

Costigan / Driving more traffic chaos to Weston Creek

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After presentations to Weston Creek residents from the developer for the former AFP site in Weston, three politicians were given the floor.

The Liberal, Jeremy Hanson, was on message. He expressed concerns for several issues and notified all that he was door knocking.

The Greens’ Caroline Le Couteur was spot on when she focused on the real problems with this development, being the original zoning (very questionably generic) and the lack of appropriate traffic and transport infrastructure that should have preceded development on this site and elsewhere across the Molonglo Valley.

Labor’s Bec Cody got very animated about the opening of the new dog park the following weekend. Being of this government, she made no mention of the planning and development issues people had been discussing. Hers was an exercise of distraction. It did not work and more on that later.

The good people of Weston Creek had gathered to hear the latest presentation by the developers of the site, the Village Building Company.

The site in question is on the corner of Unwin Street and Heysen Street and the developers are proposing a mix of around 245 units, apartments and townhouses. The site is about 58,600sqm and is zoned RZ4 (Medium Density Residential).

Most questions during the hour-long session were about traffic and infrastructure. While the developers offered answers to issues relating to the site, they were not able to provide much about the complex traffic, transport and parking issues outside their development site. As Caroline Le Couteur suggested, these issues date back to how this site was zoned in 2008.

This part of Weston Creek is already suffering from complex traffic issues brought on by the massive developments throughout the Molonglo Valley that have sent loads of traffic through the nearby streets. This development, while being carried out according to the zoning, is destined to massively add to the problems that are hitting daily commuters due to the blatant lack of forward planning for the increases in traffic.

Unfortunately the developers on the night had to bear the brunt of these frustrations. It turns out that yet again the ACT government's method of traffic planning is to deal with traffic and transport problems once the worst has been inflicted on residents. The people of Gungahlin know about this – and are still suffering while the government works away to correct the damage that was done years ago. As was said on the night, this is the future for Weston residents.

The other big problem at play in Weston is the zoning. The current zoning works against delivering architectural results that fit alongside the aesthetics of these established suburbs. This is the same across many established suburbs being subject to redevelopment. Campbell residents have highlighted this.

The developers do what the zoning allows. In Weston it will be a 21st century set of units, townhouse etcetera surrounded by reasonable landscapes – in fact very nice central open spaces. But this monotone mass of similar buildings will be stark alongside the well established urban landscapes of Weston – now celebrating 50 years.

The government's generic zoning requires so little to address the neighbourhood character. This is minimal planning. The zone system needs to be scrapped and replaced with something

relevant to each suburb that addresses good design, requires varied architecture, promotes aesthetics and insists on lush landscapes – things that matter to Canberra's future as the bush capital.

The chair later commented that Bec Cody may have been wrong about the dog park, saying it was not so ready. It seems that Cody's enthusiastic distraction (look over here) fell a little flat and on the night she had not much to offer these residents. As does her government.

Paul Costigan is an independent commentator and consultant on the visual arts, photography, urban design, environmental issues and everyday matters. He has written on public housing before at the-southern-cross.com/people