



Mick Gentleman MLA

Minister for Advanced Technology and Space Industries

Minister for the Environment and Heritage

Minister for Planning and Land Management

Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Manager of Government Business

Member for Brindabella

Obj # 19/29502

Ms Marea Fatseas
Chair
Inner South Combined Community Council
PO Box 3310
MANUKA ACT 2603

Dear Ms Fatseas

M. Gentleman

Thank you for your letter of 17 September 2019, outlining your concerns about ACT Government community engagement on planning issues. I acknowledge your disappointment that the Manuka Panel session was not specifically about the Manuka Oval and surrounding Precinct.

As Minister for Planning and Land Management I believe that Canberrans should be involved in the decisions that may impact their lives. I also believe it is important to engage with the community in ways that are meaningful and forward looking. Where circumstances change, then adjusting community engagements to respond to those changes is an appropriate and indeed necessary, course of action. There is little to be gained from "ticking an engagement box" if the outcomes cannot usefully contribute to current policy reviews.

In the case of the Manuka Community Panel, the 21 November 2018 letter from the Chief Minister and me, and the Chief Minister's letter of 6 June 2019, it was clear that the commencement of the Planning Review changed the nature of the engagement. This was reinforced in the pre-reading package for attendees that was very clear on what the Panel would consider. The intent was to seek input from a highly engaged part of the Canberra community in a way that would deliver meaningful input to the Planning Review. The Panel meeting was an important contribution to the start of a broader conversation on what needs to change for Canberra to have an outcome focussed planning system, that includes ways to consider the character and values of our city.

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In relation to the cancellation of the Environment and Planning Forum meeting I understand that Mr Ponton, Director-General of the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate had recently received feedback from a range of attendees suggesting that the forum may no longer be fit for purpose. The ACT Government is very mindful that many community representatives are volunteers who generously give up their time to assist the Government in developing policy. It is important that we adjust to change, and where necessary try a different mechanism in response to feedback.

When Mr Ponton began in the role of Director-General and Chief Planner in 2017, he gave an undertaking that he would look at new and innovative ways to engage with our community to make sure that engagement is effective and meaningful as it can possibly be. The Forum has been ongoing, generally in its current format, for many years and it is appropriate that we review the mechanisms we use to engage with stakeholders to make sure they continue to be fit for purpose, meaningful and robust, particularly when feedback from attendees suggested that this is necessary.

I am aware that Mr Ponton is currently working with the Secretariat and his colleagues in other directorates on how we can best engage with members of this Forum, and a wider group, on key policy matters within the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate. I further understand this work will be complete in the coming month and Mr Ponton will be sending an invitation to members advising of a meeting on the future mechanism for engagement in November 2019 – with the new process expected to be formalised in 2020. Part of this advice will include how we continue to involve community representatives in the Planning Review.

I am on leave from 28 September to 20 October 2019 but welcome the opportunity to meet with community council representatives to discuss your concerns when I return from leave.

Thank you for raising this matter with me. I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



Mick Gentleman MLA
27/9/19