

ACT Housing Choices Collaboration Hub

Final Report

Context

The Housing Choices Collaboration Hub is a group of **31** randomly selected individuals representing a broad cross-section of the Canberra community.

The group convened on five separate occasions, over 3-months, to **answer the question: “Canberra is changing – and there are many different ways our housing needs can be met. What do we need to do?”**. We had the goal of providing the ACT Government with community-driven recommendations for housing policy.

The diversity of the group was evident from the beginning, with many creative ideas suggested for how housing policy in Canberra can be improved. To inform its decision-making, the group engaged with external stakeholders and ACT Government representatives to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and concerns that Canberrans face in relation to housing policy.

There was wide recognition across the group that the ‘missing middle’ (medium-density dwellings) will be key to Canberra maintaining its idyllic reputation as the “bush capital” and “garden city” as it grows into a medium sized city.

With this in mind, the group developed recommendations around **9** themes, namely: zoning, planning and approvals, affordability, character, public housing, quality of design and construction, and lifestyle and diversity.

It is intended that these recommendations are viewed collectively, recognising that housing policy must be approached from a holistic viewpoint and that the majority of recommendations are reinforcing and complementary.

The group is satisfied that the themes and recommendations touch upon the major housing concerns that Canberrans face or will likely face as our city changes.

Affordability

Housing affordability is affected by land purchase price, availability and location changes and levies, stamp duty, developers buying large / multiple blocks, method of sale / auctions, financial models and bank requirements.

Recommendations

Recommendation
All agreed to ensure the proportion of new land released for lower income earners is maintained. Many agreed that the proportion of new land released for lower income earners is increased.
Rationale
To enable lower income households to have affordable housing (from submissions, and presentations including ACTCOSS)

Recommendation
Explore and implement alternative models for affordable home ownership including co-housing, rent-to-buy and financing options.
Rationale
To enable more low-income people to access affordable housing, examples in public submissions.

Recommendation
Re-invigorate the land-rent scheme to increase take-up rate for eligible buyers. (e.g. review of price level and incentives)
Rationale
To enable lower income households to have affordable housing (from submissions, and presentations including ACTCOSS)

Character

How do we maintain 'garden city / bush capital' while meeting changing needs and growing population?

Recommendation

Initial Recommendation
All applications should submit a landscape plan and streetscape elevation to describe character of green space to encourage diversity of street fronts. It should be enforceable only for multi-unit developments.
Rationale
The group wants to retain bush capital / garden city feel, and retain each suburb's unique characteristics.

Environment

How do we build / design environmentally houses and communities that minimise environmental footprint?

Recommendations

Recommendation
Require future developments in RZ3 to RZ5 to meet mandatory standards for proportion of soft landscaping plantable area to provide room for shade trees and gardens – to reduce heat island effect and reduce stormwater runoff and integrate planning with government sustainability standards.
Rationale
To maintain adequate greenspace and landscape for animals and communities to minimize environmental impact.

Recommendation
Greater preference on 'infill/brownfield' over 'greenfield'. Particularly along transport corridors. Not at the expense of parks and urban open-space.
Rationale
To reduce environmental impact with the consideration to appropriately use of brownfield area. (Applicable to zoning).

Lifestyle and Diversity

The current housing options driven by market do not provide flexibility for varying lifestyles in both physical space and possible procurement methods.

Recommendations

Initial Recommendation
<p>For both infill* and new developments, government should require and/or incentivise developers to deliver an increase in:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Mix of dwelling sizes and diversity of dwelling types2. The set proportion (%) of new dwellings that meet universal design standards: <p>whilst taking into account different Precincts and changes over time.</p> <p>Other NOTES about Infill; this should allow:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• For rules to kick in over time, as spaces/blocks are redeveloped with reference to Precinct Plans• For the mix and diversity for each area to be reviewed over time; not set and forget. <p>Notes for Item 1. As examples for consideration/incorporation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single level age-in places• Shop top living• Build to rent• Share housing• Loft-style• Courtyard• Terrace house• Mews• Manor. <p>Notes for Item 2. Universal design is considered to be an adaptable house that is able to respond to changing lifestyle needs.</p>
Rationale
<p>Based on submissions/presentations by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kate Auty, ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment• Sue McGrath, The Benevolent Society• Clare WII, Board of Community House Canberra• Shane Garrett, Housing Industry Association.

Planning and Approvals

Planning and approvals need to be simplified, controlled and accountable. We need to understand reforms and if there are any gaps.

Recommendation

Recommendation
<p>Create Precinct Plans to provide a framework for planning in and around suburbs and centres.</p> <p>The Precinct Plan should address future growth, housing, public transport and services at the level of the suburb or centre. It should also manage the cumulative impacts of the development of the urban environment, such as overshadowing; flooding from increased runoff; and wind tunnels.</p>
Rationale
<p>The precinct plan provides an interface between the parties in the planning process.</p> <p>It also provides for builders and planners to alleviate or avoid some environmental problems.</p>

Public Housing

How do we increase public housing stock to include a broader diversity or needs into the future?

Recommendation

Recommendation
Increase in government housing in-line with growth of population, including increase in type of dwellings to reflect the changing demographics. Types of dwellings to be based on Housing ACT requirements and needs.
Rationale
There is a shortage in public housing and a growing number of people in need. The current public housing doesn't provide enough variety in dwelling type (units, 2 bedroom or 3 bedroom houses etc) to suit the needs of recipients.

Quality of Construction

Construction: meets standards before, during and after construction.

Recommendation

Recommendation

Canberra's housing should be constructed to a high quality throughout all stages. To ensure this, we recommend that the inspection/certification process is completely independent and not influenced by owners, developers or builders.

