



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND  
PLANNING**

(Reference: [Inquiry into the Role and Future of the Woden Town Centre in the context of a compact city](#))

**Members:**

**MS J CLAY (Chair)**  
**MS F CARRICK (Deputy Chair)**  
**MR P CAIN**  
**MS C TOUGH**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**WEDNESDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2025**

**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Mr J Bunce (Ph: 620 50199)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, it may take evidence in-camera if requested. Confidential evidence will be recorded and kept securely. It is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly; but any decision to publish or present in-camera evidence will not be taken without consulting with the person who gave the evidence.

*Amended 20 May 2013*

## **The committee met at 1.20 pm**

**EDWARDS, MS MARIA**, Chief Executive Officer, Real Estate Institute of the ACT

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon. Welcome to the public hearings of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning for our inquiry into the role and future of the Woden town centre in the context of a compact city. The committee will today hear from a range of groups and organisations with an interest in the future of the Woden town centre.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome any other Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event or watching from elsewhere.

The proceedings are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and they will be published. If you cannot answer a question that is asked at the hearings, you are welcome to take it on notice and come back to us. If you take a question on notice, it would be great if you could use the words, "I will take that on notice." That helps our secretary to track down the answers.

I welcome Maria Edwards, from the Real Estate Institute. Thank you for joining us. This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly, and it has the same standing as proceedings of the Assembly. Today's evidence attracts parliamentary privilege. Giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

Do you want to make a brief opening statement, or should we go to questions?

**Ms Edwards:** Yes, I have an opening statement, if that is okay, in lieu of giving a submission in the first place. I could give you a bit of background.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, a brief one would be great. If it is really long, we will get you to table it, but please go ahead.

**Ms Edwards:** Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. The decisions made now will determine whether Woden evolves into a genuine, world-class town centre with a stable and diverse residential base, or whether it defaults to a high-density dormitory, where people cycle rapidly through undersized dwellings and never truly become part of the community.

In recent weeks, I have been canvassing agents who are working on the ground, meeting buyers, sellers and renters at open homes during the week and on auctions on the weekend. Their message has been consistent: the issue before us is no longer how many apartments are being built, as there is plenty of supply in the market, but what kind of apartments are being delivered.

Our members are reporting a significant mismatch between planning intent and market reality. We are seeing a growing pipeline of very small one-bedroom units that satisfy

technical approval and lending thresholds, but do not provide the liveability that purchasers and tenants reasonably expect.

Prior to 2017, the smallest one-bedroom unit sold off the plan was, on average, around 60 metres squared, plus balcony. Today, product is being delivered at around 42 metres squared internally, with a small balcony added solely to reach the 45-metre-squared threshold that is required for finance.

To illustrate the scale of this shift, a one-bedroom mini suite at the Meriton apartments in Canberra that you can use as a hotel room measures approximately 48 square metres. Some new residential apartments being marketed are materially smaller than the hotel-style product designed for temporary stays, not for permanent living.

Demand signals reinforce this mismatch. There is a report from Domain Insight recently that “study” is now the third most searched for feature in the ACT, which is different to the rest of Australia. The market is not seeking smaller dwellings; it is seeking adaptable homes where people can work, live and store the ordinary items of a daily life.

A 42-metre-square apartment without the capacity for a functional work zone or a flexible layout cannot meet this emerging expectation. If we want to retain public servants in the ACT with the mandated opportunity to work from home, dwellings need to be designed to accommodate this. Often, one of the agents reported to me that they cannot fit a queen-size bed in some of these new apartments that are being built.

Purchasers soon discover they have bought a space they cannot adapt to their life. They sell, often without a capital gain, and move on. One of the other agencies I spoke to said they had sold 25 units in the last two years, and not one seller realised a profit on those. I checked on the agent; they have sold lots of properties at a profit. It is just that that type of market is really struggling.

The trend of smaller apartments directly undermines the intentions behind the ACT government’s missing middle reforms, which aim to broaden housing choice, retain households in established suburbs and create places where people can live across multiple life stages. Housing that is too small to retain does not create choice; it creates churn.

We acknowledge that construction costs have risen across Australia, and feasibility has hardened accordingly. Previously, with pre-sales, you could reasonably expect that you would sell 80 to 90 per cent of an apartment complex off the plan. Realistically, these days developers and project sales guides are telling me it is about 60 per cent that they are selling off-plan, which means that the developer has to retain 40 per cent of them and try and offload those, which comes at a cost. Developer commentary indicates that viability is no longer about profit optimisation. It is now about whether a bank will fund the project at all, because if you do not have the feasibility in the first place, they cannot actually get these things out of the ground.

An additional and increasingly concerning factor which we would note is the withdrawal of investors from the ACT apartment market. Investor lending has fallen, and agents are reporting markedly lower investor participation in the apartment sector.

The ACT now sits at the bottom of the Australian states and territories when measuring investor finance as a proportion of overall finance for housing. The number of investors buying in the ACT taking out loans is smaller than first homebuyers—which is great; they are a big proportion, and they are growing, but investors are going down.

Investors are not optional in a compact city environment. They underpin the rental sector. They enable workforce mobility and provide the pre-sales base required to unlock project finance. When investors retreat, the system does not tighten; it just stalls.

A further consideration relates to what happens after apartments are built. The property management and strata management sectors are already under workforce strain. These roles are increasingly complex, heavily regulated and characterised by high attrition. If the Woden area intensifies without investment in the capability required to operate these properties after they are built, we risk creating dense housing that looks impressive on day one, but will be progressively harder to manage, regulate and inhabit.

A real concern for us is that strata sector. I know that we had the strata inquiry earlier this year. Actually, if you are planning for a whole lot of new apartments, you really need to have the support systems to look after the apartments once they are built. It is not just about delivery; it is about sustaining them.

Further complexity arises in shop-top housing—mixed-use buildings that have commercial presence on the ground floor and residential dwellings above. Residential tenants are entitled to quiet enjoyment under the Residential Tenancies Act, but in commercial dwellings, they are allowed to operate early hours, late hours, with trucks, with rubbish—all that sort of thing. There are frictions between both pieces of legislation that also need to be addressed, if we are going to move forward with a lot of development in the Woden area. There are lots of lessons to learn on that from existing ACAT procedures. Probably not today, but on another day, I would be happy to talk you through some of those as well. If shop-top housing is to be a deliberate feature of Woden's future, governance gaps in those acts should be addressed.

We would basically submit four key recommendations for consideration. First, introducing minimum internal areas into design standards to ensure that one- and two-bedroom apartments can function as long-term homes, not temporary accommodation. Second, incentivise developers who develop larger, more flexible floor plates through planning tools such as height-to-plot ratios or LVC adjustments—I am glad that is coming into the discussions at the moment—where they are supported by demonstrable feasibility improvements. Third, require an outcomes-based approach to housing. It is a bit blue-sky thinking, but measuring success not by unit count, but by whether residents remain, participate and contribute economically, socially and civically. Lastly, reform the Unit Titles (Management) Act to support the strata sector and investors to stay in the market, so that rental supply and pre-sales are sufficient to enable quality developments.

REIACT supports the government's objective of a vibrant, livable Woden. Our position today reflects the reality that achieving that vision requires dwellings, governance, settings and investment conditions that allow people not just to arrive, but to remain.

That was a bit longer than I probably wanted it to be, but I wanted to make sure that

I covered a lot of ground.

**THE CHAIR:** That was a lot of really useful information. Thank you for that. We will try and make sure that we each get to ask one question.

**Ms Edwards:** Yes, sure.

**THE CHAIR:** I will start off. We have just done a walk-around, and I picked up on the small apartment size and liveability strand. There is not a lot of green space out there, and you have mentioned incentivising developers to upgrade it. Do you think it is government's job to make sure that we have really good, livable spaces? If people are living in these really small spaces, it is more important that they have recreation and green space outside.

**Ms Edwards:** Yes, 100 per cent.

**THE CHAIR:** How do we do that? Within the parameters of what is already there, how should that be done?

**Ms Edwards:** Something that could be considered—and this is my opinion—is that, with some of these new apartment dwellings, they will build, for example, a cinema in them. For me, that is a small space that might be utilised occasionally in an apartment complex. Could that space be used for bigger apartments, or could it be used for community facilities that are a bit more user-friendly? Those sorts of things take up quite a bit of space in an actual apartment complex, but are they really necessary?

Maybe the planning guidelines should state what you can include as an extra facility within that. Also, if people are using the cinema within the complex, they are not using it over at Woden Plaza and they are not supporting the local businesses. If you are going to bring in things that are going to compete with local businesses that are trying to stay alive, maybe that is not ideal.

**THE CHAIR:** What about green space? There is not a lot of green out there. We did notice that one of the private developments had done a pretty good job of making probably the best green space in the town centre that we saw.

**Ms Edwards:** Yes. If they were incentivised to do that—100 per cent. Somebody has to provide it, whether it is government or private. As we know, the margins for doing developments now are so tight that it is just a matter of being able to afford it. Certainly, having that sort of space available for families to congregate or the kids to play is a great advantage, and it can mean your property is worth more in the long term. Obviously, it attracts more maintenance costs as well.

**THE CHAIR:** You also mentioned, with the vacancy rates, that there is a lot of churn in there. That obviously was not intended.

**Ms Edwards:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that an inherent feature of these very small apartments?

**Ms Edwards:** 100 per cent. Certainly, it is a churn, because, if you are a first homebuyer, you might get in there and think, “Great, I’ve got a home.” But if you get a partner or have a child, there is no way that you can live in a 42-square-metre apartment—not happily. You cannot work from home in those spaces, so where do you go?

The other thing to remember about that churn is that you want to get out of that apartment, but who is going to buy it in the long run? A lot of agents that we are talking to are saying that people are putting their place on the market but are then having to pull them off because they just cannot sell them. And it is not even about the price that they are selling them for; people just do not want them.

**MS CARRICK:** People are churning through these small apartments. When there are so many people churning through, who actually loves these places and makes sure that there is a home in these towers? I have heard anecdotal evidence that, when the pool was shut, the kids were breaking into the tower pools, which upsets the executive committees. If we are going to have high density, what is your view about the governance arrangements in having somewhere for their kids to play?

With dogs, they told us that people are just walking along the concrete, and their dogs are weeing on the pavement. Shouldn’t there be some social infrastructure? There is a big catchment, with 150,000 more people. That town centre will service 150,000 people. Would it hold the value of the apartments up a bit if there was a bit more of a vibe on the street and things to do?

**Ms Edwards:** 100 per cent; that is right. Yes, of course. Canberra is a small place, and it is very easy to determine whether things are going well in an area or not. You can look at that CHC building that was built in Dickson, where they have a really nice vibe there. They have a cafe. They have people that get along really well. They have pets. They just won an award for the community spirit that they have in that dwelling, and that is an affordable housing complex.

With anything like that, it is very complex. One of the important things around that is educating executive committees, owners corporations and things like that, about the powers they have and do not have, and what they can do, especially around mixed-use buildings. If you have a bar or a restaurant downstairs and they have umbrellas out there, are they allowed to do that or not allowed to do that?

Sometimes you will hear that a cafe wants to do that, but the owners corporation or the residents say, “No, we don’t want that; we’re overruling that. You can’t actually do that.” An important thing to think about in these developments is that you need to make laws that are compatible with having that community, having that vibe, while not impinging too much on tenants’ rights, on the rights of people who are living there.

**MS CARRICK:** Minister Cheyne is responsible for the night-time economy, and she talks about entertainment precincts. The district strategies for the city and Gungahlin do identify recreation precincts, but the rest of the town centres do not have that. Do you think it would be advantageous if the government were to identify an entertainment precinct and allow noise to be higher there for a night-time economy, so that residents know where the noise will be and where the activity is?

**Ms Edwards:** Yes, for sure. Newer buildings are built with good energy efficiency, with double glazing and things like that, and they are probably a little bit quieter to live in than the older apartment complexes. If you are going to build a town centre that has a lot of these newer complexes, the effect might not be as great as if you were in an older apartment in Griffith, for example, where you have thin walls and everything else.

It is about ensuring that people are informed. Having a night-time economy will attract people to come and live in the area, if they do not have to get an Uber. When they redeveloped those ones, the A&A ones, people loved having the areas downstairs—being able to walk to the pub downstairs or whatever. You will attract people that want to get out and about, absolutely.

**MS CARRICK:** Except that they all have to move inside at 10 pm. They are not allowed outside anymore after 10 pm. I know that you can soundproof them, but as soon as you open your window then that soundproofing is lost.

**Ms Edwards:** You would not want it seven nights a week, 52 weeks a year, would you? Sometimes in the city, at certain times of the year, they are allowed to have things. As long as the community was consulted and there were some expectations set around it, I think it would be fine. We want people out and about, supporting local businesses. Otherwise, people are going out to dinner; they are just going to the city.

**MS CARRICK:** I want to ask you about the governance arrangements. With community development, there will be 19,000 people living in Phillip. With respect to bringing those towers together and developing the community, normally, you would have a local government to do that. With governance arrangements in community development, do you think that it could be done better, in the town centres?

**Ms Edwards:** 100 per cent. Any of us that walk through the Woden town centre see that there is not any community out there. It is cumulative as well, because if there is nobody out there, people feel unsafe, and nobody wants to put themselves in that position. I think safety, security, lighting and activity out there are super important. 100 per cent: community facilities, somewhere that people feel safe to go to, a swimming pool. Obviously, people feel safe at a swimming pool, don't they? But they do not feel safe walking down a brick corridor where there is no good lighting and no shopfronts.

**MS TOUGH:** I want to touch on commercial buildings. We walked around Woden this morning. There are a lot of empty commercial spaces that look like they are ready to be leased out, but are not, and some that are just empty, with no fittings. What are you hearing about the commercial space in Woden?

**Ms Edwards:** What I am hearing is that the rents are too high in these buildings. The value of a commercial building is really determined by the rents that they achieve on it. Rather than putting the rents down and getting people in there, they are keeping the rents high, so that the overall value of the building is high, which is counterintuitive to all of us, but, in a business sense, it is not. If you put someone in on a low rent, they have to do that for all of them, which then brings down the value of the property.

