



## **WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL (WCCC)**

### **SUBMISSION FOR THE 2023/24 BUDGET CONSULTATION**

**6 April 2023**

*Your local voice*



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## WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL (WCCC) SUBMISSION FOR THE 2023/24 BUDGET

### INTRODUCTION:

Thank you for the opportunity for the Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) to respond to the **ACT Government 2023/24 Budget consultation process**. As a Community Council we are committed to advocating and supporting the Weston Creek residents in pursuing the expectations and values that enhance and ensure their safety, well-being, and quality lifestyles. While we acknowledge and appreciate the release of the draft District Strategy for Weston Creek, we are of the strong opinion that more innovation and improvement could be directed to our district within the Territory Budget. An ongoing concern is that the delivery gap remains a credibility gap.

WCCC recommends the ACT Government invest in the Weston Creek area to enhance the wellbeing and growth, of the community to support a vibrant and liveable precinct with a particular focus on:

- **Governance and liveability:** with a better investment in quality planning, and focus on the cost-of-living pressures on families
- **Environment, climate, and well-being:** mitigating the effects of climate change in the area with special consideration to air quality and urban heat island effects and protecting open green spaces
- **Supporting jobs and economic growth:** particularly around the Weston group centre and local shops
- **Health, sports, recreation, and facilities:** Development of indoor/outdoor sport, health, and recreation facilities
- **Community, connectedness, and transport:** Improved active travel including public transport, cycling, and footpaths. Including the provision of a **well maintained and safe** environment

After extensive community consultation, and in alignment with the ACT Government's focus areas and core areas of responsibility, Council submits the following comments and highly encourages their inclusion in the 2023/24 Territory Budget.

### GOVERNANCE and LIVEABILITY

Council is of the opinion that as the smallest of the ACT's nine districts in terms of land area, Weston Creek is already contributing a significant solution to the growing population and housing needs of Canberra (in developments such as LDK, Fetherston on Heysen Street, and the RSPCA site). Additionally, a greater mix of densities and uses around the Weston group centre, including shop-top housing, would provide additional dwellings and activate the area. These developments must be well planned and maintain the village and green character valued by residents.

Council notes the February 2023 release from the Chief Minister Treasury and Economic Development Directorate that population data for Weston Creek between June 2021 and June 2060 is going to have a population increase of 1,149 people. We trust that the ACT Treasury working in consultation with the Australian National University's school of demography will continue, and the estimates are further refined to inform the Budget.

**Cost of living pressures** are taking their toll in Weston Creek. Rates are considered very high and increase more than CPI (being considered the highest in Australia). It is timely for the Government to consider a justification measure or process such as occurs in NSW. Additionally, with these high rates it is reasonable that expectations are also high. Maintenance of roads, footpaths and parks should be a priority.

The outstanding **Development Application 202138682 for 1 Brierly Street Weston (Raiders Club)** proposal (for lease variation to remove the concessional status from the Crown Lease) is of concern. A possible low assessment is a governance failure and a missed opportunity to enhance the liveability for residents. Please note that this venue is heavily booked for community groups meetings, and life-long learning such as University of the Third Age.

Rather than letting Weston Creek fall into disrepair, a stocktake of maintenance, upgrades, and projects would be a sound investment. Feedback on the recent **Planning Review** is eagerly anticipated. Recent community and business feedback is an indication of the deep level concerns of this review. Council suggests a year's additional funding for the Planning Directorate to incorporate this feedback and present a well thought out product.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Better investment in planning
- Independent analysis of population data to inform the Budget decisions
- Review of ACT rates and the transparent breakdown of expenditure from these
- Enable the Competition and Regulatory Commission to examine rate and land tax increases
- DA 202138682 to be finalised promptly, noting the period for representations closed on 6 June 2022
- Ensure community meeting spaces are readily available
- Ensure finite resources are put to their most effective use through informed strategic planning
- Additional funding to extend the Planning Review

Assistance for individuals and families could include:

- Introduce school lunch programs
- Government to underwrite insurances for sports clubs thus reducing the burden on parents
- Improve the incentives for safe driving, for example reduced registration and insurance costs
- Establishment of an advisory service for those contemplating moving or downsizing their homes

#### **ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE and WELL-BEING**

The Western Creek District Strategy requires significant improvement, and this should be reflected in the Budget. Some suggestions for inclusion in the Budget for Weston Creek include:

