

Your local voice

■ ■ ■ weston creek
 ■ ■ ■ community
 ■ ■ council

www.westoncreek.org.au
info@westoncreek.org.au

PO Box 3701
 Weston Creek ACT 2611

Telephone

Mick Gentleman
 Minister for Planning

Yvette Berry
 Minister for Housing and
 Suburban Development

ACT Government

ACT Government

13 August 2020

gentleman@act.gov.au

berry@act.gov.au

The Molonglo Commercial Centre

Dear Ministers,

We are writing to you on the matter of the Molonglo Commercial Centre. Council is seeking assurances that the proposed land release timing and mechanisms flagged for this important development do not risk a continuation of the suboptimal outcomes seen elsewhere in the Australian Capital Territory.

Council believes that ACT Government's approach of selling individual parcels of commercial and community-zoned land has not delivered high-quality suburban facilities in an integrated and timely manner. While this approach may produce larger financial returns to the Territory in the short term, there is growing evidence that it is not producing the best overall long-term outcomes for the Canberra community.

The shortcomings of this 'parcelisation' approach can clearly be seen in Coombs and Wright, where services such as shops and community centres have developed in a slow and disconnected manner. Council is aware of similar issues arising at the Gungahlin Town Centre, as evidenced by the delays associated with the delivery of the long-promised cinema complex. It is becoming clear that fragmented ownership is not conducive to good precinct design and often results in buildings internalising their uses to capture passing trade at the expense of the public realm.

As the first land release of the Molonglo Commercial Centre is not scheduled until the 2021-22 financial year, Council believes that there is sufficient time to consider a different approach to the development of what will become the principle retail and commercial hub for Molonglo's projected 55,000 residents.

To ensure best practice in urban design, Council recommends that the ACT Government examine how other jurisdictions in Australia have delivered modern community and retail facilities to greenfield residential areas.

Comparable precincts in recent years include the GPT Group's Rouse Hill Town Centre, LendLease's Craigieburn Central and Stockland's Point Cook Shopping Centre. In each of these examples, an integrated approach driven by a single developer has produced excellent design and delivery outcomes.

Based on the excellent results seen both at these locations and locally at Capital Estate Development's Denman Prospect, Canberra Investment Corporation's Crace and Worth Street Pty Ltd's Casey, Council believes that the best outcome for residents of Molonglo would be achieved if the ACT Government sought the involvement of a major private sector partner to help deliver the entire Commercial Centre over a number of years. Council expects that there would be strong interest in such an offering from major national players in this market that could bring skills and innovative ideas to this important project.

This approach would be consistent with advice previously provided to the ACT Government on the development of the Molonglo Commercial Centre, which emphasised the importance of attracting larger developers to facilitate the delivery of high-quality outcomes:

“Allow one developer to develop the retail centre. This will generally result in a better design outcome, with multiple developers often designing their land to the maximum benefit of their centre over the community. Allowing only one developer to develop the site will help the ACT Government negotiate for excellent urban design outcomes”

(Molonglo Commercial Centre, ACT – Market Potential Assessment, August 2018, page 89)

“Consolidate retail parcels within the Group Centre Core to encourage sizable retail delivery in the first stage of development... This will encourage larger scale developers with a history of delivering this typology, to the project. Tendering for these sites should ensure understanding of the project aims and social, cultural, design sustainability and financial aspirations.”

(Molonglo Valley Stage 2, Group Centre and Environs – Planning and Urban Design Framework, Urban Design Component, November 2012, page 218)

To safeguard the public interest, Council suggests that the ACT Government retains a degree of involvement in the ongoing development of the estate. This could be achieved either by entering into a joint venture arrangement with the private sector partner or by establishing an ongoing liaising process, similar to that established under the Delivery Deeds used recently for other large projects in the ACT, such as the Dickson and Lyneham on Northbourne sites. Requirements for strong community consultation and involvement during the master planning stage and the use of the National

Capital Design Review Panel would further assist in facilitating an exemplar design development for this important piece of community infrastructure.

Council firmly believes that the Molonglo Valley is capable of demonstrating excellence in high-quality, sustainable urban design that would rival national and international standards. Achieving first-class outcomes at its key commercial centre would be an important step towards realising this long-held aspiration.

We look forward to your responses.

Regards,



Tom Anderson
Chair
Weston Creek Community Council



Ryan Hemsley
Molonglo Valley Representative
Weston Creek Community Council