



Gungahlin Community Council

Gungahlin Community Council Inc.
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10 August 2021

Standing Committee on Planning, Transport, and City Services
ACT Legislative Assembly
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Inquiry into Draft Variation 364: Gungahlin Town Centre Further Considerations for the Committee

The Gungahlin Community Council (GCC) has provided a written submission to the Committee's Inquiry into Draft Variation 364: Gungahlin Town Centre and appeared before the Committee as part of the hearings conducted on 29 July.

The GCC asks that the Committee also consider the issues and topics noted below that have arisen from the hearings, or come to the GCC's attention since our written submission was made:

- We would ask that the Committee undertake a visit to the Gungahlin town centre to observe the effectiveness or otherwise of the current mixed-use developments in terms of delivering good planning outcomes from the perspective of current and future Gungahlin residents.
- The GCC does not claim to be a "representative body". As required by our funding deed from the ACT government, we actively seek out the opinion of residents through a range of channels including face to face meetings, live streaming, video conferencing, popups at festivals, Facebook, our website, and traditional media (TV, radio, print media). The GCC advocates on behalf of residents on the issues arising from these opinions. These issues and advocacy are openly published. The GCC notes that these channels are recognised and valued by many ACT government agencies and directorates who engage with the GCC to get messages out, and seek feedback on behalf of the community. The following data points (as of 5/8/21) illustrate the GCC's broad based engagement:
 - ~80,000 – population of Gungahlin
 - 897 – number of subscribers to GCC email list
 - 3,287 – number of followers of the GCC FaceBook page
 - 1,563 – number of respondents to the 2019-20 GCC Community Survey
 - 714 – number of signatures on the Call to Suspend Land Sales in Town Centre petition
- The industry representatives at the hearings spoke in some detail about how mixed-use outcomes could be improved. The GCC notes that the precinct code, with or without the changes proposed by DV364, actively discourages commercial on sites being relevant to the whole precinct. This indicates how much further work needs to be done to get the planning right, along with other incentives and investments. From R4/C4 (and R89/C89) of the precinct code:

The scale of leisure, recreation, community and commercial activities included with multi unit housing development achieves all of the following:

- a) ancillary to RESIDENTIAL USE*
- b) services the local residents only*

- Part of EPSDD's justification during the hearings for increasing residential density in the Gungahlin town centre is compliance with the government's objective that "70% of new housing development to be within Canberra's existing urban footprint" by treating the Gungahlin town centre as existing urban infill. The Gungahlin town centre is still undergoing initial development - much of East Gungahlin is essentially greenfield paddocks. The Gungahlin town centre has already made a significant "contribution" to densification because of the transition of precinct 2b from office park to residential mixed-use – a loss of over 100,000m² of commercial space. It seems grossly unfair for the government's densification strategy to be further concentrated in this area.
- The Planning Minister's comments during the hearings regarding the Defence Housing Australia (DHA) office lacked detail and accuracy. As a result of a Federal election commitment, DHA committed to move their head office to Gungahlin
 - <https://www.dha.gov.au/about-us/our-organisation/news-and-events/news/news-article/2018/05/17/dha-s-relocation-to-gungahlin>. Although this is a smaller Federal agency, its move to the Gungahlin town centre by March 2022 is welcomed by the GCC. The GCC notes that this move is not a result of "market forces" or the planning system - it was as the result of direct action (arguably like the establishment of Winyu House by the ACT government).
- The explanation/evidence provided by EPSDD during the hearings that "market forces" indicate there is no demand for commercial space and there is demand for residential space demonstrated a startling lack of commercial awareness and completely ignores the responsibility and obligations of the "planning system" to deliver good planning outcomes for existing and future residents, ie. employment, retail, community and entertainment services. Development of the appropriate social infrastructure to meet the Common Good expectations for the community is surely a key objective of the planning system – Common Good outcomes are rarely delivered by the "market forces" of the commercial sector.
- EPSDD staff implied during the hearings that because a substantial Federal government agency has not chosen to establish a presence in the Gungahlin town centre the only path forward is to sell more land for residential (mixed-use). This indicates that much more work is needed to develop the Gungahlin town centre as a destination for employment, retail, entertainment, education and community services. A level of creativity and innovation, and concrete incentives are need to realise these goals. One example of such an incentive is the peppercorn rent offered to UNSW for the CIT Reid campus (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-05/unsw-to-build-1bn-campus-in-heart-of-canberra/12028028>):

Mr Barr defended opting to hand the valuable land to the university essentially for free, rather than selling the land to developers.

"Obviously there is an opportunity cost associated with granting the land at a nominal value for an education purpose," he said.

"The alternate could have been to build more apartments. That would have been probably the highest economic use, in a cash sale for the government.

"But we recognise that in developing Canberra's CBD, yes we need more residents, but we also need jobs and diverse economic activity."

- During the hearings, the Committee asked the Minister for Planning to outline a vision for the Gungahlin Town Centre. Even with the support of the EPSDD staff in attendance this vision was not clearly articulated. At the very least the Gungahlin Town Centre Precinct should include this vision, yet DV364 seeks to remove a statement of commitment to a “strong employment base in the district of Gungahlin” seeking instead to “provide for a range of employment within the town centre”:
 - (n) support a strong employment base in the district of Gungahlin Provide for a range of employment within the town centre
 - (o) provide a business park within precinct 2b that contains a variety of building heights consistent with a campus-style development
 - (o) design of buildings, infrastructure and public realm spaces to reflect needs of a changing climate

There was no evidence provided or study conducted on the impact this would have for the long term on the viability of the town centre to function in line with the decentralised design of Canberra of satellite self-contained communities.

- The GCC would like to conclude by reiterating that there was no evidence provided during the consultation for the conclusions provided in the Town Centre Refresh regarding “strong for residential development” (from the Engagement Report):

KEY MESSAGES FROM THE COMMUNITY

BUILDING HEIGHT AND CHARACTER

- There were mixed views about increasing building heights in the town centre.
- Support for retaining the current building heights noting concern about traffic congestion, bulk and scale; overshadowing; privacy; and the interface with existing developments.
- Support for increasing building heights noting that the town centre character was changing; design quality was more important than building height; the need for additional marker buildings; and the strong demand for residential development.

UPGRADING AND ENHANCING PUBLIC SPACES

- Additional public spaces and open space are wanted by the community in the town centre, including active and passive recreation spaces and pocket parks.
- Public spaces should be well designed with amenity including landscaping, seating, shade, recreational activities, playgrounds and opportunities for community activities and good access.
- The amenity of Gungahlin Place needs to be improved, including landscaping, seating and shade.

WALKING, CYCLING AND ROAD TRANSPORT

- There was significant concern about increasing traffic congestion, as a result of the continuing growth of the town centre. Traffic flow and intersections also need to be improved.
- There are concerns that parking supply is not meeting short and long term demand.
- Safety for pedestrians, cyclists and motorist needs to be improved.
- There is strong support to improve the pedestrian and cycling network both within and into the town centre.

Further details about the community engagement are provided in the Gungahlin Town Centre Planning Refresh Community Engagement Report, available www.yoursay.act.gov.au.

Your consideration of these issues would be appreciated.

Regards

Peter Elford
President, GCC on behalf of the Gungahlin Community