From talking to people who are in the commercial area in the main shopping centre,

they are finding that the rents are too high. It is very different to the residential tenancy space, where you cannot put the rent up by more than a certain amount, whereas in commercial it is a piece of string, really. If you have signed a five or 10-year lease, they can do whatever they like, basically. That that has been really tricky for businesses that are in there. Basically, that is what I am hearing.

**MS TOUGH:** We spoke to some businesses as well, who say they are struggling a bit, in the spaces they are in, to stay afloat. It could be because of working from home; it could be cost of living. There could be a whole range of factors for them. What are you seeing about business closures or businesses not opening in Woden?

**Ms Edwards:** It is pretty well documented that ACT has the highest number of businesses starting and then businesses folding within short periods of time. I think that is a feature all over the ACT. But if you are building brand-new premises, obviously, you are going to want a premium rent for it, because it is a brand-new, lovely space. That is obviously affecting people wanting to take those risks, especially in the economic environment that we have now.

**MS TOUGH:** There are fewer people working in the area than there have been in the past, with departments moving out, consolidating, working from home and the like, but more people are moving in. Should that see more business activity in the area, or is it that the people who live there are looking for different types of businesses, and there is not a match?

**Ms Edwards:** Yes, it feels like a bit of a chicken and egg situation. If you do not have the shops there, people will not go there. They will go to the city or they will go to Belconnen, for example, or even Tuggeranong, which have a wider variety of shops there. Woden Plaza does not have a wide variety of shops. If they have the services—they are getting a haircut, they are going to the chemist, they are going to the doctor—obviously, you will stay in your local area. But if you want a variety of shops, and you go to the trouble of parking somewhere, you might go to a different city centre. If the shops there do not have the foot traffic, they will not open, because they do not have the support there.

It is a tricky balance, I think. Initially, you would want it to be viable for commercial businesses to open, and stay open, so that you attract people to stay in the local area.

**MR CAIN:** The vacancy rates amongst all those apartments: do you have an idea of what the real figure is?

**Ms Edwards:** No. The unfortunate part is that it is very hard to get data on exact figures. I have anecdotal things. I approached both the main portals this week. I said, “Can you give me an example of what the actual vacancy rates and things like that are? How many one-bedroom apartments have sold versus how many with three bedrooms?” They are all very difficult to get any data out of.

I would really love it if there was an opportunity with government to get some data from rates, land taxes and things like that. I think that would be a much easier way to get some idea around things. We get bonds data, I suppose. The reported vacancy rates are lower than what the actual vacancy rates are. As I mentioned, you can put one ad

on Allhomes for an apartment complex with 50 apartments in it.

**MR CAIN:** What are the sources of the reported vacancy rates?

**Ms Edwards:** Mainly Allhomes, because that is the biggest one in the ACT, and that is where they will take their figures from.

**MR CAIN:** Do you know what that number is?

**Ms Edwards:** The vacancy rate in the ACT at the moment is 1.4 per cent.

**MR CAIN:** The town centre?

**Ms Edwards:** It is 2.4 per cent, I think you said, Fiona?

**MS CARRICK:** Two per cent, for the whole of Woden. But for 2606, which is Phillip, Chifley and Lyons, it is 2.8 per cent.

**Ms Edwards:** Yes, and the Australian average at the moment is 1.2.

**MR CAIN:** Obviously, you are aware that a vacant residential property is liable for land tax. The owner is liable for land tax. We might ask the minister the same question, because they will have all the taxed properties that are not actually occupied, one would think.

**Ms Edwards:** You could almost match it up between who is paying land tax and utilities, for example—who is using utilities—because that would be a really simple way to work out what is occupied and what is not. I do not think those departments talk to each other very much.

**MR CAIN:** How can we get a better assessment of the actual vacancy rates?

**Ms Edwards:** Through those mechanisms. The number of properties that are paying land tax and the number that are connected—people that are paying electricity bills. Comparing those two things would be the most accurate way; otherwise forcing portals to give us information, but they are commercial entities.

**MR CAIN:** Obviously, with the land tax, an owner is meant to declare whether it is vacant or not.

**Ms Edwards:** I feel like that has tightened up. It feels like there are more mechanisms around people getting caught, if they are not actually declaring it these days, through using utilities as well. Obviously, it happens, but I think the proportional difference is probably not that much. If you see ads on Allhomes, for example, it may be 10 per cent of them, if less—less than that—that would be privately managed properties. I do not think it would be a huge amount, particularly in the apartment space.

**MS CARRICK:** I heard anecdotally that, with the new towers behind the police station, 100 of them have not been sold yet. I think they are struggling to sell them, even off the plan.

**Ms Edwards:** That is why, as I said, the project sales builders that I have been speaking to are saying it is enormously difficult to sell anything. They are ending up with 40 per cent to 50 per cent of apartments not sold at the time when they have come out of the ground. There has been bad publicity about buying apartments in the ACT due to quality and things like that; you would obviously take that into account.

With the generation of people buying into apartments, with those in their early 20s, for example—it is not older people; it is younger people—they maybe have parents who are helping them out and they are saying, “Don’t buy an apartment. Hold out for something a bit bigger or buy something a bit bigger.” They are probably influencing buying decisions a little bit.

We also have not had the migration. We used to have a lot of migration to the ACT and they were happy to live in apartments because they were coming from countries where the norm was to live in a small apartment. It does not seem as aspirational for the next generation of people that have grown up in Canberra.

**MS CARRICK:** Have you heard any anecdotal evidence of people handing in their deposit and not progressing with the sale?

**Ms Edwards:** I have not heard about that happening en masse. It is not something that I have heard has happened.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for your attendance today. No questions were taken on notice. The committee secretariat will send you a copy of the transcript. Let us know if there are any problems.

**Ms Edwards:** Okay. I am happy to follow up, if there is anything else that you need.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you so much.

**BUTLER, MR LACHLAN**, Chair, Belconnen Community Council  
**ELSUM, DR IAN**, President, Curtin Residents Association  
**HUNTER, MS SIMONE**, Chair, Weston Creek Community Council  
**TANG, MR NELSON**, President, Woden Valley Community Council  
**THOMPSON, MS RACHEL**, Treasurer, Woden Valley Community Council

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome our big panel. We very much thank Woden, Belconnen and Weston Creek Community Councils and the Curtin Residents Association. This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly and it has the same standing as proceedings of the Assembly itself. Today's evidence attracts parliamentary privilege. Giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of the Assembly. We will not take opening statements because I think that would take the entire hearing. We have written submissions from everybody here. If you have brought in anything else, do you wish to table it?

**Mr Tang:** Chair, I have prepared an opening statement, but I could table it if that is the desire of the—

**THE CHAIR:** I feel that, if we have five opening statements, it would probably take our entire hearing. How would you feel about tabling it? Will that work for you?

**MS TOUGH:** If it is just one opening statement?

**MR CAIN:** The Weston Creek Community Council did not make—

**Ms Thompson:** I do not have an opening statement.

**THE CHAIR:** How many people have brought an opening statement?

**Mr Tang:** I did.

**THE CHAIR:** All right. Go ahead, Nelson.

**Mr Tang:** Thank you very much, Chair. I thank the committee. We are here today to ask the inquiry to come up with a clear vision for the Woden town centre—our town centre—a vision that is focused on improving the quality of life for people working and living in the Woden Valley. The future of the Woden Valley is currently at a crossroad. There is a choice for the ACT government. Phillip, our town centre, is at the centre of this change.

We are experiencing an increased population, with more people being attracted to Woden Valley's proximity to Civic, access to services and access to transport. More and more apartments and high-rises are being built in the town centre to facilitate this change. Increasingly, the characteristic of the area is changing, from a suburban one to one that resembles an urban city core. We have received a range of feelings and sentiments from people in the community about these changes. For example, I know of young people who moved from other parts of Canberra into apartment complexes in Phillip. They tell me they enjoy the central location, the affordable price, relative to the rest of Canberra, and the amenities offered in an apartment complex, for example, and they love the access to transport. But I also know people who have called the Woden

Valley home their entire life. They are concerned about diminishing local amenities as a result of blocks being bulldozed to make way for high-rises. They are noticing the increased traffic and, as an inevitable result of the increased population, they are looking at construction sites dominating Phillip.

While the community is trying to juggle all these diverging views, what is clear is that developers are pushing ahead with their plans. Their overall objective is to not only build houses, shops and offices in Woden but to ultimately make a profit. Usually, this is where we see governments step in and impose requirements so that developments benefit the community as a whole. Unfortunately, it is not exactly clear to the Woden community that this is the approach taken by the ACT government.

To be fair to the government, we have seen investments. We acknowledge that the government has built the CIT in Woden and constructed the bus interchange, but we have also identified areas of improvement, especially around sporting facilities, community services and community arts. Recently, the community council has been approached by private developers in a consultation on potential applications being submitted to the government to change the Woden district plan. This would see height limits amended so that buildings up to 55 storeys can be built. During one of these consultations, when we asked the developers what additional amenities would be included to accommodate the additional people, they did not have an answer to that question. What is clear is that there are competing interests in a changing Woden, and we would like to see the government take greater leadership in advocating for the community.

The community council is really pleased with the Legislative Assembly's interest in the future of Woden town centre. We will advocate for our community and make sure that future residents and workers will continue to enjoy a high quality of life. This is why we are calling on the committee to investigate the viability of better public spaces. This includes sophisticated community spaces, like a performance centre or a community centre. This is so we can have a space for the community to come together, which is something that we do not currently have access to. We are asking for our parks and public spaces to be maintained and, where viable, to be upgraded so that people can continue to enjoy a stroll after work or during their lunch break. Really importantly, these will be free public spaces for our young people and for the community.

I would like this inquiry to come up with ways to preserve and expand community sport facilities in Woden—for example, to come up with a strategy to plan and replace the aquatic and ice facilities. There is a range of requests for improvements—and they are detailed in the written submission—and, while the community council would like to see all of them implemented, we understand there are physical limits. What we are asking for today in the hearing is for the government and the Legislative Assembly to prioritise community needs in an environment of competing interests. We thank the committee for their time in considering the future of Woden. We look forward to answering your questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you so much for that. We did a bit of a walk around this morning. We have had a number of submissions over the years calling for something like a city renewal authority. It certainly struck me that we have a lot of concrete in that town centre but not much green space. Nobody is in charge and authorised to activate. There

is no ongoing program. We have seen bitsy programs over the years. There was a great Connect Up program in Belconnen. There is Margaret Timpson Park, but it does not have ongoing funding. These things come and go. There have been some grant-sponsored small festivals, but those are one-off things; there is no ongoing program. Does anyone have views on governance and funding to have really good activation, both for the physical layout and for the programs—the stuff that would go on in the public spaces in that town centre? Lachlan does. Does someone else?

**Ms Hunter:** I will start by saying that I think that there is an opportunity while we are considering the broader vision for Woden town centre to have more consultation and more activation on the spaces that are currently there and use that as an opportunity to discover the requirements of people who already live in the area and use the spaces. We do not have any events funding or anything that coordinates in this space—besides from the community groups that regularly activate the space—or to have a bit more of a coordinated approach while we are looking at a longer term vision for this space. I think that would be really inclusive, and it could be a real positive to bring that community together to talk a bit more broadly about what is lacking in that space.

**THE CHAIR:** That is great. Lachlan?

**Mr Butler:** I think that governance is possibly the most important thing this committee inquiry could look into. I do not think there are many areas of government looking at community groups or residents' wish lists for their district or their town centres. It is very much an issue of delivery, not an issue of ideas or plans. The Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan was the only thing that ticked on meeting the population forecast a decade early, but there is not a lot being done for the services, amenities and infrastructure for the Belconnen town centre. I genuinely think that this committee needs to explore the governance—not just coming up with ideas but also delivering on the ideas.

**THE CHAIR:** Ian, what is the secret formula to make governance for activation work?

**Dr Elsum:** I have one suggestion. I started learning about planning in the ACT through the development of the Curtin Master Plan. It was certainly developed with a lot of community input and, by and large, the community was pretty happy with what was come up with. Then the development application came in. When we spoke to the proponents about the master plan, they said, "Master plans have no standing." If there were a new master plan for the Woden town centre and it was changed so that it does have standing—so that people have to comply with it—you could start building in the things we think are needed. You referred to green space. More green space is needed. There needs to be better access to Eddison Park, so that people can actually access the existing green space. Recreational facilities are desperately needed in Woden, not just for the residents but also for people who might visit from surrounding suburbs. It is really important to holistically consider the lives of the people who are going to live there. It is not just a place to live and access work; it is also about access to recreation facilities, parks and things like that. That really needs to be built into a master plan. We tend not to look holistically at people's lives when we do this planning.

This is a short story. A young couple from Sydney live in apartments near Curtin. They did not own a car in Sydney. They had no intention of owning a car in Canberra. They

can access work by cycling and walking. They bought a car. They bought a car because they cannot access recreational facilities.

**THE CHAIR:** Ian, a lot of are shocked when we find out the master plans are aspirational.

**Dr Elsum:** A change to planning legislation is required. Doing that could give effect to governance. It is really about implementation. If the Curtin Master Plan had been implemented, the community would have been really happy, but it has not been implemented. In fact, it has been violated on several occasions.

**Ms Thompson:** We talk about a master plan, and there is the district strategy. The district strategy is the legislative document. Master plans do not go into the detail that the district plans do, and we know the issues with that. I have been part of looking at all of this for the last five years. In my experience over the last five years, it is block by block by block. It meets the district strategy or the changes to the district strategy that occurred in 2023-24. That is okay. It keeps happening. Every time they do that, they put in a lease variation to adjust the height from what the district strategy actually said. There seem to be no limits. It is always: “We’ll get around that” or “We’ll always be able to work through that, because we’re going to add something else here as a sweetener.” That seems to be part of the problem.

