
Submission on Molonglo Valley 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 the Molonglo Valley. Any questions about the submission should be directed to greatercanberra@gmail.com.

Summary

In this submission, we outline our recommendations with regard to the Molonglo Valley 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 very few 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. Plan for strong population growth
3. Beginning reclassification of the Molonglo Group Centre to Town Centre now
4. Focusing development around the new Town Centre
5. Supporting stronger public transport links through future planning

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 - Plan for strong population growth

We note the strong divergence between the final population planned for in the draft District Strategy (55,000), and the ACT Treasury's recent population forecasts, which project up to 86,000 residents in Molonglo by 2060. We strongly recommend the ACT Government plan for future population growth now, rather than being caught by surprise. This should include a strong pipeline of active and public transport infrastructure projects, support for key services, such as schools and child care, centred around the Molonglo Centre, and zoning changes to ensure sufficient areas enable urban infill, mixed-use, and medium-density housing.

3 - Begin reclassification from Group to Town Centre now

Noting the strong population growth that has occurred over the past few years in the Molonglo Valley, and the continued increases in population forecasts that have occurred since the creation of this draft Strategy, we strongly encourage the ACT Government to consider reclassifying the Molonglo Centre from Group to Town Centre now, rather than at an unspecified future date. Creating a vibrant, attractive, walkable and transit-connected hub at the centre of Molonglo Valley is key to making the area less car-dependent and more sustainable, and to enabling future additional urban infill as the suburb matures. This change will also create certainty for local businesses and stimulate economic activity in the area.

4 - Focus new development around the new Town Centre

In light of the aforementioned population pressures, additional population in the Molonglo Valley should be concentrated in the soon-to-be Town Centre, close to shops, services, community facilities and transport links. This should involve increasing height limits in the areas around the centre, along with developing a practical mixed-use design guide to ensure new residential development in the centre is co-located with great facilities and amenities that are useful and attractive to the community.

5 - Support stronger public transport links through future planning

Connecting denser development in the Molonglo Valley to high-capacity public transport routes will be essential to reduce carbon emissions and manage traffic flows as the area grows. In light of this, we strongly recommend that the final plan include increased specificity around future transport connections. In the short to medium term, this should involve rapid bus routes, with dedicated lanes and prioritisation where needed, from Woden to Belconnen via Weston Creek and Molonglo, and from Molonglo to City. In the longer term, this should include light rail from Molonglo to City and Molonglo to Woden via Weston Creek. We strongly encourage a 'future-proofing' approach be taken to new road development in the area to ensure light rail and higher-capacity bus routes can be expanded in future with minimal expense.