to our city, including Stromlo, Bulgar Creek, Kowen and Tidbinbilla. These recreation areas have been widely recognised as a key feature of our city and are very important to a healthy community. They should be maintained intact. This is particularly important as the average age of the community rises and we battle to contain medical costs.

It has been suggested that within these recreation areas there should be some attractions with a low profile and low impact on the environment, but no substantial development. The importance of areas like the Cotter within Canberra's culture should be recognized and retained. It is considered that recreation could be a major generator of income for the ACT given our central position in Australia and great facilities for all types of sport.

Generally members of the community consider that 'good' design of residential development includes restricting development to a maximum of 3 storeys and enforcing private open space and overshadowing requirements. If these measures are followed, then the community would find acceptable most redevelopment proposals in existing urban areas.

In making these general comments, members of the Weston Creek community have taken into consideration the evaluation criteria discussed in Chapter 4 of the discussion document *Towards the Canberra Spatial Plan*. They have also commented on the considerable negative impacts on biodiversity of Growth Concepts 3 and 5, but have recognised that greenfield development will offer opportunities to utilize new water conservation technologies.

The beneficial sustainability aspects of shorter projected average trip distances and length of congested roads offered by Growth Concepts 4 (in particular) and 5 have been noted, but these benefits are offset by lifestyle issues associated with adjusting to much higher residential densities required by Growth Concept 4. Furthermore, the higher infrastructure costs for new dwellings required for Growth Concepts 2, 3 and 5 and the high cost of new water and sewage infrastructure for these Concepts are seen as negatives.

A substantial number of residents are also sceptical about the true motives behind Growth Concept 3 since this option results in a large increase in Government revenue from the development of greenfield sites. This Concept is often seen as an unfortunate result of the devastation wrought by the 18 January 2003 firestorms which has presented the Government with an opportunity for a land grab that would otherwise not have occurred until the pine forests were harvested.

### **TIMING OF DEVELOPMENT**

If some development was to proceed in the Molonglo area it is suggested that this would not occur until 10-20 years have elapsed. However, the community cannot wait this long for the burnt forest regions to be restored, either from an environmental perspective nor from a visual perspective. There needs to be a medium term remediation plan in this area.

### **TOWARDS A PREFERRED POSITION**

The community is very concerned that the Stromlo area be "greened" in the near future, both for environmental protection reasons and also to ameliorate the devastated landscape that is currently viewed by a community still suffering the after shock of a massive fire. The community generally believes that an acceptable amount of greening would be achieved by the restoration of Deek's Forest Park on its 18 January 2003 site, with the rest of the Stromlo area being developed as an "Urban Forest" as set out in the Reforestation Business Case developed by ACT Forests and released in June 2003.

This "Urban Forest" concept appears to allow limited urban development in a bushland setting in a manner that offers adequate protection from bushfire events as envisaged by Mr McLeod in his report entitled *Inquiry into the Operational Response to the January 2003 Bushfires in the ACT*, which also resulting in a commercial forestry area that

produces an economic return to the Canberra community. This concept also maintains a large recreational area on Canberra's western outskirts and hence maintains the lifestyle choices of a large number of residents of Weston Creek and elsewhere. In this way, the unique landscape setting of the city, which is highly prized by all Canberrans, is retained.

An additional benefit of the "Urban Forest" concept is its contribution to the achievement of the ACT Greenhouse Strategy because an area that would be largely urbanised, and hence be a greenhouse gas producer, is retained in a treed state and is thus a carbon sink

Furthermore, by limiting greenfield development, the city is more sustainable since existing infrastructure, services and facilities are better utilised.

### **SUMMARY COMMENTS**

The Growth Concepts so far developed have taken polarised approaches and the WCCC feels that a further "Hybrid" Growth Concept should be developed taking into account the comments in this document. In particular the population projections should be related to this new hybrid Growth Concept by allowing for a series of progressive population growth options with graded responses.

A statement about the current action to be taken with land that may be required for residential development in 20-30 years time is essential to give certainty to the general public, affected rural leaseholders and developers.

In any event, the Weston Creek community sees no requirement for large-scale residential development of the Stromlo area within the next 20 or so years based on realistic population projections. However, some limited residential development might be acceptable provided that it is within the bounds of an "Urban Forest" as envisaged by ACT Forests in their Reforestation Business Case released in June 2003.

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