



Inner South Canberra Community Council

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ACT 2024-25 Budget Consultation

Thank you for inviting the Inner South Canberra Community Council (ISCCC) to comment on the 2024-25 budget. Our following submission can be made public.

Need for improved financial management.

2. Although we are suggesting items where modest increased outlays are justified, we make these proposals against a call for the Government to increase its efforts to deliver responsible fiscal discipline and financial management. The Government has seen its credit rating reduced, leading to increased borrowing costs to service high debt levels. Recent audit reports have drawn attention to serious shortcomings in the Government's approach to financial and project management, which need to be addressed on a whole of Government basis, overseen personally by the Treasurer.

3. Of particular concern, the lack of reliable cost and benefit information about Light Rail Stage 2 and other major projects, such as West Basin, casts a big shadow of uncertainty over the forward estimates. The Government needs to do much more to reassure the community that its proposed outlays are affordable, will not drain health, education and other critical services of necessary investment, and represent good value for money.

4. Rate rises over recent years have been punitive and well above CPI, to which many residents' incomes are pegged. Responsible financial management should enable rate rises to be capped at CPI.

5. A package of financial management reforms should include these elements:

- a) New spending unfunded by the Commonwealth should be offset by identified compensating savings elsewhere in the ACT budget.
- b) All significant programs should require a rigorous, objective, transparent risk analysis and risk management process, monitored by a risk manager independent of line responsibility for the program, whose progress reports should be made public.
- e) Rate rises in future years should be limited to, or below, CPI.

6. Against this background, the ISCCC's budget proposals for reprioritised spending are in five categories:

I Planning—more resources should be allocated to implement responsibly the new planning framework, implement thorough risk management, and facilitate medium density residential

redevelopment in existing RZ2 areas where this can be done sensitively and with local community support.

II Social (Affordable, Public & Community) Housing—this should be targeted and sympathetic in design to existing housing. It requires an additional allocation of resources to meet the needs of high priority clients.

III Tree Planting—investment in evaluating, and consulting on, opportunities for tree planting and continuing maintenance. Realistic targets need to be set.

IV Heritage Protection—more resources should be allocated to manage Indigenous, built and arboreal heritage.

V Community Consultation and Fix My Street—cuts in real funding for community consultation should be restored and additional resources provided for dual mode live and online consultation. *Fix My Street* needs to be fixed, by providing feedback and timeframes.

The ISCCC's suggestions are detailed below.

I Planning

7. The ISCCC recognises the need for residential infill, and notes that the 'District Strategies 2023' show the Inner South growing (from a 2021 Census base of 31,592) by 8,000 to 13,000 by 2050. Ninety-one per cent of this growth is shown as 'High density', but a much greater proportion should be 'Medium density' (as in other Districts), requiring a more nuanced response, with allocation of sufficient resources to:

- Undertake forward planning to facilitate sustainable medium density redevelopment.
- Manage locality-specific development controls permitting site amalgamations for increased densities and better environmental outcomes.
- Provide transparent and effective consultation with neighbours, pre-application and development approval processes with input. Exempt Certifiers/assessors must be held accountable.
- Give increased emphasis to compliance and evaluation, including consultation and transparency.

II Social (Affordable, Public & Community) Housing

8. The ISCCC recognises the need to reduce waiting times for social housing and increase the government's housing stock in the Inner South. This has been declining due to the sale to private developers of these government assets. The ISCCC recommends that the budget provides funding for the following:

- a) Continuation of the 'Grow and Renew' program with a focus on appropriate projects close to services and transparency on outcomes.
- b) An open discussion with the Canberra community about solving the urgent need for social housing, including: the 'salt and pepper' policy, providing more transparency about levels of social housing in each area; requiring developers to build social housing or provide for such housing in other developments; and establishing whether more land can be released.
- c) Increasing the availability of social housing in existing medium to multi-story dwellings.
- d) An independent analysis of compliance with the object of the *Housing Assistance Act 2007* (s.6(c)) to 'provide maximum value for money in the provision of housing assistance'; and

e) Rental of privately owned properties—this preceded Canberra response to housing shortages is a sensible way to cater for those most in urgent need of subsidised housing.

III Tree Planting

9. The ISCCC supports tree planting to help meet climate challenges and also to maintain the Inner South's character and amenity. In particular, we propose funding for:

- a) Evaluating opportunities for more tree planting in public areas, particularly in deficient areas, e.g. shopping centres, Fyshwick, and Kingston Foreshore.
- b) Carrying out and maintaining mass planting.
- c) Evaluating whether the current planting rate will meet the current target, given that young trees and tube stock do not replicate the canopy cover of established forests.

IV Heritage Protection

10. The ISCCC welcomes current work to improve heritage arrangements. Additional funding should be reallocated for adequate staffing and evaluation of heritage services.

V Community consultation and fix my street

11. Community councils operate on a shoestring to provide the Government with feedback on priorities and programs, helping to fill the democratic deficit which exists at local level in the ACT. Yet the allocation to community councils has this year been cut in real terms, while they have been asked to adopt costly additional hybrid live and online meetings. The cut should be restored and the grant augmented to enable these voluntary organisations to access up-to-date IT solutions.

12. Fix my street is a useful service, but too often suggestions disappear into a 'black hole'. The service should be funded to provide users with feedback on what happens to their suggestions in every instance.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input to the budget process. We are willing to provide oral amplification of this response if you would find that helpful.

Yours sincerely

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