The group unanimously agreed to this principle. From a construction perspective this can be achieved by ensuring independence in the inspection process including: Greater clarity of standards, frequency of evidence based inspections during the building process, unannounced and frequent auditing of certifiers, solely government appointed certifiers and reviewable records of documentation.

Sources: community first hand stories (anecdotal) – Chris Millman

Rationale

The Rationale behind this recommendation is to ensure:

- The elimination of conflicts of interests
- Increased transparency in the inspection process
- Ensuring quality of construction
- Reduction in rectification of building costs
- NB: Case in Point: Signification number of new flats in the ACT currently with water damage requiring rectification.

Quality of Design

Design: suits location, zoning, amenities, liveability, inside and out, environment

Recommendation

Recommendation
<p>We would like the government to adopt a sustainable outcome-based standards of design that demonstrates best practice design quality and liveability standards (eg NSW SEP 65 case study)</p> <p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Promotion of best practice examples in demo projects- Incentives for solar/renewables, materials, EER, accessibility (eg. reduction in rates)- Design review panel mandatory for all applications RZ3-5
Rationale
<p>To address the issue of an ACT standard outlining the code of practice governing/covering design quality and liveability.</p>

Zoning

The current zoning system is:

- Inflexible (prevents innovation / suitable design)
- Difficult to understand (where to go, how to navigate, reasons for decisions, increases costs)
- Not responsive (Difficult to change)

Recommendations

Recommendation
Many agreed to allow dual occupancy with separate title in RZ1. With dual-occupancy, some were concerned about small plot sizes and large houses on small blocks of land. Retain current RZ1 plot ratio for the remainder of that zone.
Rationale
Allows dual occupancy and retaining a 'garden city' environment.

Recommendation
We don't want lots of tall building closely packed next to each other. With greater density we need greater green space on each block.
Rationale
Allows RZ2-5 development while retaining the 'garden city' environment.

Minority Reports

These minority reports **do not reflect the room**. They are **minority positions** that failed to achieve the **80% level of support set by newDemocracy** as the minimum level of common ground. These reports are reflected by at least 10% of the room, and are included to contribute to informing the Government as a complement to the main report.

Connectivity

Recommendation
<p>Stronger integration of the public transport system with the government's city planning approach, including the development of areas of concentrated urban infill.</p> <p>This includes rezoning and looking at by back opportunities to unlock underutilised land along transport routes, particularly focusing on areas between town centres to improve connectivity and create a more walkable city.</p>
Rationale
<p>https://www.routledge.com/Sustainable-Pathways-for-our-Cities-and-Regions-Planning-within-Planetary-Norman/p/book/9781138188303 (speaker Barbara Norman)</p> <p>Additional sources: Travis Gilbert (ACT Shelter) and Kerry Wilmot (ISF UTS).</p>

Recommendation
<p>In order to create a more sustainable city Canberra needs to address the significant cultural attachment to the use of the car as the primary mode of transport.</p> <p><i>The Collaboration Hub felt that a significant change to reliability, efficiency and pricing structures would be needed to change behaviour. Many felt that the cost/value of the current public transport system should be addressed with reduced fares. Some felt that this should be free. Some people also felt that developments close to public transport could have reduced rates of parking/ provide share cars instead.</i></p>
Rationale
<p>We have one of the most expensive and the least performing public transport systems in the country with speed, reliability and price being talked about reasons collaboration hub members would opt to use a car.</p>

Canberra has one of the lowest cost recovery schemes in place in Australia - only getting about 20% of the cost of running the network. Therefore reducing cost would have minimal impact on cost recovery if this meant greater take up.

Source: see page 12 of

https://infrastructure.gov.au/infrastructure/publications/files/Trends_Infrastructure_and_Transport_to_2030.pdf

Parking spaces add a significant cost to development and it's important that lifestyle affordability is seen in context not just upfront cost. And affordable housing not located on the fringes away from public transport.

Environment

Recommendation

Ensure that the planning processes for new and redeveloped communities takes into account the preservation of old growth trees and environments that allows for the integration of wildlife corridors linking suburbs through green spaces.

Rationale

While many of the Hub members generally supported protection of the environment this recommendation was not included in the final report due to the significant number of recommendations being put forward and a clear focus on the initial question posed to the group. This recommendation fell short of the required consensus to be included. The original recommendation is provided below with a rationale based on the conversations held over the five working days.

- The corridors are valuable in providing natural green spaces for use by citizen and the local wildlife.
- This is important to promote biodiversity and protect threatened species and avoid fragmentation and destruction of remnant old growth habitats
- Retaining linked green spaces reflects the Community Housing Hubs strong views on retaining the nature of Canberra being 'The Bush Capital.'

Public Housing

Recommendation

Increase the income threshold from (\$893 gross combined for 2 people) (to whatever the median is so that they pay less than 30% of their gross weekly wages on rent) to allow a wider demographic of people struggling with rental stress to access public housing/community housing.

Rationale

Rental affordability is an acute problem within the ACT. Close to a third of low income households renting are in housing stress (where they must spend more than 30% of their income on rent payment and almost half of low income households in private rental are in housing stress.

Bearing in mind, the average weekly rent within the ACT is \$530 p/w for a 3 bedroom house and \$450 p/w for an apartment.

The original recommendation of an "increase in public housing stock (range of dwelling choice) to suit predicted need, to suit diverse population (including age and financial/ intergenerational factors by % in line with % of population in housing crisis," had strong support from the group, however, it lost some support due to time when a consensus couldn't be reached around details of eligibility.