As you said, a central planning authority could look at it holistically and say, “This is where the schools are, with our increased population growth. This is what we want Woden to look like over the next 30 years.” But that does not seem to be the case. Because each block is being done individually, we are getting a death by a thousand cuts and we are losing all of the facilities that we had. I am not against development. I think that is what is needed and we need to create a denser centre, but at what cost? We cannot do that and have an accommodation hub at the cost of all of those recreation and social facilities.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Mr Butler:** To get to your question about the secret behind it, I think the secret sauce is that we need one single body that has authority and accountability to deliver on these plans. The master plan and district strategies are documents prepared by one area that looks into a bunch of things that other areas look into and other ministers look into. At the end of the day, no-one is actually held accountable for delivering on the master plans and district strategies—all these plans—and the ideas we come up with.

**Ms Hunter:** Rather than it being a group of people who are elected to a role from places other than locally. An element of stewardship goes into this and that is best offered by community groups and community leaders. So, rather than having a board that has people who might transition through a job or cycle through and progress their career through it, you need people who are on the ground locally and have continuity of care for their community, so that they can participate on that.

**THE CHAIR:** Or people who maybe live interstate.

**MS CARRICK:** I will continue on the theme about governance because it is really

important. I feel that what we are missing is a local government that loves and cares for us. For example, not all the master plans are terrific, and it is not just about implementation. For example, in Woden, we have a building structure that gets taller towards the core. We have 28-storey buildings on the north side of our public spaces. Do you think that we need some sort of governance body that looks at the vision of where we want to be in 20 or 30 years and community needs and implements that? Then there is the follow-up of community development. Who does the community development? Who ensures that we know who the building owners are and that they are encouraged to have active fronts? Who encourages annual events with which we can build the community or spaces where like-minded people can come together? Does governance need to be broader than just some central body that implements things?

**Mr Tang:** Ms Carrick, there is definitely a concern at the moment about the authority the current body has, the Planning Authority—the powers it has. It essentially assesses applications on an ad hoc basis. That has been echoed on this panel. It receives the application and the only options are to approve it or deny it. We do not see a very holistic approach, even in consultations to change the district plan, as I mentioned in the opening statement. Private proponents come to community councils and have that consultation. It is not a government body, which would probably be more fair handed in its assessment in a consultation. That is just the planning phase. You mentioned events and community shopfronts et cetera—those kinds of design elements—and ongoing maintenance and regulatory reforms. No-one does that, I would say—not for the Woden town centre. A successful example would be the Multicultural Festival. It is regular. Maybe we should look at who runs that and have something similar for the Woden town centre.

**Mr Butler:** There are a lot of issues. I have lived in New South Wales. People think the ACT government is unpopular here in the ACT. Local councils are equally, if not more, unpopular in their respective jurisdictions. When we look at planning in New South Wales and other states, we see that state governments are overriding local governments anyway. If we were to look into another layer of governance, through a local council or a local government approach, there would be a lot of additional cost. Is the ACT financially stable already with one layer of government? I do not know that it would be with two layers. I do not think the local government element would actually improve that much.

**MS CARRICK:** It does not need to be another layer of government, but there has to be something that is looking after us, because at the moment no-one is looking after us at all.

**THE CHAIR:** Did somebody else want to make a comment?

**Dr Elsum:** I would like to make a brief comment. Social connectivity is really important. If I use the Curtin analogy, local groups organise things which bring the community together—the Residents Association and other groups—but spaces are needed for that to happen. We are lucky to have a central courtyard that is used in our group centre. We have very few indoor spaces available to the community. They are heavily used. I would suggest that, if you look at the Woden town centre, there are no equivalents. There is a town square, but there are no equivalent spaces for people. If there were spaces for people, both outdoor and indoor, then community groups would use those facilities to do things. The lack of spaces is extremely inhibiting. In the Curtin experience, a lack of indoor spaces in the suburb is really inhibiting what happens.

**MS CARRICK:** Do you think that the government should have a plan and organise funding to build spaces or do we just abandon ship and leave it to the private sector like Scentre Group, the Hellenic Club or Geocon and say, “You can use the lease variation charge, as long as you give them some community facilities”?

**Dr Elsum:** I believe it is the government’s role to ensure that the spaces are created. It is about the whole range of infrastructure. If you put more people in the area, you need more infrastructure—green spaces, shall we say, and social and community infrastructure. If the government does not build them, then it should be mandating that the developers build them as part of their facility.

**Ms Thompson:** What I think needs to happen is to start from the baseline of the new population growth projections over the next 30 years, not only for the town centre but also for the feeder areas to that town centre—ones that use the town centre. That is really important. It is not just about the people in the town centre itself. Then whoever it is, whether it is a central agency or whatever, needs to look into this holistically—the amenities that are required for that projected population growth. They need to look at the input into this inquiry but also more broadly. And the amenities for that population also need to be benchmarked against other locations around the country. They should look at where it needs to be zoned, so that you look at a holistic plan of where it should be zoned. That is part of the planning process that we do not see happening in Woden; we see it being piecemeal, block by block. That includes how people will move around and interact with the town centre—where flows of people go and that type of thing. There needs to be an index study on that. Only then can you look at determining who should built them—whether the government builds them or whether the government mandates it: “You’re looking at this development. You need to build this facility. We’ll carve out some LVC, but then we’ll take it over and manage it.” The management of community facilities after they have been built is also really important.

It may be that they are planned but not yet built due to the current budget situation. We know the budget is really bad, but at least have them planned. It is about rezoning and looking at the recreational area we have largely lost around the pool precinct. A lot of that is now mixed use or accommodation. Where does that recreation area now need to reside? It needs to look at the holistic plan and where things flow, into the parks, into the town centre and into the transport corridors. That is how I see we need to step through the process in order to achieve that.

**Mr Tang:** I want to bring up the example of consultation with Scentre Group on the 55-storey apartment building. The plans are drawn and they have 3D models of exactly what it will look like. They were brought into a consultation room, which was meant to be for the community to ask questions, see the scope to change et cetera. I do not know if you attended, Rachel.

**Ms Thompson:** Yes; I was there.

**Mr Tang:** One of the things that was discussed was the community space in the design. I asked whether there is scope to increase community space from the current design. The answer was pretty much no—pen is to paper already. The design has already been drawn completely privately and the consultation is run by private proponents. I am

concerned that, from a community perspective, this is not a flexible application. It is not consulting on what the community wants; it is essentially putting in a plan, and this would be submitted to the government for assessment. At what point is community interest inserted in the process?

**Ms Hunter:** I agree, 100 per cent. There seems to be complete miscommunication between what our community expects and is aspirational for, and our standards, and what is actually being delivered. As the third wheel in this—the government; private, community and our local elected MLAs and so on—we hope that you guys are championing the community’s cause, not the private sector’s.

For example, with the Scentre Group development, it is very much about ticking a box, “We’ve provided some community space here.” We have basketball and volleyball groups, and our aspirations are for a stadium-type delivery in this space. Actually, we still need that ice-skating rink and the pool; we really value these things. They are part of our vision. Either we are not communicating that effectively enough or perhaps standards are slipping somewhere. Certainly, I do not think it is because of a lack of vision from the community.

We need to find a nice spot in between, where the developers’ needs are getting met and the community’s needs are getting met, and where people have housing that is beautiful. We are trying to build a beautiful city here, not just tick boxes, get some profit and move on to the next town. We are shaping and designing a beautiful city, and that is what our stewardship is about.

**MS TOUGH:** I am interested in the connectivity between the different parts of the town centre and the bits around it. The Oaks is down at the far end, where the pool is, all the way through to Westfield. With the connectivity into the Phillip trades, the business district, there is the absolute car park of a street on—

**Ms Thompson:** Corinna Street.

**MS TOUGH:** Corinna Street, yes. It means people do not necessarily want to even drive to Westfield and they are choosing to go somewhere else. The new bus interchange is opening. What do you see as a way of keeping it as a cohesive place? I do not know whether the changes in Belconnen, with more apartment blocks being built, and maybe the bus interchange, can serve as a lesson regarding cohesion in Woden.

**Mr Tang:** I love Woden. We all love Woden. We also acknowledge that some of the design elements of Woden can improve. The town square, for example, is in a position where not a lot of foot traffic can usually go through. In order to revitalise that town square, we need to make sure that the design as a whole, from private interests, residential to workers, all comes together.

There has been improvement, I would say, with the new bus interchange. There is a better flow to go to Woden Westfield, for example, where many people access. Overall, again, I come back to this lack of planning, of vision, that we have heard quite a bit about today. We do want to see someone with a plan to improve the town centre.

**Ms Hunter:** It is a very hostile environment that is being built down there. With Corinna Street, there must have been a special on giant concrete balls because someone went, “Let’s just put these here.” There is no value in having those giant concrete balls. They are obstructionist, they are right next to cycleways and things. It is a horrible waste of money, for starters. Corinna Street is a nightmare. There is no real parking. There is no flow. It is a hostile environment. And that is for able-bodied people. Imagine getting around this space if you have accessibility requirements.

As a Weston Creeker, I would like to say that Woden has always been the shining glory of our town centre. It is one bus away. It used to house employment. It used to be this thriving metropolis before we knew what Civic was, as a young person. You could go and see the movies. You could go ice skating. It was quite vibrant, and it felt very safe. It is not feeling that way now. I think there is a great opportunity, and it is great that companies like Scentre and developers would like to come in, but it is really important at the same time that we get some of these key elements back into that space so that it is less hostile and more community based.

On the employment thing, I want to drop that in there. That is a really big problem for residents of Weston Creek and the broader south-side community—the lack of anchor agencies. It has been great to watch Belconnen develop as it has. It has a bit of employment support out there, which also feeds into the daytime economy, retail et cetera. Belconnen is quite aspirational, really. We can certainly learn from the mistakes that have been made in that space, and we can try and craft something inclusive and beautiful on the south side, in Woden.

**Mr Butler:** I am definitely no expert on Woden. With all the people we have in Belconnen, we want to see a lot more employment in Belconnen; otherwise the transport connectivity will not be able to keep up.

The issue with the plans and visions for the Belconnen town centre master plan is that there are lots of key arrows that point to where we want to improve—from the town centre to the University of Canberra, and all the places that we want to make better connected. But we have seen no progress there.

Everyone knows where things need to be improved and what needs to be done, but no-one is responsible for improving the connectivity between the town centre and the University of Canberra. City Services maintain it. There is some infrastructure money that comes through to improve some parts, but there is not someone there who is saying, “We need to make sure that these parts are connected.”

**Dr Elsum:** On the question of connectivity, those three areas are totally disconnected now. If you are going from one to the other, you would probably get in a car, which is why they are disconnected. Again, there is the need for some holistic master plan.

Connectivity means people want to move on foot or on a bicycle from one to the other. There probably needs to be a spine, which provides that, and which is attractive—probably with trees and shade. Given what is there now, you would probably have to make some overpasses over the roads. But if you want the connectivity, which I think would be great, that is the kind of thing you have to do. It needs to be, again, part of a master plan and we need to ensure that there is implementation of that.

**MS TOUGH:** With pedestrian access, obviously, Hindmarsh Drive is huge, when it comes to crossing over into the Phillip business district. Launceston Street is quite a busy street, too, with a school, buses and people. You might not see it if you are not in the area at different times, but do people who live in the Oaks get in their cars to drive to Westfield, or are they walking and maybe jaywalking? Is there that connectivity?

**Ms Hunter:** There is a lot of running across Hindmarsh Drive, particularly. I see it all the time—young people running over to KFC, across that strip there. It is very disjointed. It is very busy.

**Ms Thompson:** Certainly, from Launceston Street, going across, or from all those areas up north, what I have heard when I have been talking at the Sunday markets is that people drive in their cars to go and pick up their groceries. I think there is a little supermarket or something up there, but there is no Coles, Woolies or IGA type thing there.

**Mr Tang:** It is a bit of a shame. I know people who live in the Oaks and in Trilogy, those apartments in the north; they do have to drive to get to Westfield because of groceries and waiting for the lights. It would be something that could definitely be improved.

**MR CAIN:** There has been talk about a whole centre plan, master plans or a centralised government voice. There has been talk across agencies about a centre. Do you think there is scope within the district strategies for a more detailed message from government on what the town centres should be like? Is that a natural place for the town centres to be represented? There would be a relationship with the rest of the district as well.

**Mr Butler:** I am sure there could be a role for them to play. Personally, I think that district strategies are crap. With the theme of employment, the Belconnen district strategy talks about increasing jobs from 25,000 to about 50,000, which is good. With lots of people moving to Belconnen, we want to see more employment in the town centre. But there is no plan to do that. There is no strategy. You cannot even look at it and think, “This is where jobs are going to appear.” There is just a vague, “We think there’ll be some jobs here and there.” I think it talks about a thousand jobs at Kippax. I do not know how there will be a thousand jobs at Kippax. The district strategies are meaningless. At best, they have a list of things that the government should look into. It is not a plan.

**Ms Hunter:** I would say “incoherent” is probably the right word. While it is great to have a strategy, we are expecting that to be drilled down on, and for the opportunities and the positives to be pulled out and looked at. Again, it is a matter of someone else who is going to do it. Are the developers going to do it? I think there is a lot more scope for us all to work together, to work out what outcomes the community wants and try and get those delivered through the strategies that are the next level of planning.

**Mr Tang:** I would caution, though, that not all districts are the same. There cannot be a one-size-fits-all policy. Woden will probably get light rail in 2030. It is different. It does not have a community centre, for example—some things that other districts

already have. The desires and the interests are different.

**Dr Elsum:** The district strategies are very broad brush. What is needed for Woden is much more detail, and something that is more coherent for a small area—a master planning type process with teeth, so that they have standing. That would be a preferable way to go, if you wanted to drill down on a particular smaller area and look at it in more detail.

**Ms Hunter:** I agree, 100 per cent. Woden is very important to Tuggeranong, Weston, and even Molonglo at the moment. We cannot build the “Paris of the South” unless we all get together and work on it together. We would have much better potential to get a really great outcome and build a really great town centre, not one that is just needing the minimal viable product or the minimal requirements. We want beautiful things, lovely architecture, great open spaces, healthy people, happy people and an inclusive environment. We can do it.