- **Protection of and improvements at Fetherston Gardens.** There are many active groups in Weston Creek that have contributed to the improved condition of the ACT. Council praises the extensive and tireless work of volunteers who have restored and saved some areas that may have otherwise been lost. In Fetherston Gardens, volunteers and visitors are entitled to safe and welcoming facilities. Again, WCCC urges Government to install toilets at Fetherston Gardens. Additionally, equity of access has been compromised as paths and lawns have been damaged due mainly to storm damage. To safely expand access to a range of visitors, repairs must be completed without extended delays. Investigation should be undertaken to improve storm water flow from the Fetherston Ridge development, and the possibility of permanent paths could be considered. Unfortunately, vandalism has also become an issue. Apart from being distressing, these actions could be potentially dangerous. The installation of permanent CCTV cameras is therefore requested.
- Air quality in urban areas is an international health issue. Analysts are critical of poor collection and suggest better monitoring. Geographically Weston Creek has unique topography, making it a sensible location for an **air quality monitoring station**. Monitoring the air quality and sustainability is critical to measure exposure to hazardous substances in the air such as smoke, pollen, and dust in real time.
- **Managing bush fire risk** is a very serious issue and continues to be a source of stress and trauma for many locals. Council is hopeful that the recommendations given to Government by the Multi Hazard Task Force will be addressed in the Budget.

- In support of residents, Council again requests **Weston Block 2, section 75, (affectionately known as Coolo Park)** be reverted to its original, green open space zoning, then rehabilitated in line with resident's wishes. This could be a successful community partnership.
- Of great concern is the money spent for **the Western Edge Investigation**. The area is bordered by the Murrumbidgee River and Weston Creek including Chapman, Duffy, and Rivett. WCCC does not see any logical reason for development of this area.
- Residents value their green environment and native fauna and flora. The blue-green corridors need protection from feral and free-ranging domestic animals. Weston Creek is experiencing an increase in roaming cats and foxes and these animals are causing serious damage to native wildlife population. This needs greater attention.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Improvements at Fetherston gardens including toilets, repairs, and security cameras
- Establishment of an air quality station in Weston Creek
- Recommendations given to Government by the Multi Hazard Task Force be addressed in the Budget.
- Weston Block 2, section 75, (affectionately known as Coolo Park) be reverted to its original, green open space zoning
- Protection of the Western Edge
- Implement a Strategy for the control of foxes and enforce cat containment in all areas.

#### **SUPPORTING JOBS and ECONOMIC GROWTH**

Unfortunately, the draft Weston Creek District Strategy circulated has left the community feeling confused and underwhelmed. Further consultation, explanation, and inclusion of new initiatives for Weston Creek could result in an exciting strategy. Of note for Weston Creek:

- **Upgrade of Brierly Street:** The WCCC 2021 survey provided overwhelming community feedback for cafes, street art, outdoor eateries, gardens, entertainment, and traffic calming. Council looks forward to further significant Government investment in Stage 2 Brierly Street and beyond.
- Council notes the intention of upgrading the **Fisher shops** and **Weston Group Centre**. Council has received consistent feedback that these facilities need upgrades including beautification, energy savings, safe access, and family friendly environments.
- The **RSPCA site** is an area for future development. This is an opportunity for innovative thinking and business opportunities. Council looks forward to future consultation on this site.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Upgrade of the Weston Group Centre and surrounding precinct
- Upgrade of Fisher shops
- Consultation on the RSPCA site

#### **HEALTH, SPORTS, RECREATION and WELL-BEING**

Council has long advocated for increased sporting facilities in Weston Creek. Residents remain frustrated by the lack of facilities and Council has been advised some sports are unable to meet demand. For consideration in the Budget:

- An **indoor sporting facility** for the residents of Weston Creek is a high priority. Volleyball, badminton, table tennis and gymnastics clubs are all experiencing high demand and limited venue availability
- **Arawang Netball Facility** in Stirling, upgrades are required
- **Rivett Oval**. Although some work has been funded and appreciated, more will be required
- **Holder Oval** is often the target of vandalism. Neighbours would appreciate better lighting and maintenance of the oval
- **Therapy pool facilities** are in high demand and pressure. A local therapy pool is a high need.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Consult with the sporting and recreation groups of Weston Creek with a view to build a new indoor sporting facility in Weston Creek
- Upgrade Arawang netball courts
- Continue upgrades to Rivett Oval and repair the general access
- Provide ongoing, coherent, and regular maintenance of Weston Creek ovals, including Holder oval, with increased lighting provision
- Construction of a therapy pool in the district

## COMMUNITY and CONNECTEDNESS and TRANSPORT

Careful consideration to the following issues needs to be addressed in the Budget.

