



## Inner South Canberra Community Council

### Inner South Canberra Community Council election platform April 2024

This document sets out the Inner South Canberra Community Council's (ISCCC) views on issues which we ask to be addressed by candidates for the 2024 election. Parties and prospective independent candidates are invited to provide their responses, which will be posted on the ISCCC website for the information of the Inner South public. This offer will be kept open until after nominations close.

#### Planning: the context. Building the Inner South of the future.

2. Some 60% of dwellings in the Inner South at the time of the last census were apartments or town houses. There is no 'missing middle' in the Inner South. But there is a need for more public and social housing, and better management of the existing stock and its population. The ISCCC supports the provision of more public housing in our area, partly replacing dwellings lost in recent redevelopments. Major opportunities for new housing exist at East Lake, completion of Kingston Foreshore, Dairy Road, the Brickworks and the former Forestry School.<sup>1</sup> New housing at these sites should include significant allocations for public and social housing, with a focus on disadvantaged groups such as single parents and older single women.<sup>2</sup>

3. The best outcome for these developments and others will come with close community consultation. RZ2 outcomes should be reviewed to establish how closely the original intentions of this innovation have been met. In the meantime, we consider that better use could be made of remaining opportunities in RZ2 zones, including through block amalgamation.<sup>3</sup> The recent liberalisation of RZ1 blocks to permit a secondary dwelling is unlikely to have any significant effect on housing affordability, and there is no case for further dilution of the parameters for RZ1, which protect our valued garden city environment.<sup>4</sup> Housing supply for Canberra can and should be boosted through increasing the pace of land releases.

4. While opportunities for sensitive renovation will arise, there is no need for holistic redevelopment of our Inner South shopping centres. Manuka, Kingston and our other local centres are our meeting places, the beating hearts of our communities and

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<sup>1</sup> . Inner South Canberra District Planning Strategy 2021 [ISCDPS] Strategic Direction 1.1 Proposed Action 1. Implement a targeted urban renewal program....

<sup>2</sup> ISCDPS 2.1 -1. Social housing to be integrated throughout all the suburbs... -2. A mix of social and private housing to be provided in the East Lake urban renewal area.

<sup>3</sup> . ISCDPS 1.1 –3. Review RZ2/3 zones ACT-wide, particularly the rules, to obtain better outcomes near local business centres.

<sup>4</sup> ISCDPS 1.1 -2. Multi-unit redevelopments not to be permitted in RZ1 zones.

ecosystems of vital small businesses. They would be easy to destroy but it would be very hard to replace their character, village atmosphere, specialty shops and services.<sup>5</sup>

5. There have been too many planning dead ends, such as the apparently abandoned Manuka to the Lake project. Huge investments have been put into ambitious planning exercises such as East Lake. The new Government should focus on projects which can be delivered on an affordable basis, in a reasonable timescale. There should be more up-front precinct planning with genuine community engagement. This is not just about housing. The projected near doubling of the Inner South population by 2060 indicates a need to plan now for new schools and expanding existing schools infrastructure such as a swimming pool, and likely impact on roads and transport services. The current Inner South District Strategy is largely a template document that reflects tokenistic engagement with our community. The new Government can do better.<sup>6</sup>

6. It is evident that the growth of Canberra creates issues which go well beyond the ACT borders, though the ACT will continue to provide vital services for the region. Future population growth will to a large extent occur in the surrounding shires of NSW, with consequences for the city, including for transport, health, education and justice services. There would be strong value in the creation of a joint regional planning authority with NSW to drive cross border coordination and renewal.

#### Planning: systemic reform

7. The current Government's planning reforms have replaced a well understood, if defective system with one which is opaque, subjective and with uncertain Governance. The incoming administration should commission an evaluation of the changes made to the planning system by the previous administration, with a view to prompt intervention to address the system's most egregious failures. These actions should be given priority:

- The planning system should be subjected to a comprehensive risk assessment and risk management process, which can demonstrate whether the alleged shortcomings of the previous system really existed and (if they did) will in fact be addressed. Consideration should be given to an independent, expert decision-making body such as NSW's 'local planning panels' which operate in some areas.