**MR CAIN:** Would you all agree that there is a need for really detailed master plans for each of the town centres which contain how goals will be accomplished?

**Ms Thompson:** Yes.

**Mr Butler:** I think it is good to have—

**MR CAIN:** That is obviously a result of community consultation, as I think has been pointed out.

**Mr Butler:** I think that the Belconnen town centre master plan is a reasonably good document. But no-one is held accountable for it. I think that is the real crux of the issue. Again, it is similar to the district strategies. There is a long list of studies, reviews and plans that it says government should look into.

One of those is a traffic study. It still has not been completed yet. The master plan came out nine years ago. It is very specific about improving Margaret Timpson Park. A decade later, next year, we will only get concept designs for it. You can have the most detailed, best plans ever, with all the community consultation, but if there is not one body or one minister that is actually held accountable for it, you will not see it get done.

**MR CAIN:** How do you solve the problem? You could have a master plan which might be the best master plan ever, with goals and targets, and even means and ends to get there. What is the way that government says, “Here’s how this is going to happen”? Is it simply a cross-directorate issue? Do we need someone who works across the directorates, or do we need someone like the planning minister to really take ownership of those things and make sure they happen?

**Ms Hunter:** The planning minister needs to enforce it. The problem that we have is that there is no enforcement. You can make all the laws, plans and everything that you want, but you have to, to a certain degree, have that stewardship over it and make sure that it is being delivered on.

We do not have a master plan yet for Woden. We are working on that now, but the best

place to start would be having the right people consulted from very early on, developing the vision together and having people carry that over for what could be essentially a lifetime project. People who live in the area will commit, and they will help with that accountability.

**Dr Elsum:** With the implementation, ultimately, it is government's role to make sure it is implemented, but the mechanisms can be different. There are some things where the government would have to say, "Yes, we as a government will do this." With other things, they can say to private developers, "If you want to do something in this area, you have to include these things."

With green space, I have seen, in Manhattan, pocket parks that work really well—300 or 400 square metres. They are really nice. If you want to build an apartment block on this block, you must provide a pocket park of size X as part of it. That is just it. If you want to do it, you have to put up a pocket park. It is a matter of providing requirements. I think there is a range of mechanisms to make sure things get implemented.

**THE CHAIR:** I confess that I am slightly nervous about recommending another master planning exercise, because in 2004 there was a planning exercise and in 2015 there was a planning exercise. I wonder whether, 10 years later, if we do another Woden town centre planning exercise in 2035, we will be anywhere different than we are now.

**MR CAIN:** That is the point of my questions. How do we make sure that they actually implement it?

**Dr Elsum:** How do we get the change?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, how it happens.

**Dr Elsum:** I think the change is the one I mentioned earlier. We have to change the standing of master plans. As the standing of master plans gets changed, with the Curtin group centre master plan—I will keep saying it—there was a lot of community input. The community was pretty happy. No standing, no implementation. Change it, so that—

**MS CARRICK:** Can I make a point here? You say that the Belconnen master plan was okay. The Curtin one was okay. Was the Woden one okay? We have 28 storeys around the whole perimeter of our public space. It is getting overshadowed and windblown. We have lost our social infrastructure. There are no sites identified for them. We do not have a community centre. Can we implement our Woden town centre master plan? We need a new one. Ours is terrible. It is atrocious. Belconnen might be one thing, but every area is different. What has happened is different. We need a new plan because we do not have one. It is appalling. It cannot be implemented.

**Ms Hunter:** I did bring this up, I think, in another hearing—the idea of having district planners or people allocated to each district, within the planning directorate, that have a responsibility to provide a bit of oversight on this.

**Ms Thompson:** Or perhaps that live in that community.

**Ms Hunter:** Yes; having allocated district planners that assist with the development,

the coordination et cetera. It is not the minister's fault if all of this does not happen. We are not doing that anymore. There are people who are employed to do their jobs to get these outcomes that are not elected. The accountability lands within the ACT government.

**Mr Tang:** The other element is to have the government as a proponent for many of these projects. We have seen private sector proponents; they are always interested in money. We need someone to step up in that void. The community is here, but we are working on a volunteer basis. It is government, really, that has the resources and the leadership to do it, to take on more of this.

**Ms Hunter:** Following on from that point, with Scentre Group, their proposed vision and their submission for a lease variation or a major plan amendment was going to be pushed in by the end of this year. That is what their consultation was saying, initially. I do not think that it should be approved. There should be a holistic review. Because this is such a large change that has been proposed for Woden, this should not be getting pushed through before this inquiry has provided their recommendations and we have a holistic plan for Woden. How do you know what community facilities should be put into what they are proposing, unless all this work has already been done? I do not think that it should be approved or even considered until after all this work has been done.

**MS CARRICK:** Jo said that you were loath to recommend a new master plan. If we do not have a new master plan, what are we implementing? What are we doing? Where do we go?

**THE CHAIR:** We are at the end of the hearing. Does anyone have a brief comment?

**Mr Butler:** I have a very brief comment on some of the points that Fiona made. The Belconnen town centre does have a pretty decent master plan, but if the goal of this inquiry is to recommend that Woden gets a new master plan that will not get implemented after two years of consultation, that is a terrible outcome. There are genuine governance issues. A master plan might not be the way to go, because they do not work. They have not been working.

**MS CARRICK:** You need both—the plan and the implementation.

**Mr Butler:** Yes. If this inquiry concludes, “We need a Woden town centre master plan,” you are not going to get any improvements to Woden.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, true.

**Dr Elsum:** The community will be cynical about a new master plan unless the standing of master plans changes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you so much for your time. I do not think there were any questions taken on notice, but we will send you a copy of the transcript and you can let us know if we have written down anything incorrectly. Thank you so much for your expertise and contributions. We will do our best.

### **Short suspension**

**BUSH, MR RICHARD**, Advocacy Group Member, Pedal Power  
**HEMSLEY, MR RYAN**, Deputy Chair, Public Transport Association of Canberra  
**JELACIC, DR AMY**, Chair, Public Transport Association of Canberra

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome representatives from the Public Transport Association of Canberra and Pedal Power. This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly and has the same standing as proceedings of the Assembly. Today's evidence attracts parliamentary privilege. Giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. We are not going to take opening statements. We have your submissions. Thank you very much. If you have anything extra to table, please let us know. We will jump straight to questions. I will jump to the really obvious one. Woden town centre is very difficult to walk through, ride through and move across, from the interchange to the centre. It does not have good flow at all. What could be done, practically? Given what is already there and given the state of where the interchange is now, what could be done to make that a bit less hostile for people moving around on foot and on wheels?

**Mr Bush:** What draws you to that conclusion?

**THE CHAIR:** Walking through it myself. I find that there are a lot of roads that do not have crossings. There are a lot of people running across places. The temporary interchange is tricky and there are not a lot of people moving through. I did not see a single bike or anybody on wheels in that space.

**Mr Bush:** Let me take you through it. East to west, from the new bus interchange through to the CIT boulevard that has just been built, up the steps and into the city square. There is an elevator that will take long bikes. You can cycle and walk through there and past the library. There are no crossings. There is a pedestrian crossing across Corinna Street that takes you down to an underpass under Melrose Drive. That is east to west. The only road you would have crossed is the one where the pedestrian crossing is. The road that was inserted in the western plaza of the new—

**MS CARRICK:** The road through the public space. That is the one I was moaning about.

**Mr Bush:** It is currently blocked off. They are probably waiting for the paving to settle. We objected to that road, as did the Woden Valley Community Council. But, apart from that, there is no road you have to cross. From north to south, you can come in where the squash courts are, across Launceston Street, at the traffic lights. You can pick up the end of the Woden town centre bikeway. That takes you along Furzer Street around to Corinna Street. You have right of way all the way. It is separated in some places and it is in a mixed zone in other places. That bikeway takes you past the western entrance to the Woden plaza, and takes you around to Corinna Street and down to Callam Street.

There is another east-west entrance through Eddison Park onto Matilda Street. There will be traffic lights there when the interchange is built across from Callam Street, which is closed to traffic now but it will be open to buses. There is a cycleway on Matilda Street. The problem with that is a long-standing one with the Hellenic loading dock. We make a point of that in our submission. They are operating that loading dock

illegally. The government has been inept in bringing them to account.

**THE CHAIR:** The government has not done any enforcement?

**Mr Bush:** No. We have been asking them for five years to start imposing parking fines, for example, because the delivery trucks are blocking both the footpath and the cycleway. It got so bad that the developing agency for the Woden interchange has stationed a person there—

**MS CARRICK:** Yes. We met her this morning.

**Mr Bush:** nine to five, Monday to Friday.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. We met her.

**Mr Bush:** How crazy is that and how expensive is it? Anyway—

**THE CHAIR:** Amy and Ryan, do you have any comments on the flow through of that area?

**Mr Bush:** Matilda Street will take you straight into the Woden business sector, where the public service buildings are.

**Mr Hemsley:** If you do not mind, I will interject here in response to Jo's question. It is one of those things at the moment. At the PTCBR, we are also considering what the location of the new permanent interchange means for the Woden town centre. There are obviously a few moving pieces associated with that. One of them is, of course, what Scentre Group has proposed to do with the blocks that they have under their ownership in the Woden town centre. There has been all sorts of discussion recently about the proposal they have put out for increased heights for the mall and the surrounding car park structures and how that interlinks with various parts of other sites that they own.

One of the weaknesses in that plan that we identified—and we put in a submission to that process, and we are happy to share that submission with the committee—is the fact that the bus interchange does not really feature prominently in the plans that they presented, as nice and expensive and—what is the word I am thinking of—their misleadingly detailed submission. One of the things that they incorrectly identify in that plan is where the actual bus interchange will be located. They put it much further south than where it will actually be. Our view is that, if you are not properly identifying where that bus interchange is, your plans for developing your sites adjacent to it are unlikely to link in properly with that. Our submission requests that that particular aspect of the plan be rectified before any major plan amendment request is put in and that further work is done into linking all their exciting new developments into the new Woden interchange properly and comfortably.

**THE CHAIR:** We would love to see a copy of your submission. It would be great if you could send that in. That would be awesome. I will hand over to my colleague, Ms Carrick.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you. I would like to ask you about TOD, transport oriented

development. In your view, does transport oriented development mean you have housing—pretty much dormitory housing—where you can get on public transport and go elsewhere, or does TOD housing have community spaces and recreational facilities that are self-contained and built around a public transport node? We keep referring to TODs all the time, but we have a town centre that is pretty concrete-y, pretty hostile, not very green, and with very limited social infrastructure. Is it your view that a TOD is a dormitory place, or is a TOD more about a self-contained town centre that has social amenity and public spaces, relatively self-contained, and connects to transport?

**Dr Jelacic:** The Public Transport Association of Canberra talks about transport oriented development, or TOD, in a fairly limited way. As far as I know, TOD is not something that the ACT government has explicitly pursued in developing places such as the Woden town centre. We certainly have views about what TOD is, but I am not 100 per cent sure what you are getting at with the question.

**MS CARRICK:** Do you use TOD in your language, in your submissions?

**Dr Jelacic:** As I said in the previous answer, we use the term sometimes, when it is applicable to what we are talking about.

**MS CARRICK:** What do you mean when you refer to TOD?

**Dr Jelacic:** I am very happy to explain, but I am not entirely sure what that has to do with the inquiry at hand.

**MS CARRICK:** What I am trying to get at is that Woden has lost a lot of social infrastructure and it is becoming more and more dormitory. My understanding of TOD, having worked in infrastructure, is that it is a development that has what the people need. You can get small TODs and big TODs, but, with the size of a town centre, it would be a development. It is a development that meets the needs of people. We have been here talking about social infrastructure in Woden and how it is limited. We are losing the aquatic centre, we have lost our indoor sports stadium, we have no culture, no arts centre or anything. My question is: do you think a TOD should have all that social infrastructure—parks, green stuff, active fronts, markets and events—and be an active town centre?

**Dr Jelacic:** It is not my understanding that Woden town centre was designed with transit oriented development principles in mind. If that is something that the government wants to pursue, that would be a very interesting proposal. But, as it stands, I am not sure that is a relevant measure against which to consider Woden town centre as it currently exists.

**MS CARRICK:** So you do not use TOD with respect to the Woden town centre?

**Dr Jelacic:** I can only repeat, I do not understand that Woden town centre was developed with the principles of transit oriented development in mind, as it is commonly understood in the urban planning world.

**MS CARRICK:** All right. I will check. I do not know if the government uses the term “TOD”. It does with respect to the corridor. I will ask Chris Steel when he comes up.

**Dr Jelacic:** I think that is a great idea. I might just add—

**MS CARRICK:** We use the term “TOD” for the corridor, so it would be handy to know what it means.

**THE CHAIR:** It might be a better question for government.

**Mr Hemsley:** I will add to what is being discussed here. One of the things that we are obviously interested in as an association—to take a step back from the specifics around the use of the term “TOD” or otherwise—is a range of facilities and amenities located close to public transport. We support the location of the proposed pool in Commonwealth Park, for example, because it will have excellent public transport access. One of the things that might be worth inquiring of the government, regarding how facilities in the future will be located in the Woden town centre, is the location of the future Woden Community Centre.

Until relatively recently, it was fairly well understood that the new Woden Community Centre would be located on Callam Street, fronting the bus interchange and providing a really convenient location for people who want to access the services that will be provided by that facility, by simply accessing it by public transport. There was a contract let recently to investigate potentially locating it on the other side of the Woden town centre, closer towards Melrose Drive. There is a bus stop on the western side of the Woden town centre, but it has been inactive for many years. So, from the perspective of our association, locating a facility such as a community centre in a location in the Woden town centre that is almost as far away from public transport as you can get does not make a lot of sense.

That is the sort of thing where we might recommend further lines of inquiry be put to government to better understand why they have decided to take that facility and move it further away from where greatest public transport accessibility in the Woden town centre will be located.