- **Improved policing.** Council continues to ask for a permanent and more visible presence of police in the area. With the growing ACT population, we believe a new police station is required for the Weston Creek/Molonglo area
- Council has long advocated for a safe community environment, including responses to dangerous driving, safe roads, and transport. **Recommendations of the Dangerous Driving Inquiry will require funding.** Council appreciated the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry and we look forward to this report
- **Safety for women and area maintenance:** residents feel that Weston Creek has been neglected, looking, and feeling shabby. Solutions include: improvements in pathways and lighting in such areas as bus stops, shops, and transport connections; more footpaths and maintenance of existing ones; clearance of obstructions on pathways; physical barriers to prevent vehicles driving on parks and ovals; improved cycle paths and off-road cycle paths separating cars and cyclists.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Maintain and revitalise Weston Creek
- Greater visible police presence in Weston Creek
- Improvements in pathways, lighting, and visibility in such areas as bus stops
- Government develops and implements a comprehensive policy response to dangerous driving, including a better targeting of police resources.
- Follow up on resident concerns, example improve deliverables for *Fix My Street*

Effective transport and active travel systems allow all people to move easily within the neighbourhood and make connections with other people, work, places, and services easily and safely. It has come to the attention of Council that there are concerning breaches of the Disability Standards in Weston Creek. Attention is requested for:

- **Traffic Issues - Hotspots** near schools and other public areas need to be reviewed particularly where these roads have seen increased traffic resulting in them becoming rat run roads. Problems include the **Namatjira Drive and Streeton Drive**, the **Namatjira Drive and Perry Drive**, the **Mulley Street and Streeton Drive intersections**. These are dangerous, particularly at school drop off and pick up (including before and after school care). These intersections need a better line of sight. In some cases, such as **Holder**, the narrowing of lanes in the area has confused drivers. Two car lanes and a dedicated bicycle route is needed here, especially to encourage different transport access to the village centre. With the **Stirling/Chapman** intersections the issues are increased by both frequent out-of-service buses, and increased traffic from Molonglo and Belconnen travelling to Tuggeranong. This is causing suburban roads to be the quickest route however traffic builds up at the connecting intersections.
- **Walking and cycling connections:** Cycle Route C5 off road for bicycles is meant to meet a certain width, but it does not meet these standards. Therefore, it is not safe and needs attention. Consideration needs to be given to wayfinding from Weston Creek to venues such as Mount Stromlo.
- Weston Creek is a major stakeholder for the **light rail project**. Council would appreciate active and ongoing consultation with the Project Team to ensure the best possible outcomes for the residents of Weston Creek

during the light rail planning and construction phases. Council has been advised of the difficulty for community members with **mobility issues in accessing light rail**. Wheelchair assistance is not readily available, and advice can be confusing.

- Council notes that a revised **Parking Policy** has been under development since at least 2016, as far as we can tell. This Policy would be expected to cover minimum parking space sizes, allocation and location of disability parking zones, provision of timed and untimed zones and hazard mitigation. The forthcoming Policy is often cited as a reason for not taking clear action on a multitude of issues, yet the Policy has yet to be seen. We request the policy be released without further procrastination and the well-documented issues with Weston Creek Group Centre parking be addressed systematically.
- **Transport connections:** Limited weekend buses are negatively impacting on active travel and public transport options for both work and recreation. Connections to other services are not aligned and this creates an unsafe perception. Buses need to go to Woden and Canberra Hospital from Weston Creek.
- With the Village Building Company Development on the old AFP site, concerns have been raised regarding the Government's responsibility to ensure safe car and pedestrian travel. **Heysen** and **Gruner Streets** will have increased traffic, requiring attention to these roads and connecting intersections.
- **Mulley Street and Streeton Drive** is dangerous, particularly at school drop off and pick up. This intersection needs better line of sight. The narrowing of lanes in this area has confused drivers. Two car lanes and a dedicated bicycle route is needed here, especially to encourage different transport access to the village centre.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Improved cycling and walking routes
- Car spaces and district improvements meet Disability Standards
- Review of transport and bus connections for Weston Creek residents
- Improve the traffic management and flow on Gruner Street and at the Heysen Street intersection
- Attention to problem intersections, particularly hot spots near schools
- Improve the line of sight at the Mulley Street and Streeton Drive intersection including attention to car and bike lanes
- Ongoing consultation with the Weston Creek community regarding the light rail planning and construction.

Please note that we have consulted widely with the community on this topic, including at community public meetings, newsletters, and community mail outs. We have sought, and received, valuable information which has in turn informed this submission. We agree to the WCCC Budget Submission to be made public and to be uploaded to the Budget Consultation website.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this input. As an active community group, Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) looks forward to participating in any future consultations and/or discussions.

Council extends an ongoing invitation for Government to make presentations at WCCC public meetings including on the matters raised in this submission.

Yours sincerely,

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