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<sup>5</sup> ISCDPS 2.2 -1. Local centres to be upgraded in accordance with master-plans while maximising the value arising from the heritage character of the buildings, streetscapes and open spaces.

-2. Development at Kingston and Manuka Centres must respect the heritage values of the areas.

-3. Government to work with leaseholders, business and the community to regenerate all Inner South Canberra shopping precincts.

<sup>6</sup> ISCDPS 4.1, 4.2 & 4.3

- The new system gives a central role to subjective judgements by Government decision-makers of what constitutes a ‘good outcome’. This results in too much uncertainty for the community and too much power for decision makers within the bureaucracy. There should once again be mandatory rules for key aspects such as building bulk and scale, solar access, prevention of overshadowing, site open space and tree cover.
- The weak governance of the planning system requires thorough review with full stakeholder consultation, focusing on the elimination of conflicts of interest and excessive concentrations of power.
- There should be periodic reviews of development decisions and their systemic context, conducted by an independent body, and followed by quick action to follow up lessons learned.
- Knock down rebuilds are almost control free under the present regime, leaving neighbours with no redress if confronted with consequences such as loss of solar access, or deep excavations up to a common boundary. Knock down rebuilds therefore need to come within the mainstream planning system, with development applications and rights of appeal.
- There is a need for quality control of private certifiers, supported by a registration system and effective penalties where standards are infringed. Project developers and builders should be held to stricter bond requirements in respect of building defects.
- Heritage areas continue to need special protection.<sup>7</sup> The recent move away from the earlier development application pathways into the unregulated world of exempt developments and private certification is now seriously eroding identified heritage values. In particular, the exempt development process must be disallowed in heritage precincts.
- The Community needs strong and readily accessible appeal rights. ACAT should be reconstituted on a more flexible, more nimble and less legalistic basis. A ‘neighbours charter’ would usefully bring the rights of residents in respect of neighbouring developments together in a coherent way.

### The Environment

8. Global warming presents many imminent threats to the health and well-being of the community.

- All the new Government’s policies and programmes should as a primary objective have the minimisation of greenhouse emissions and the reduction of urban heat island effects. Air quality monitoring should be improved.
- Measures should include tree planting programs with realistic stretch targets, plus green wall and heat reflection measures for buildings, roads and other

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<sup>7</sup> *ISCDPS Theme 6: Heritage*

infrastructure. Many overseas and interstate examples offer ways to ameliorate the heat island effect.<sup>8</sup>

- Requirements for new dwellings should include measures such as photovoltaic power and storage, and EV charging, with tenants able to participate. As new technologies such as Green Hydrogen emerge, they should be incorporated into design requirements.
- Trees frequently suffer during redevelopment and are removed unnecessarily. Remaining trees need extra care after disruption. Regulation should pay particular attention to the welfare of trees affected by redevelopment. Trees should be given space to thrive, while parking on verges needs better policing. Property owners should be incentivised to plant shade trees, and a special unit could be established to drive more realistic tree planting targets and ensure new plantings are supported by well-designed watering and maintenance programs.

### Transport and City Services

9. Current plans for the extension of the light rail from Civic to Woden remain of great concern to the Community Council. The recent report by John Bell and others on transport options for South Canberra, '21st Century public transport solutions for Canberra', outlines a plethora of concerns about the lack of plausible estimates for the completion of the project, given the many engineering problems to be overcome, and the absence of a cost/benefit analysis. The cost of tramway works such as the \$13 million new stop at Mitchell appears excessive to some residents compared with similar improvements in Melbourne. This brings out the likely need for a long-term expensive maintenance program. The report advocates, instead of light rail, an expansion of the electric bus network. Candidates should explain their response to the recommendations in this report, and their proposals for the future of public transport in South Canberra.<sup>9</sup> ISCCC also favours a program of engineering works to reduce the railway journey time to Goulburn and Sydney, as well as progressive improvements to the radial road network into NSW.

10. Regarding other transport issues, the ISCCC advocates that

- 40km zones should have flashing warning lights, as is common in other jurisdictions.
- The new Government should conduct an audit of the condition of footpaths. While climate change makes it sensible to encourage active transport options such as walking and cycling, the poor state of many footpaths makes this particularly problematic for elderly people, those with a disability and young families. This situation is arguably inconsistent with anti-discrimination legislation.