**MS CARRICK:** I will change the language to “integrating transport and land use”. Do you think that the Woden town centre could be better planned as far as integrating transport and land use goes—that is, having the community centre near public transport, in addition to indoor sports? There is the aquatic centre. We are losing cultural stuff. There is the theatre rep, the arts centre, and that sort of thing. Do you think that the town centre should have more social infrastructure around transport so that everybody from the surrounding districts can hop on a bus, come and participate in activities?

**Dr Jelacic:** That sounds like a great idea. Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** There you go. We got there in the end.

**Mr Bush:** Can I go back to paths?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Bush:** We talked about routes, but we did not talk about paths. A big thrust of our

submission was that, with the increased density of the Woden town centre, there will be more use of paths. There are more people and more cafes. We want deep-rooted shade trees. Overlaid on all that is the emergence of e-bikes. These are bigger and heavier bikes and they need more space to move around, so we need wide paths. It is not just routes that we are talking about. We can describe the routes, and they are good, but we have to make sure that the paths are wide enough for the increased traffic that is going to come with increased population.

Pedal Power had some success with the Woden Village development. That is opposite the Hellenic Club. We got them to set back the building line on the bus interchange site such that the northern plaza of the CIT would be given better sun access. They have agreed to do that. There is still not enough width for all the people moving in and out of the bus interchange, but at least there is something.

**MS TOUGH:** It goes quite nicely with what I was going to ask.

**Mr Bush:** I was just going to say that end-of-trip facilities are important.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Bush:** People, especially those riding expensive bikes into the Woden town centre, need proper storage. There are parking needs for short-term visitors on the surface, but then, underneath buildings, you want end-of-trip facilities, with a shower, a change room and secure bike locking. New buildings are required to have those, but they should be retrofitted, where possible, in existing buildings. People will ride to work if it is very convenient, and they will ride expensive e-bikes if they can be confident they will not be stolen during the day when they are at work.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MS TOUGH:** My question touches on that nicely. Some submissions we have received are calling for wider roads, more roads, more parking, or to at least not lose the parking that is in Woden, and, on the flip side, you are calling for wider paths, better connectivity and better public transport. We are seeing a new interchange and residential areas around the interchange which should give us less need for cars. How do you see it playing out, with that connection between the interchange, housing and potentially better bike connectivity, as a way forward, and then not needing as many cars. If car parking is lost or put underground, it is not as big a deal, if that makes sense.

**Dr Jelacic:** Yes, it does. Thank you. I will jump in. Anytime that the community is calling for increased parking and wider roads, it is very important to look at the area in which they are asking for that and to understand what the constraints are. Woden town centre already has a lot of stuff. There are a lot of buildings, there are apartment buildings, there is Westfield, there are multilevel car parks already, there is a library, and so on. Which of those things do community members think that we can give up in order to provide more parking or wider roads? Where does this stuff go? That is a really hard thing to grapple with. I think that is the key area and it is really important that members of the community have a realistic understanding of what is possible.

Land use is one part of it. The other part is cost. It is not cheap to provide parking,

through both money and opportunity cost. Where does the money come from for multilevel parking lots, which are really expensive to build? Where does the money come from for basement parking? Again, that is super expensive to build. If we are choosing to use land in Woden town centre for parking, imagine all the other things that could be going there that cannot go there because we have decided to give that land to parking. The committee needs to consider those sorts of tensions in the things that I know you are hearing from the community. They are incompatible things. I understand that. Those are the sorts of questions that I would respectfully urge you to think about really carefully, as well as cost, in terms of both land and actual money.

**Mr Bush:** We will have to reinforce that. The surface car parks are disappearing. In Woden town centre, Westfield still offers two- or three-hour free parking. People will put up with a lot for the convenience of their cars. I watched Melrose Drive at a quarter to nine yesterday morning. It was backed up from the roundabout to the bus stop. People know it will clear in a few seconds. We have made it very easy to drive cars around Canberra. But the thing that will change it is the cost of running a car and the cost of parking, and eventually the congestion will get so bad that people will start looking at alternatives.

Of course, the emergence of e-bikes introduced a new cohort of riders who are prepared to ride to work when they did not, but it is happening slowly. I can still always find a bike rack at the western plaza entrance. There are only six racks and there must be a thousand people in the plaza at any one time. There is always space to put a bike. People are still preferring to drive around with their cars and they will put up with a lot to do that. Time is on our side. It will happen. We have to just make sure that the infrastructure for cycling and walking is right to encourage that.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you.

**MR CAIN:** If the proposed high-rises around the Woden town centre happen and light rail is connected in five to eight years, is Woden town centre a dream transport hub?

**Mr Hemsley:** It would be on its way. The Scentre Group proposal is obviously part of the puzzle. Light rail is part of the puzzle. Additional walking and cycling facilities are part of the puzzle. Obviously, there are further aspects to Woden town centre which will be developed over the coming years as well. Obviously, Scentre Group's proposal is a long-term proposal, out to 2050, I think. There are explorations as to what happens in other parts of Woden town centre and surrounds. There is the northern Woden precinct near the Phillip Oval light rail stop. There is the Athllon Drive corridor on the other side of Yarralumla Creek to the Phillip service trades area. There is the future of the Phillip service trades area itself. It is about how that all fits together and what the government may or may not do vis-a-vis its very—

**MR CAIN:** They are with us next, if you want to hang around.

**Mr Hemsley:** Indeed. The government made a very ill-considered decision to ban residential redevelopment within a very constrained portion of the Phillip service trades area, thus denying South Canberra its own miniature Braddon. There is obviously a lot of stuff happening. We are quite supportive of the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework that the government has committed to deliver this term. Once that

is complete, we need to start looking at it in closer detail. How do we make sure that all these great bits and pieces of the puzzle are not just done in isolation but are actually done as part of a more cohesive model?

In our submission, we have been quite explicit that we would like to see an updated master plan for the Woden town centre and surrounds, making sure it all fits together. Obviously, there are no master plans in the new planning system. What we have now is place-specific design guides. We have seen that tested with the City Centre Urban Design Framework, which then became the City Centre Urban Design Guide. That itself was a product of the City and Gateway Design and Planning Framework. That gives a very clear idea as to how the bits and pieces of development that happen in the city centre do not happen piecemeal but happen in an integrated way so that you are building on the unique characteristics of the city centre. So we would recommend, potentially as an outcome of the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework, the “Woden Town Centre Urban Design Guide”, which we have mocked up the cover of here.

We think that is the logical next step after the Southern Gateway project has been completed, and that makes sure that we are stitching together all the different pieces of the puzzle. We are looking at the cycle routes, we are looking at the new bus interchange, we are looking at the Scentre Group proposal, and we are looking at all the surrounds of that as well. We would include the frame of the Woden town centre, which of course includes the Phillip service trades area. Let’s make sure that we are all doing this as an integrated project and we understand how everything fits together. In that way, we really do get close to that transport nirvana that Mr Cain alluded to before.

**Mr Bush:** The Phillip trade centre is a cycling desert. There is nothing in there to aid cycling.

**MR CAIN:** That was my question. I was saying that if the development continues at pace, as is, and the light rail connection is made, do we have a wonderful transport hub for all forms?

**Mr Bush:** Why not? It is a big investment. The interchange is beautifully designed. There are two lock-up bike storage points there, getting back to cycling. The design of them is beautifully integrated with the rest of the interchange. I am looking forward to light rail. I hope I live long enough to be able to ride it.

**MR CAIN:** You can get it from the city to Gungahlin, if you want.

**Mr Bush:** It is a great investment in Woden’s future to have that there. In the meantime, the interchange is an excellent idea, and it will cater for the people who are living in the towers. What those people are not getting is a school. That is the problem. For people who are interested in cycling to work from the Woden town centre now, and they have children—and children live in those towers—they have to drive the child to school. If they leave the town centre, they might as well drive on to work. It is the wrong start to the day.

All this has happened in less than 10 years. Woden town centre was designed for retail and employment. It was not designed originally for residential. It has just happened. Some of the buildings for residential have been converted from business buildings. It is

a dormitory suburb, really. I do not think it will ever be anything more than that. If you have more employment there, maybe more people will live and work in the area. Basically, it is a matter of coming and going by car, but why not come and go by cycling or walking?

Those towers at Yamba Drive are one kilometre from the Woden Plaza, and there is a separated bikeway between there and the western entrance of the plaza. How easy is it to get on a bicycle and ride that distance rather than drive a car? We heard this morning from witnesses who were talking about people who drive there because it is too difficult to walk across Launceston Street. It is not, really.

**MS CARRICK:** I love your Woden town centre urban design guide. That is just beautiful. To go with it, you have the plan, the design guide, the integrated planning sites for where facilities will go. Presumably, that will all be in there.

**Mr Hemsley:** It would be a tiered process. We would be working with a model of what was done. Essentially, how did we get to the city centre urban design guide? That was a product of the City and Gateway Urban Design Framework. What was that a product of? That was a product of the city plan. Essentially, all these things are nested within each other. We think that a logical process by which we will probably end up with a Woden town centre design guide is, as the government has already alluded to, through a dedicated Woden renewal authority.

The urban design guide itself does not need to cost the earth. Having had a look at the contracts page on the ACT Tenders website, it costs about \$300,000 to do. It is not a huge investment to be able to stitch together all the various bits and pieces and ensure that we are getting the best value out of the much larger investments that are being made both by the government and by the private sector in the Woden town centre.

**MS CARRICK:** I like what you said, because—

**THE CHAIR:** We are now over time.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay. It is about having the governance to oversight it all. At the moment it is very hotchpotch; there is no community development or any of that local government stuff that happens in the town centres. A Woden renewal authority could do a broader role of looking at that, and community development activities in the spaces that we make.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you so much for your time. I do not think there were any questions taken on notice. We will send you a copy of the transcript.

**Mr Bush:** Can I draw your attention to our recommendations?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Bush:** There are two sets; one is a general set and the other is specific infrastructure projects.

**THE CHAIR:** For Woden town centre, yes.

**Mr Bush:** In the first set of recommendations, we talk about the government and officials being more proactive in implementing their own policy on people-first designs in infrastructure. Often, we find there is an element of timidity among officials and ministers, who tend to worry about traffic flow over cycling and walking, and their own policies say the reverse. There is a road hierarchy that they have accepted that puts walking at the top, cycling second, public transport third, delivery vehicles fourth, and private vehicles last. Yet often we have a battle convincing the planners that the design should be more people-friendly and not assist traffic flow. That is our experience, having done this for 50 years. If you can make a recommendation about that, it would be good.

**THE CHAIR:** I am so sorry, Richard; we are at the end of our hearing.

**Mr Bush:** Just two infrastructure—

**MR CAIN:** Yes, we have the submission.

**THE CHAIR:** The next session is about to begin, so we do have to finish.

**MS CARRICK:** Have you handed that in, Richard? Is that in your submission?

**Mr Bush:** It is in the submission.

**MS CARRICK:** It is in the submission?

**THE CHAIR:** We have it, thank you, Richard.

**MS CARRICK:** And don't open the road in the West Plaza.

**Mr Bush:** It was the Woden to Civic bikeway that I wanted to mention.

**THE CHAIR:** I am sorry, we are at the end of our time. We need to start the next session.

**BOWLES, DR DEVIN**, Chief Executive Officer, ACTCOSS  
**KRISHNAMURTHY, MR RAVI**, President, Australian Multicultural Action Network  
**McMILLAN, MS REBECCA**, Chief of Staff, Woden Community Service

**THE CHAIR:** I welcome Ravi, from the Australian Multicultural Action Network, Devin Bowles, and Rebecca McMillan. Thank you so much for joining us. This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly, and it has the same standing as proceedings of the Assembly itself. That means today's evidence attracts parliamentary privilege, and it also means that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of the Assembly.

I would suggest that we do not have opening statements; then we will have more time for questions. Does anyone have an opening statement?

**Ms McMillan:** Yes, I think we both do.

**Dr Bowles:** We did.

**THE CHAIR:** If you have short opening statements, please go ahead. If they are long, we might table them.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, table it.

**THE CHAIR:** Table it?

**MS CARRICK:** I want to pick out some key things, but we will run out of time to ask questions.

**Ms McMillan:** That is fine.

**Dr Bowles:** I will be very quick. I note that many of our observations are not Woden-specific but apply to planning processes or other factors which permeate the ACT. I note that, to support a great quality of life, town centres must deliver affordable housing, accessible social infrastructure and opportunities for community wellbeing, ensuring that people experiencing poverty and disadvantage are not left behind.

**Ms McMillan:** I can summarise very quickly. The three main points in our submission are about the importance of having spaces that bring people together, designing for access and flexibility, and spaces that support physical and mental health as well as sustainability. We also want to highlight the critical infrastructure gap with the Woden community centre.

**THE CHAIR:** Ravi, was there anything you wanted to draw our attention to before we start with questions?

**Mr Krishnamurthy:** I think I mentioned in my submission that housing prices are going up. That escalation is a big concern. There is the diversity of housing as well, and there are a few other recommendations that I put in my submission.

**THE CHAIR:** I am concerned about housing affordability. I am also concerned, in the Woden town centre, that, with people in the apartments there, there is not a lot of recreation and community space, and we do not have the community facilities that we should have. We do not have the multicultural meeting space that we should have. I think there have been a lot of good points made. Noting what is there already, what would you have government change to make sure that we do have more livable spaces?

**Ms McMillan:** From our perspective, we are looking at encouraging having spaces for all the community to come together—for youth, for aged people. I recently went to Scentre Group’s session, which was a co-design session for the community. They were looking for so many facilities, from sports facilities to recreation facilities and creative facilities. The general consensus is that there is so much population density planned for the area but there are not sufficient amenities around it.

From a community services perspective, we are looking for spaces where we can be together as one organisation, and where we can be a central point for the community, in order to have better wraparound support. Having co-located services would be really important.

