

AN OPEN LETTER

About

A Petition from Residents of Coombs and Wright

Seeking Public Accountability for

What is Happening At Coombs Local Shopping Centre

TO:

ACT Government Minister:

Minister Mick Gentleman
Minister for Planning and Land
Management

gentleman@act.gov.au

*Members for the ACT Electorate of
Murrumbidgee:*

Bec Cody

cody@parliament.act.gov.au

Jeremy Hanson

hanson@parliament.act.gov.au

Giulia Jones

jones@parliament.act.gov.au

Caroline Le Couteur

lecouteur@parliament.act.gov.au

Chris Steel

steel@parliament.act.gov.au

Members of the Parliament of Australia:

Gai Brodtmann
Member for Canberra

gai.brodtmann.mp@aph.gov.au

Hon Zed Seselja
Senator for the A.C.T.

Senator.seselja@aph.gov.au

COPY:

John Dietz
CEO, Suburban Land Agency

suburbanland@act.gov.au

FROM:

Alison Hutchison
Resident of Coombs since May 2016.
Organiser of the Petition

Contact details supplied in an accompanying
email to the above recipients of this Open
Letter.

DATE: 8 JUNE 2018¹

¹ Population data by area on page 2 updated 10 June 2018.

Public Accountability for What is Happening At Coombs Local Shopping Centre

I recently created a petition on Change.Org for residents of Coombs and Wright who want public accountability in relation to the Coombs Local Shopping Centre². The petition has attracted 100 supporters in just a few days, with more signatures being added every day. The text of the petition is shown in the attachment.

Over 5,800³ people now live in the Coombs/Wright and yet the designated shopping precinct is not open. Residents are inconvenienced, frustrated and annoyed by the lack of facilities and they want to know why. Many, like myself bought into Coombs some years ago on the understanding that local shops would certainly be available by now.

In February 2018, the developer, Renato Cervo, assured the local community that the centre would be open for business “very soon”⁴. Further construction work was observed on site in late summer but building work and landscaping seem to have stopped now. The building looks as though it needs a fit-out for tenants and, presumably, it needs a certificate of occupancy/ building completion to be applied for by the developer and issued by government. However, there are **no** encouraging signs such as “Now Leased” or “Opening Soon”.

This Open Letter present three requests arising from the attached petition:

1. **Accountability.** We consider that residents of Coombs and Wright are entitled to public accountability on the progress of critically important social infrastructure such as the Coombs Community Local Shopping Centre. It is not reasonable to simply say that the developer has until late 2019 to complete the project and therefore residents must watch and wait in silence until then. Those of us who have spoken to the developer personally have been met with responses that include hostility, derision, anger and, on occasions, personal abuse. This is just not acceptable.

We seek help from you, our elected representatives in parliament, to act on our behalf and obtain for us public accountability from the developer, Renato Cervo.

2. **Information.** We consider that we are entitled to information and not just social media rumour about what is happening. What are the specific factors affecting the developer’s inability to recruit tenants for the new building, particularly a supermarket? Are there problems with the size or design of tenant spaces? Are the lease terms and conditions not market competitive? Is there uncertainty for tenants because of other nearby planned developments (like Koko⁵)? Or are there other market forces or personality factors involved? More recent rumours refer to the whole site being up for sale. Is that the case?

We seek help from you, Minister Mick Gentleman and our elected members of parliament to identify the specific factors contributing to the delays in opening and we ask that you let the community know accordingly.

² Coombs Community Local Shopping Centre is located on the corner of Fred Daly Avenue and Fairhall Street.

³ Population data by area corrected on 10/6/2018 based upon ABS ERP *Population Change by SA2 (24/4/18)*.

⁴ “Coombs shopping centre will be open 'soon' says developer”, Canberra Times 8 February 2018 <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/coombs-shopping-centre-will-be-open-soon-says-developer-20180207-h0v6yz.html>

⁵ Koko Molonglo development sign is located on the corner of John Gorton Drive and Steve Irwin Avenue, diagonally opposite Coombs Community Local Shopping Centre. <https://www.kokomolonglo.com/>

3. **Deadline.** We consider that we are entitled to have our requests for accountability and information met by November 2018, at the very latest. This is the scheduled timing for the next Mingle Wright/ Coombs Community Information Night. We have set a deadline because we do not want this uncertainty to drift into 2019.

If the Coombs Community Local Shopping Centre is not open by November 2018, we petition the government to invite the developer, Renato Cervo, or his representative, to attend that meeting and hence be publicly accountable for the status of this critically important infrastructure.

In the intervening time, we trust that you, Minister Mick Gentleman and our elected members of parliament, will work pro-actively with the developer to address and resolve the current totally unsatisfactory situation.

We have all watched this scenario unfold over several years so we do not need to be told the background or how we got here. Nor do we need to be told that shops are currently being constructed in Denman Prospect. We live in Coombs and Wright **not** Denman Prospect. Many of us want shops that are within walking distance not another car-trip. People with disabilities and those dependent upon public transport also need real consideration.

We are only too well aware that a development application is anticipated on the Koko⁶ site that is expected to include a large supermarket, shops and residential apartments. It will be years before those facilities open but we recognise that the proposed development may have implications for the Coombs shops.

A recent ACT Government YourSay survey⁷ indicates that people rate “Access to shopping precincts” as the top feature contributing to a *great suburb*. In fact, they rate access to shopping precincts higher than access to parks, footpaths, streets and maintenance of trees, shrubs and roads. A shopping centre is not just a source of commercial profit for a developer, it is a critically important factor in social cohesion, particularly in newly developing suburbs such as those in the Molonglo Valley.

In following-up this petition, we intend to stay focussed on seeking your help, as the relevant planning Minister and elected representatives, to know what is going on, and we will stay focussed on seeking to have the current inconvenient and frustrating situation addressed and resolved by November 2018.

I have provided my contact details in the accompanying email and would be pleased to speak about any matters raised by this petition.



Alison Hutchison

On behalf of residents of Coombs and Wright who signed the Petition’.

⁶ See Footnote 5.

⁷ *Better Suburbs Your Say Survey Results September to November 2017, YourSay ACT.*

https://www.yoursay.act.gov.au/application/files/5515/2643/0163/Better_Suburbs_Survey_Snapsh ot.pdf

*This is the text of the petition on Change.org
that is addressed to Mingle@act.gov.au for action.*

Public Accountability for What is Happening at Coombs Local Shopping Centre



Residents of the suburbs of Coombs and Wright (in the A.C.T.) seek public accountability from the developer of the Coombs Local Shopping Centre, Renato Cervo, about what is happening to this critically important infrastructure. We petition the Suburban Land Agency's Molonglo Mingle Team to invite Mr Cervo, or his representative, to speak at the next Wright/ Coombs Community Meeting organised by the Mingle Team in 2018. Residents seek to have a progress report on the development and the expected opening date for the shopping centre, given that Mr Cervo's own sign says that the Centre was established by him **for the community** in 2015 and yet the building lies empty.

*Find the petition within www.change.org by searching 🔍 for
“Coombs Local Shopping”*

Or, type this URL into your browser: <https://chn.ge/2JijNJD>

RESULT AS AT 8 JUNE 2018: 100 HAVE SIGNED