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<sup>8</sup> ISCDPS 3.3

<sup>9</sup> ISCDPS 5.1

- Street lighting in some parts of the Inner South requires improvement as does signage on dog on lead footpaths.
- E scooters and shopping trolleys create an obstacle course, particularly for people with a disability. Docking stations should be provided for e scooters so they are not left across footpaths. Supermarkets should be made to collect their trolleys from surrounding streets at least once daily, and scooter hire companies required to collect their abandoned assets more rapidly.
- Bus shelters should be redesigned to facilitate wheelchair access.

11. The city has become scruffy. Measures to smarten it up should include more regular weed cutting, emptying of public garbage bins and a vigorous program of graffiti removal. Fast food outlets should be required to take more vigorous action to keep adjacent streets and parks clear of their discarded packaging. A levy on these companies to subsidise street cleaning should be considered.

#### Oaks Estate and The Causeway

12. Within the Inner South, the Oaks Estate represents a focus of multiple disadvantages requiring special attention from the new Government. The 40% of housing stock represented by public housing is mainly of poor standard and often in disrepair. The population endures disproportionate health issues yet has difficulty in accessing health care and social services. Cut off from the rest of the ACT, the Estate has no direct bus link to the city. The new Government should establish a Task Force to examine the issues facing the residents of Oaks Estate and produce holistic solutions to give them a much better future.

13. Residents of the Causeway endure somewhat similar problems to those of the Oaks Estate, and they must be addressed as part of the East Lake redevelopment. More clarity is needed to resolve the anxiety which has been created for existing public tenants over their prospects for rehousing.

14. At all public housing locations, the new Government should commit to active management of its properties, higher standards of property maintenance and prompt attention to difficulties caused by the small minority of tenants.

#### Government at Strategic level and Finance

15. Although we are suggesting some 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 costs for servicing high debt levels. Recent audit reports have drawn attention to serious and multiple 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. The new Chief Minister would benefit from the advice of an independent Treasurer.

16. Of particular concern, the lack of reliable cost and benefit information about Light Rail Stage 2 and other major projects, such as West Basin, conference centre and stadium development, 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. The CIT is an example of management reviews taking far too long to conduct and implement.

17. Rate rises over recent years have been punitive and well above CPI, to which many residents' incomes are pegged. High property taxes are deterring investors from financing much needed rental properties. Responsible financial management should enable future rate rises to be capped at CPI.

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

- New spending unfunded by the Commonwealth should be offset by identified compensating savings elsewhere in the ACT budget.
- All significant programs should require a rigorous, objective and transparent risk analysis and risk management process. This should be monitored by a risk manager independent of line responsibility for the program, whose reports should be made public.
- Rate rises in future years should be limited to, or below, CPI.
- The size of the Territory bureaucracy, its management and its distribution should be reviewed to ensure that it can handle priority tasks effectively and benchmarked against best practice Interstate. Where possible, Ministerial and Departmental responsibilities should be aligned to create clear lines of command. Expensive consultancies should be used more sparingly.

### Community Consultation

19. The current Government pays lip service to consultation, for example in the new Planning Act, yet the reality is very different. Fix my street has been a useful innovation, poorly implemented. Many times, people are given no idea whether their request has been read, whether any action will take place, or when. Fix my Street needs to be fixed to provide feedback to all people making requests on the web site.

20. 'Have your say' too often features leading questions aimed at smothering dissent and should be redesigned to provide genuine open-ended consultation.

21. Community organisations provide a valuable means of communication between the people of the ACT and the Government, even though the Government may not always enjoy the advice we provide. Community Council and Association members have broad links with the community through their own families and the many other organisations they belong to, yet funding for the community councils, steady for the last decade, has been cut in real terms this year. The new Government should commit

to restoring the cut and increasing it to fund any extra services required from the community councils, e.g., dual in-person and online delivery.

### Conclusion

22. In all our proposals, our underlying expectations are that the new Government will observe high standards in transparency, accountability, and sustainability. Across the board, consultative processes should take pains to include disadvantaged and minority groups.

23. Political parties and intending candidates are invited to provide their response to our election platform. We commit to posting these responses on our web site. We will renew this offer after nominations are closed.