**THE CHAIR:** Where would you put that?

**Ms McMillan:** Personally, I do not have an opinion. I can come back with our organisation’s view on that. I know that, from a Woden community centre perspective, it was earmarked to be near the offices. However, I have heard that that is now potentially off the table and may be incorporated in either part of the Scentre Group design or potentially the Hellenic Club area.

**THE CHAIR:** Would there be concerns about having it near the Hellenic Club?

**Ms McMillan:** I do not know enough about that from a logistics point of view. The youth centre, where we currently have it, is near the new interchange, which is great from a transport perspective. We want to make sure that it is easily accessible and safe, and that people feel it is welcoming to go to. At the moment there is not that central spot. We do have the youth centre; unfortunately, it is not fit for purpose.

**THE CHAIR:** There are not a lot of third spaces. Ravi, your submission made quite a lot of comments about not having well-informed multicultural design there. We did not have things like prayer rooms and signage in different languages. Some of those things sound like they would be quite easy to do better than they have been done in the past.

**Mr Krishnamurthy:** Yes. The green space was something that we discussed after that as well. From the multicultural point of view, more of those shared public areas, that are common for everyone, is what we are looking for. The signage is not very well placed in the existing Woden community centre, which is ageing, as we all know. These are the things that we mentioned.

I cannot remember whether there are even enough dog parks around the area. We did hear from other members that there are not sufficient public toilets, and the facilities for breastfeeding mothers, parent rooms, are a bit scarce as well. Developing the area is fantastic. Having light rail stage 2B—I am part of that consumer group as well—is nice,

but having accessible public transport is really vital.

**THE CHAIR:** The green space is a pretty key thing to underpin the third spaces, isn't it? If you do not have the green space, you cannot gather there.

**Mr Krishnamurthy:** Yes, that is right.

**MS CARRICK:** Rebecca, do you know what the needs are for your community centre? This is basically a community centre for Woden Community Service to deliver their really critical services, the really important services that you deliver to a broad range of the demographics—seniors, youth, disability, families at risk. You do all the really important services. Do you know what the needs are? Do you have it documented, and what happened to the community centre?

**Ms McMillan:** I believe Infrastructure Canberra have previously documented the number of square metres, staffing stations and meeting rooms. I do not have that with me, but I am happy to provide that to you afterwards.

**MS CARRICK:** That would be good.

**Ms McMillan:** In addition to incorporating all of our back office corporate services, it is important for our front-facing services to be located there, in terms of having meeting spaces and multipurpose function spaces, to be able to have social groups for youth groups and the elderly. I am happy to provide a document outlining what we need.

**MS CARRICK:** The east side of Woden is still government-owned—the east side on the Callam Offices side, from the Smith Family and Koomarri buildings south, through to the Woden Town Park, and the child care and youth centre. That whole area is still government-owned. Have there been any conversations about developing that as a community services precinct, whether that includes an indoor sports stadium or—

**Ms McMillan:** My understanding is that was the spot that had been earmarked for the Woden community centre, but in the most recent conversations we have had we have been told that that is no longer the case. We are trying to find out more information. We have not had a lot of information about it.

**MS CARRICK:** You have not had conversations with the minister?

**Ms McMillan:** We have had a conversation with Minister Steel, when we last visited him. He was the one who directed us towards attending the co-design workshop by the Scentre Group, to find out more about that. Infrastructure Canberra did reach out to us last week. They are coming to visit our office this Friday, to find out more about our needs. We have not had a lot of information to date.

**MS CARRICK:** If they say that Scentre Group or the Hellenic Club can provide the facilities for you, how are you going to ensure that you get what you need?

**Ms McMillan:** We need to make sure that we are involved in those conversations and that we provide them with the minimum requirements that we need from an operational point of view, and for it to be co-designed. For example, with the Scentre Group, we

have not had an opportunity to meet one-on-one with them. If they were the ones to be doing it, I would want that opportunity, to make sure that we were part of that process, not being told, “This is what you’re being given.”

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, because that is potentially what happens. If you are next to the Hellenic Club, do you see that as a problem with vulnerable groups that you work with, being next to a big gaming club?

**Ms McMillan:** Yes, that would be concerning. I would have to come back to you with our organisation’s view on that.

**Dr Bowles:** ACTCOSS would certainly view that as highly concerning.

**Ms McMillan:** Yes.

**MS CARRICK:** It appears to me that a lot of the needs in our community, whether it is accommodation for you, whether it is recreational or cultural, are now all being provided—the fact that Minister Steel says to you, “Go and talk to Scentre Group,”—

**MR CAIN:** Insulting.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes. We are asking the private sector to provide any amenity that we need.

**Ms McMillan:** My understanding is that the design quotes for whatever stage they were at came in higher than they were expecting, and they are now going out to multiple groups, not just the Scentre Group. I think there are around 16 different private groups that they are looking at to be able to provide that service. We are waiting to find out more information. Things do seem to be very much done in isolation. It would be great if all the work could be done collectively.

I know Devin was going to talk about the climate change pilot which ACTCOSS has been involved with, and Woden Community Service was one of the participants in that pilot. Some of the findings from that could really help to inform some of the design for the Woden town centre, as well as the Woden community centre itself. However, that seems to be being considered very separately to this. I would really encourage, where we can, for us to be collaborating together, in order to have the best interests of the community met.

**Dr Bowles:** Absolutely, collaborating. If I can take a step back, I hope, first of all, that each of you sleeps well at night, but that the last thing that you are thinking about when you go to sleep is, “How do we get the ACT government’s health budget under control?”

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Dr Bowles:** Because if that does not happen, it is not sustainable that the government will be able to provide Canberrans with the services that we want. To do that, we need to be much more linked up in how we think about health. The US Surgeon General indicates that loneliness and social isolation lead to heart disease, strokes, anxiety,

depression and dementia. Loneliness and social isolation contribute to people with those conditions being 26 and 29 per cent more likely to die early. The effect of social isolation and loneliness on health overall is similar to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

It is not acceptable for the government, which is facing a rapidly escalating health budget, to ignore a determinant of health that is that significant. Planning needs to be very deliberate and ensure a degree of social connection, which I do not believe the Woden town centre currently allows for. That would look like a few things. It would look like planning to have adequate health, education and community services that are there, and that are physically designed and related to one another in a way that facilitates community and social connection.

It also means dealing with the fact that right now Woden town centre is a known urban heat spot. There are relatively few places that you can go to socialise in Woden that do not involve spending money, for much of the year, because half the year it is an Arctic wind tunnel and a quarter of the year it is a heat island. If you do not have the resources to hang out in the mall and spend money there, the physical and social infrastructure that enables social connection for young people, for multicultural communities, for all kinds of people, is really limited.

It is not acceptable that we leave that to the private market, which does not have either the capacity or the motivation to be joined up in its thinking about what an overall town centre space should look like, and it is probably not motivated to do that, either. In fact, it is often motivated to attract tenants who are going to get people to spend money.

**MS CARRICK:** It is profit-driven.

**Dr Bowles:** Related to that, we need to increase social housing. In our budget submission, we asked that social housing stock be restored to 10 per cent of all housing stock by 2036. Woden, being projected to be the second-fastest growing population area, clearly has some heavy lifting to do in terms of social housing. We would love to see the salt-and-pepper approach continue and to see really thoughtful design that means that social housing does not have a neon sign over it, saying “social housing”, but where people can integrate with their community.

**MS TOUGH:** I actually wanted to touch on social housing. I know in some of the apartment blocks in Woden there is public housing, community housing and disability housing and you would not know from looking at them. They are just scattered through. Some of the apartment blocks do not have it, so it seems to be just luck of the draw of what the developers build, whether they built it to be more accessible when they built it, whether government or someone has come along and purchased them from the developer. Do you see, because there are so many apartment blocks and there are going to be so many more, a way of making sure that we do have that public housing and community housing and disability housing scattered through the whole town centre?

**Dr Bowles:** Yes, absolutely. Right now, as I understand it, the government is looking at altering lease variation charges. The potential for significant value to be generated, I think, is pretty high when you bulldoze a few houses and put up a high-rise. I think there are really legitimate questions to be asked about how those profits are shared between the community and the developers. One way of ensuring some shared social

value is to require a high degree of social housing in new apartment blocks. So it strikes me that one of the key ways to generate more public housing could be to say, “Yes, you can put up a high-rise here, but you need a couple of apartments on every floor to be social housing, not just for a few years but in perpetuity or for at least a generation.”

**MS TOUGH:** Yes, definitely. This is an extreme example and I do not think it would ever happen in Canberra, but you see some places in Sydney where they have built big apartment blocks or big new complexes in well-to-do areas and then they put public housing in but have limited—

**MS CARRICK:** The “poor door”.

**MS TOUGH:** Yes, the “poor door”. They have limited accessibility to, actually, the whole precinct. We hear in passing from people comments about, “There are definitely housos in that building,” or, like, that stigma. How do we make sure when we put public housing or community housing in every level hopefully of an apartment block or just scattered through, that the people living in those houses feel just as valued and just as part of the community as the whole building?

**Dr Bowles:** This proposal might sound radical but actually, I think, has some justice to it, which is that maybe the government could pick. So I remember when I was a child and my brother and I had to split something, one person did the splitting and the other person did the picking. So perhaps a similar principle could apply.

**MS TOUGH:** The picking, yes. Similar situation in my family, yes.

**MR CAIN:** Cutting the cake too.

**MS TOUGH:** Yes, cutting the cake. Yes, definitely.

**Mr Krishnamurthy:** If it is okay, I would like to add some points as well here.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, please.

**Mr Krishnamurthy:** I think the scattered public housing is preferable than the concentrated public housing because that stigma on the public housing is very common. I live in the Inner North and I can just feel that a lot of residents here feel the same thing, that mixed tenure development, for example public plus the affordable and the private, I think is considered one of the best practices overall in urban planning. That is what we feel from the network.

I do know that there are some apartment blocks in Woden that lack disability-friendly access, as the Chair has mentioned. So that needs to be addressed, and the new blocks should have the mandate with full accessibility from the start, rather than trying to add it towards the end side of it, after the sale. There are a lot of members joining—they prefer to invest in any of this housing, which is really increasing as we know across the whole Australian economy. Changing the housing is a bit hard because you spend all that money and then buy it thinking that you are going to live there and then build a family and things, and then realise, “Okay, so this is not there, that is not there and that is a bit of an issue.”

Also, I think we checked through some of the most recently developed centres across Australia. I think there is a place, Brimbank in Victoria. Definitely. I think they have built a state-of-the-art library which is, again, important. I think they have added all the business hubs if I remember correctly. They were all put into one place and that was really helpful for the people. That is one of the reasons why in our submission we mentioned a business concierge is always helpful and having a micro-business incubator where the government and the community—and we are all part of that community of practice—is the best way of coming up with a liveable space where everyone can thrive and enjoy.

I would mention a similar example from New South Wales as well, I think Darling Square. They have a library and they have childcare, the food hall, the IQ-Hub and the Makerspace they call it, where the arts and culture all come together. I think these are all very good examples which already exist in Australia. So if we can follow that sort of an approach in Woden town centre that would be fantastic. It will be a thriving space for sure.

**THE CHAIR:** Devin, thank you for talking about inclusionary zoning. The Greens and a lot of community groups have been calling for that for a long time and the planning minister now has it on his statement of priorities, which is very exciting. Has ACTCOSS thought about what proportion of new developments should be set aside for public and maybe community housing?

**Dr Bowles:** Well, we, as I said, are calling for at least 10 per cent of housing stock to be social housing by 2036. I do not have the math problem in front of me but we know that right now it is roughly 7-ish, 6, 7 per cent from memory.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, 5.7.

**Dr Bowles:** So we know that we are aiming for 30,000 new dwellings by 2030. If you extrapolate out that rate and say it is going to be 60,000 dwellings, or however many it is going to be, then I think it resolves with a fairly simple math problem, which I will not attempt on the record.

**THE CHAIR:** No, but thank you. You have set out my homework for me. Thank you.

**MR CAIN:** We did a two-hour wander through the Woden town centre and surrounding precincts this morning as a committee and we noted that there was a youth rehabilitation centre. What was the name of it?

**Ms McMillan:** Youth centre?

**MS CARRICK:** Youth centre. It is just a youth centre.

**MR CAIN:** A youth centre, right on the town square. I guess there were some questions whether that was an appropriate place for a public—a place where we want to encourage the public to gather and hold gatherings and things like that, noting the very worthwhile purpose of such a centre.

**MS CARRICK:** Youth Foyer. You are talking of the Youth Foyer.

**Ms McMillan:** Youth Foyer, yes.

**MR CAIN:** Youth Foyer. So whether there is perhaps an alternative approach to try and balance the location of places where people are being rehabilitated, brought back to a better version of themselves, versus a community hub for the whole of the community to celebrate and gather.

**Dr Bowles:** Sorry, the people that attend the Youth Foyer, you mentioned they are being rehabilitated. What are the—

**MS CARRICK:** Do you want me to elaborate?

**MR CAIN:** Yes, yes.

**MS CARRICK:** The Youth Foyer caters for 20 young people that are at risk of homelessness and they are trying to keep them in education. So that gives them accommodation for 20 people. The issue is—it is a great thing, but it is right in the core of Woden, right in the middle of the public space with blank walls. So it is just—when we are trying to activate a town centre, it is in the wrong spot with blank walls. So there is a balance between, sure, you want to look after your young people, but you also need to have active public spaces.

**MR CAIN:** So basically it is denying a significant part of that square for dining options, a little bit of retail, et cetera. So it kind of seems like a bit of a mixed message of a town square at the moment.

**Ms McMillan:** As I said, I know that our organisation has put in a submission for the Youth Foyer, but I am not sure about the background as to why it has been located there or—I am assuming it has already been built?

**MR CAIN:** It is built, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, it is built. It is there.

**Ms McMillan:** So I am not sure how feasible it is to now relocate it—

**MR CAIN:** No, we cannot.

**Ms McMillan:** —but I am happy to get someone from our team to speak with you after this about their thoughts about it.

**THE CHAIR:** Rebecca, probably only if your organisation has something specific to say about the design or location of it, sure, but yes.

**MR CAIN:** Sure.

**Ms McMillan:** Yes.

**Mr Krishnamurthy:** If you do not mind?

**THE CHAIR:** Ravi, yes?

**Mr Krishnamurthy:** If you do not mind, I am happy to just add some points here. I think, from my understanding of the Youth Foyer, it is mainly targeted for a specialised service. That is what I think. If we tried to put it in place in the middle, I think that is a bit of a concern because—I am just comparing it against the rehabilitation services—usually from both sides, from the people using the foyer and the hub and those youth minds who are a part of it—they should not be together because it basically disturbs both ends. It is good to have some form of a suitable approach, where—I think the specialist support precinct model is always good. But mixing them along with everyone may not be one of the best designs, is what we feel.

**MR CAIN:** I know in your submission, Ravi—and thank you for it—you have mentioned some priorities and perhaps even gaps for our multicultural and CALD community. Did you want to say what the possibilities are for rectifying some of that?

**Mr Krishnamurthy:** Let me just read through here, Peter. I think one of the key perspectives we mentioned was about the accessibility of community facilities, which we have discussed here, and also the integrated learning and recreation, because these are all very important when you buy a million dollar property and then try to live in a place with the family. So that is mainly what I think we have mentioned. Also, we do talk about proximity to Canberra Hospital, which is really important for the ageing community, mainly for the CALD members. The health needs are very, very important, so that should not be overlooked. So that is the other bit I think we mentioned.

Light rail is coming over there. We know that stage 2B is under full speed and it is being developed but there are some gaps with a lack of an enabled bus service. We all know that. So that is one of the gaps I think we did mention, I remember. Housing diversity, which I have already mentioned, and escalating house prices—we know what is happening there as well. So these are all bits of cultural blind spots I would like to throw here so that they can be considered as part of whichever phase we are in, which will be very helpful for everyone.

**Dr Bowles:** If I can just speak to the Youth Foyer question?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Dr Bowles:** My understanding is that it is to provide services to young people who are engaged in education but at risk of homelessness. I am perhaps showing my age when I say that often the presence of a density of young people can, in fact, enliven a space. I think it is important that some prime real estate, really, be invested in people who are experiencing life challenges. These, as I understand it, are young people that are continuing to engage with education despite significant adversity. I have not spoken with any of them or with the people that run the program and would defer to their expertise, but I would not necessarily say that it ought to be moved based on what I currently know.

**MS CARRICK:** Have you seen it, the space?

**Dr Bowles:** No.

**MS CARRICK:** I will show you there if you are interested.

**THE CHAIR:** I would say there are some inherently different views but it is part of salt-and-pepper to have these everywhere. I do not know, Peter, if your question was about whether it should be there, or whether the design of it is the right design.

**MR CAIN:** Yes, I mean, certainly the design does not facilitate, I guess, community engagement for what you would consider a town centre to try and accomplish.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, so it is about the design of it.

**MR CAIN:** So it is basically a closed-off—a fairly significant part of one end of a town centre, of a public community space.

**MS CARRICK:** Of the town—of the space.

**THE CHAIR:** We are back to the beginning. I might take us back to some common threads that have come up from many of the submissions and today's conversation, the lack of green space and the lack of anybody in charge of activation. So we see in Civic you have the CRA and in some places—Belconnen had a little connecting-up program for a little while, Devin, which probably goes to some of your—that was a program put together specifically to address the loneliness of a lot of the young people and students moving into that really built-up area and it ran little programs all around, but it was short-term and the funding for those things tends to run out.

We have had a lot of people ask for some kind of government structure or funding or government-led, government-involved thing that makes sure you have good green space and design in your public spaces and good activation; things on all the time, not just a few little one-off grants. Do you think that would help in the Woden town centre?

**Dr Bowles:** Absolutely. One of the features of social connection is that it needs to be sustained and the idea of short-term grants being able to drive the long-term connection that enables people to thrive is, I think, somewhat misguided. What we need are long-term programs that develop the social infrastructure, classic sort of community development work, where people can create relationships and friendships with each other that does not happen in, you know, “We had a party and it was great and then we are done.” It is the kind of thing where people repeatedly come to a space and even though it is a public space, they have an affinity for it and a relationship with it and associate it with the people that they attend it with. And that is one of the key ways to build that community and social infrastructure.

**Ms McMillan:** From that co-design workshop that I went to where they were speaking about the town centre and having space, they really spoke about the importance of needing space for things like markets and performances but also making sure that there was storage as well for those sorts of events too. So whilst the green space is important, just making sure that there are the wraparound facilities for that as well, but definitely having that outdoor space is important.

**Mr Krishnamurthy:** Yes. Having that sort of a proper structure, I think it really helps with a long-term vision as well as the accountability. That is something that I would like to mention here. Whether it is CALD or non-CALD, you know, consistently I think this has been expressed. I did go through some of the submissions. Some form of a structure, for example, the Woden precinct management authority, or the Woden green space and activation board, you know, that sort of a management team, a place management team, would be very helpful in forming the proper structure over there.

We know that high-quality green space is very essential for activating any of the living areas where people and business may come together, and for a town centre, this is super critical. For example, it does encourage people living there to stay longer rather than just selling and then moving off. The turnaround is minimised and that saves a lot of money for the public. That is an important one.

It also provides confidence in the government because when there is a proper authority and a mechanism where people can approach and the structure is clearly visible to everyone, that gives very strong confidence to the public, and that is very important. So it is an important question, I feel. Again, comparing this with a few of the recent developments I mentioned about Brimbank and Darling Square and all that—I think they are doing pretty good. So we already have working models elsewhere. It is just how we implement those here is what I think is quite important, I feel, yes.

**MS CARRICK:** Ravi, I go to a lot of multicultural events. The multicultural community is very good at putting on events. When I go to them in the Woden town centre they are always in the big clubs, in the Hellenic Club or the Southern Cross Club. Does it concern you that there is—unless you can tell me another space where they hold the events—that the events are always in gaming clubs?

**Mr Krishnamurthy:** Look, this is an important question. I think all of you have asked that before in the same inquiry here. We are running a project within our network that is mainly for gambling harm prevention. It is not advisable for the public to run a community event in a club, unless the club has a separate entrance there where the entrants are not exposed to any of those gambling machines. It is a big topic, we all know that.

So doing an event in a club by itself is okay because a lot of clubs, I think—you know, as a workaround and also to encourage the community, they do give free space for us to run some of the events and small meetings, not a huge gathering of like 200 members and all that. But then I know Hellenic Club is doing it and Southern Cross Club also has space for that. We arrange a lot of programs over there.

But having a dedicated space for community events, I think, is very important. We are doing some other programs in Melrose High School. So most of those public schools do have big halls where we rent a space and then we run our events. But having a multicultural centre, which is again another topic which is being discussed everywhere, is very helpful. It is very helpful. So running them in parallel in a club with all these poker machines around us is not advisable, no.

**MS CARRICK:** There is talk at the moment of having a big multicultural venue. How

do you balance having the big multicultural venue with having smaller venues scattered around the town centres and suburbs? Like, I know in Molonglo they are keen for a space to have their events. We had Diwali in the car park. It was pretty hot. So where is the balance between having a big one for a lot of people and community halls for events around the community?

**Mr Krishnamurthy:** Yes, having one big venue—let’s call it a multicultural hub—I think that gives a good scale, visibility and also access for members—equal access for different multicultural members. We do work with some of the new migrants and youth, seniors, as well as disabled community members who are both young and old. Having a specific area where we can run that sort of thing, I think that avoids them getting confused and avoids the duplication as well. So these are all very important.

Having a large hall surrounded by some smaller classrooms where we can run community language schools and we hire for different needs, I think that is quite helpful. We know that it has been scattered all over, and it is pretty hard at the moment to find a list of which places are available in real-time online, other than just calling each and every venue and then find out, you know, “Are you there for this particular day,” and things like that. So having one multicultural hub where there is a big hall surrounded by smaller rooms is definitely helpful.

**Dr Bowles:** Ms Carrick, may I—

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, I was just going to ask you about having all the events in the big clubs, gaming clubs.

**Dr Bowles:** Yes and thank you very much. I want to start by saying, if memory serves from the most recent gambling prevalence survey in the ACT, people from multicultural communities in the ACT gambled less frequently but were more likely to experience harm when they did gamble. I think it is a real shame that the ACT has made itself reliant on clubs for big community spaces, particularly clubs that use a product, that market a product, which, when it is used as intended by the manufacturer, is designed to cause harm. It is a business model that, for many clubs, is designed to cause harm. We need a social infrastructure that does not give social licence to a group of organisations which has a business model of causing the community harm.

**MS CARRICK:** Rebecca because you deliver all these critical services to vulnerable members in our community, where do you do that?

**Ms McMillan:** Where do we do it currently?

**MS CARRICK:** Yes.

**Ms McMillan:** We are spread across multiple sites because we do not currently have a central location for us all. Our head office is based in Shea Street in Phillip and we also have mental health services there but in a separate building downstairs and not co-located. We have space in the Westfield where we have a hub where we run a little pantry where people can come and get food relief. Then we have the youth centre which we discussed before as well. So at the moment we are spread across multiple locations. We actually have other services too, of course, in schools. We run before-school, after-

school care and early learning centres. So I think we have 28 different locations in total but those four are sort of the community programs and corporate services locations.

**MS CARRICK:** Does it make it logistically difficult to be spread out?

**Ms McMillan:** Absolutely. It stops that sort of organisational effectiveness, you know, that sort of internal connection, but also we do not have a front for the community to see us. We are currently in the kind of more, I guess, industrial section in that Phillip region, so people are not wandering by. It is not really conducive to being an open, welcoming space for people. So it certainly has challenges, but we are doing our best with what we can.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there anything we did not get to today?

**Dr Bowles:** If I can just say?

**THE CHAIR:** Devin, yes.

**Dr Bowles:** I understand the budget pressures and the need, basically, to drive density. If you are the ACT government that makes complete sense. Doing design well, including of our city centres, is going to cost money. And it is not going to pay off today, it is not going to pay off tomorrow, but it will pay off soon for our budget, and it will pay off for the whole of the rest of Canberra's existence. If we want to be a government that looks beyond, you know, one election cycle, this is an investment that really makes sense. I do not think we should be talking about, "Do we have one big meeting centre or do we have several small ones?" This is the kind of essential infrastructure that if we invest in now will be providing social dividends which absolutely convert to economic dividends for the ACT government for decades.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for that long-term thinking. Thank you very much for your time. Thank you, Ravi, for joining us online. I hope that experience was okay.

**Mr Krishnamurthy:** Thank you. Thanks a lot.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, good on you. Thank you.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you, Ravi.

**THE CHAIR:** Rebecca, I think you took some things on notice, but we do not pursue community organisations with a passion. So please get back to us with anything you can, usefully, but we will not be punitive in our approach there.

**Ms McMillan:** Okay. Yes, okay.

**THE CHAIR:** Our secretary will send out a transcript of the hearings. Let us know anything that stands out that was not correct. On behalf of the committee, thank you for your attendance.

**Short suspension.**

**BRYANT, MS JOSIE**, Committee member, Save Phillip Pool  
**GREENE, MS MARIA**, Committee member, Save Phillip Pool  
**JOHNSON, MS ALESHIA**, Executive Director/CEO, Warehouse Circus  
**KEYS, MR GRANT**, Chair Facilities Subcommittee and Life Member, Weston Creek  
Woden Dodgers Basketball Club  
**MILLER, MR MARTIN**, Committee member, Save Phillip Pool  
**NEUMANN, MS COLETTE**, Secretary, Royals Volleyball Club  
**RAISIN, MS LOUISE**, Committee member, Save Phillip Pool

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome, Warehouse Circus, Save Phillip Pool, Weston Creek Woden Dodgers Basketball Club and Royals Volleyball Club. This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly. It has the same status as Assembly proceedings. That means today's evidence attracts parliamentary privilege. It also means that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and might be regarded as contempt of the Assembly. We have actually got the submissions. I do not think we will do opening statements. Did anyone bring an opening statement they would like to table? Have we got any? We do.

**MS TOUGH:** I think Ms Johnson said she has one.

**Ms Johnson:** I do, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. How long is it?

**Ms Johnson:** Four minutes. Too long?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**MS CARRICK:** Is it possible just to make the key point without reading a stretch?

**THE CHAIR:** Can anyone who has an opening statement make a one minute statement and then table anything else? Is that a possible way to go forward?

**Ms Bryant:** Yes. Yes, we will give it a go.

**Mr Keys:** Happy to table.

**MS CARRICK:** Because if we do not do that we will run out of time.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. If we do four minutes for everybody it will. We will start down with Grant. If you have a one minute statement for us, Grant, go ahead. You do not have to if you do not.

**Mr Keys:** Yes. I will be happy to table my statements, they are three or four minutes long. But yes, just to reinforce the need—the high demand that we are seeing as a large basketball club on the south side of over 600 members and we are certainly very interested in working with the government to look at both indoor and outdoor infrastructure.

We think the redevelopment of the Woden town centre presents some great Environment—10-12-25

opportunities. Not just working to look at the high demand for indoor basketball and indoor sports infrastructure, but the new Olympic sport of 3x3 basketball and how we can work with government to activate some outdoor areas and look at some really great outdoor spaces as well. I think there is some great opportunities there, but I think bottom line is, we are very open to working with all sides of government to achieve better outcomes than we are currently getting at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** Awesome, thanks Grant. Aleshia?

**Ms Johnson:** Great. I will skip the who we are and what we do. I will table my statement, but in 2025 we have launched a new brand concept called the Capital Performing Arts Warehouse which is a virtual hub at the moment for performing arts training, performance, experimentation and exchange.

The Capital Performing Arts Warehouse is currently home of Warehouse Circus, our youth community circus school; Warehouse Entertainment, our agency; the Canberra Circus Festival; Hand to Hand Academy, registered training for performing arts; the Circus Wares retail shop and Circoscope production house. These are all driven by Warehouse Circus. These are all entities driven by Warehouse Circus.

We want to turn our virtual hub into a bricks and mortar reality and we think Woden town centre is the perfect opportunity to do that, to imagine the future of Woden town centre as a vibrant and family friendly cultural hub championing circus arts in the nation's capital. We want to see zoning for community, cultural and sporting activities embedded in entertainment and hospitality precincts with strong links to public transport. We have the ability as one organisation to manage a venue that is open day and night and services the daytime economy and the nighttime economy with activities for all ages and all abilities.

**Ms Bryant:** I am Josie Bryant representing Save Phillip Pool. We believe that retaining a 50 metre outdoor pool in Woden is a vital asset in support of the social, economic and environmental prosperity of the Woden town centre and its liveability into the future and we have aimed to prove that in the submission we have submitted or sent to you.

We are part of the coalition advocating for a new aquatic strategy for the ACT and note that Minister Berry has recently received a petition from 26 groups seeking community consultation to move that forward.

We believe, however, that Phillip pool or this public community amenity aligns very well with the opportunities sought by your terms of reference within this enquiry into the role and future of the Woden town centre. Namely, promoting community health and wellbeing, education, sustainability and resilience to climate change and provides an amenity that encourages community activity and social cohesion. It will provide and continues to provide a vital green space and community amenity in response to the needs of the growing population and the ever increasing densification of the Woden town centre. This is an area of real concern for us. We do not believe the proposed development that is on the table right now for approval will anywhere meet the needs of the Woden community.

We believe that in the work that we have undertaken, the petitioning with the local

community, that has really proved that the need for something along the lines of an outdoor facility is much more endorsed. We believe that we will call upon the government to prevent the closure of the 50 metre pool and to negotiate the surrender of the Crown lease back to the ACT government for ownership. Other options we would like the government to consider would include a land swap and maybe giving the developer a reprieve from what are apparent complications with that site. The Phillip pool is a treasured community asset and plays a critical role in providing aquatic facilities, green space and a summertime hub for the community in terms of—

**THE CHAIR:** Josie, I might just step in there. Are there any other key points in there?

**Ms Bryant:** Yes. Well, I guess, I think—almost 6,000 people have signed a petition and so we believe community support is there and we feel that there has been a lack of any needs analysis by the government and that has been evidenced in recent communications. So we really feel that this has not been given a fair hearing.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, absolutely valid. Thank you. Colette?

**Ms Neumann:** Very briefly, we at Royals are one of six clubs across Canberra that compete in the volleyball competition. It is one of the fastest-growing sports in Australia currently. We have over 500 registered players—and that is in just six years of the club being formed.

We are one of the only south side clubs, but even so we are struggling to find enough training space for our members. As I said, we make up one-third of the volleyball competition across the ACT, and we are open to contributing to a multi-sport facility. We are not looking for our own luxury facility. As far as indoor sporting facilities, a multi-purpose facility in Woden would make a massive difference to our local clubs and to our local people. It would align directly with the ACT government's priorities supporting women. We are at 65 per cent young women in our club. For youth and multicultural communities, having equitable access to the space is very important. We would be looking at a four- to six-court multi-purpose facility, which would certainly deliver lasting health, social and economic benefits for the south side. We see on a regular basis the competitions being run up north and moving further and further up north, and the south side is missing out on that attendance and that number of people coming to the Woden area as well.

We had a strong showing in the submissions to the inquiry into barriers to participation in sport as well. Our top 15, roughly, suburbs are all south side and local to the Woden area but are being sort of squashed into training in one venue and the competitions are just not in the area. It would be great to bring people down here.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. That is a whole array of problems, and do not think a single one of those problems is on the table to be fixed right at this second, if I am not wrong. I am not quite sure how to tackle this, but I think maybe a useful conversation might be along the lines of what the role is of government; how the government should be making sure we have the right facilities in Woden town centre; and which of these things really should be in the Woden town centre—whereas which of these things might be, “Oh, it should be south side or maybe in Mawson.” Do you know what I mean? Right now, I do not think the government has planned any of these things. How do you think we

could get a different outcome from the track we are on right now?

**Ms Neumann:** I read something about the potential of rezoning areas, and I wondered if that was being extended to the Weston Creek area as well or could be considered to extend to the Weston Creek area also. There are some areas within Weston Creek that would work perfectly well for a facility. It does not have to be right in the town centre.

**THE CHAIR:** For a multi-sports facility maybe?

**Ms Neumann:** For a multi-sports facility, but they are not zoned appropriately to do that. I have been trying for about six years to understand what I am supposed to do to sort of start that, but I cannot work it out. It would not necessarily have to be right in the centre. It all ties in with public transport to the town centre as well. We have a lot of kids who have to sit around in the dark waiting for a bus for 20 or 30 minutes after training in the evenings, and, as a volunteer coach, I feel like I have to sit there with them. I think having really good infrastructure in the town centre to support things in the area would be very, very important.

**Ms Bryant:** I would add that we think that the Phillip pool is well located for the town centre and the amenities, especially with the high-rise developments that are going on—and really the need for some green space anyway. Also, population wise, it fits very well with what is recommended by the Royal Life Saving Society in terms of the population size warranting a facility of 50 metres. They say that a population of 40,000 to 70,000 would require a district style pool with 50 metres and 25 metres and some of those additional indoor facilities. At this stage, we are getting a really small developer's best shot at what would be fairly standard in most of those high rises—25 metres.

**THE CHAIR:** Josie, you mentioned an outdoor pool too.

**Ms Bryant:** Yes, absolutely. The Royal Life Saving Society benchmark does reference that, and it is in the document we have given you. So, in terms of post population and location, we see this is a really well-placed pool and a really vital facility.

**THE CHAIR:** Would there be other sites in the Woden town centre that would suit?

**Ms Bryant:** Possibly, but we also think that the current location is less expensive to revamp what exists than find a whole new site and redevelop and build. But we are open to those suggestions.

**THE CHAIR:** Except that it has already been sold—so that is difficult.

**Ms Bryant:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** I guess I am trying to work out what is possible.

**Ms Bryant:** That is why we are saying, “Could there be a negotiation of, say, a land swap or something along those lines?” Also, the co-location of the ice-skating rink with the pool is a vital link. As we have explained in the document, there is that heat exchange that is unique and something that can be really well developed and taken forward. We have also considered whether the data centre's heat exchange could be an

economical and really groundbreaking opportunity. It has been done elsewhere, and it is something that we could look at, to be effective.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Aleshia?

**Ms Johnson:** I would just like to put to government that Warehouse Circus presents an opportunity for Woden town centre to bring life to the centre and breathe a culture there that is not currently there. We have been around for 35 years and we have been running programs for all ages and all abilities. We are one of the leaders in Australia in disability circus and circus as therapy. It is an outreach. So it is a positive social activity that young people can engage in. Also, it makes the town centre nightlife approachable for young people and young families.

I think having performing arts in an area immediately lifts the cultural intention of the area, because people go, they see a show and they go out for dinner or people come and they bring their children to classes and they wait around for their kid to finish class and they go and shop in the mall. Our spaces at the moment are home to play dates, family gatherings, barbecues and working bees. We already have a really robust community that we feel could benefit Woden town centre.

The one thing we do not have is space for up and coming and small to medium performing arts to perform sustainably anywhere near Woden. We believe we could manage a very attractive venue for people to come to the Woden town centre and be involved. We think we would have links through education, sport, performing arts and entertainment, cultural exports and cultural tourism to Woden, which it has very little of at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** I can see you are filling a lot of roles there. Would the space that you need be space that could be accommodated in one of the developments that is going up?

**Ms Johnson:** We have spoken to Scentre about our pitch of having some community space within their development. We have also worked with the University of Canberra Master of Architecture students on some scoping of Woden town centre for possible locations, and there were some really interesting things there. One student put forward the rejuvenation of Yarralumla Creek through putting the venue as a kind of connection to nature venue, which is really important for the wellbeing of young people and really inspiring for performing artists to have a connection to green space. A lot of the students chose the old community centre as a potential site for a theatre and rehearsal spaces, because it would then connect that corridor from the CIT through Woden town centre to past the library to a performing arts venue, which then opens up links and partners with CIT and various things.

Most of the spaces you can use are multi-use, which is not necessarily suitable for circus arts. We would be hoping to have a dedicated training facility but co-located with community services, because we do work really well in that setting, being able to refer young people to community services and allied health as well as other arts organisations. We believe we could facilitate that quite well and bring it to the Woden town centre as a really valuable offering.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Grant?

**Mr Keys:** I would go back to the ACT election in 2020 and the 10th parliamentary agreement between the Greens and Labor, which included a commitment to build an indoor sports facility in Woden. We were very excited about that and we went out and did an audit of our basketball facilities in 2021. Included in that audit was a recommendation to establish a working group to advance planning for a multi-use indoor sports stadium in Woden. We envisaged that that would have a couple of different sporting clubs, government representatives and community groups involved in it to actually start looking at what would be the optimal place, the optimal working and management model and how to ensure that we have agreement upfront and we are not battling for space—as we are at the moment, trying to get every scrap of a school venue that is out there at the moment—and to work together in a more organised and ordered way. We certainly have not seen any movement towards that goal yet.

**THE CHAIR:** What was the last you heard from the planning minister or the sports minister?

**Mr Keys:** We met with the sports minister last year. She is very supportive and welcoming. We have put in various submissions. We did get some action on some upgrades to one of our facilities, the Hedley Beare Centre for Teaching and Learning, where we have a lot of our trainings—one of seven different venues which we use. We are sort of scattered from Forrest down to Tuggeranong. We do not really have a home court. We certainly do not have a place where we can host games. That action was good but the planning was done with limited consultation and, therefore, we have had noncompliant backboards and scoring equipment installed so we cannot host games. So it was probably a little bit of a waste of money, really. What we are calling for—and we are seeing this come forward with the new development and the two courts that are being built at the Garran Primary School—is to be involved and for Basketball ACT to be involved in the planning to make sure that the money that is spent is put to good use in making sure it is all compliant infrastructure and we can use it as best we can to get good outcomes.

**MR CAIN:** Forgive me if I do not have this correct. So we have got volleyball, Warehouse Circus and basketball wanting to cooperate on an indoor sports centre. Is that the understanding?

**Ms Neumann:** I believe the warehouse said it would need to be a separate thing. But I think basketball and volleyball could certainly work together. Volleyball is unique in that, with pace that it has grown in the ACT in the last four or six years, it is not seen as a tier one sport or a tier two even, I do not think. So it is very overlooked and not considered when it comes to this sort of thing.

**MR CAIN:** But it could share space with basketball?

**Mr Keys:** Yes, and I think netball might be another sport.

**Ms Neumann:** Yes, and badminton and table tennis—all of those.

**MS CARRICK:** Netball.

**Mr Miller:** Badminton.

**Mr Keys:** Futsal. There is a whole range of different indoor sports out there that are desperately in need of space.

**Ms Neumann:** Might need more than one.

**Ms Raisin:** It might need to be a really big venue, I think.

**Ms Neumann:** With a pool.

**Ms Raisin:** Having been with the Dodgers for some time, they do need something. It is horrendous driving your kids around everywhere.

**MR CAIN:** So why Woden? Is that because the government has sort of promised there would be something?

**THE CHAIR:** Peter, we might move on to Fiona's question, but we will get back to you. I am sorry, but we are running out of time.

**MS CARRICK:** We have just spoken to the Woden Community Centre and ACTCOSS. Loneliness is a big thing that in our community and with all these isolated towers and without the amenity to bring them together. Aleshia, with Warehouse Circus, if you were lucky enough to get a venue that covered the needs of your circus, could we co-locate and share with other performing artists?

**Ms Johnson:** Absolutely, yes. A circus training space has a lot of dedicated equipment. So, if it is one room, then it is very hard for us to co-locate. We have that situation at the UC High School, Kaleen, where we set up and pack up every day, which is very labour intensive—there are big mats—and causes all sorts of issues. If we had a venue that was slightly larger with a few studio rooms, we could certainly co-locate with other performing arts. If it were a venue that had multiple smaller rooms, we could co-locate very easily with allied health services and things like that. We are very interested in partnering and working with other art forms, because cross-disciplinary approaches to performing arts are the next step for the development of the art form for circus and for many others. So I think we could facilitate that very well.

Also important is our ability to connect those liminal spaces to spaces that mean something to people—places that they go to, because that is their home away from home. Our lot of our students regularly say that this is the place they come to where they feel belonging. We see huge value in it being a connector to things like youth centres and services through the liminal spaces where young people are hanging out with their families. So, yes, absolutely, other performing arts would co-locate very well.

**MS CARRICK:** The new public space, the West Plaza, has the row running through it. If it were lucky enough to be on that space—because Scentre Group does have a community space there identified—could you have alfresco dining and spill out onto that public space and sort of be a first mover to attract other businesses to come in?

**Ms Johnson:** Yes; absolutely. Most theatres work in that way—to touch on Peter’s question of “Why Woden?”: proximity to dining strips, proximity to nightlife and potential nightlife that just needs a reason to exist. We are not just talking about a dedicated theatre for Warehouse Circus; we are talking about a theatre for the community, so it could then be used. From our centre in Chifley, a lot of other organisations are looking for spaces of that kind for health conferences or other events. We also have national connections to circus artists and touring professionals who would love to be able to bring work.

We also run a festival, which was a proof of concept for enlivening Woden town centre. We pitched big tops on the Chifley Oval, because it is near our site. That has proven that, if you have that strong community, people will come. Yes, absolutely, connecting to bars, restaurants, cafes, playgrounds for kids and playgroup kinds of activities fit really well alongside what we do.

**MS CARRICK:** Grant and Colette, similarly, if you were to have an indoor sports stadium that was on the ground floor around that central core area—because they tend to have a cafe as well in them; well, Belconnen does and Tuggeranong does—what could you do for the Scentre Group to bring people into the Woden town centre and the shops so that there is the day and night economy and the Scentre Group would be really happy to invest? You talked about multicultural events.

**Mr Keys:** Basketball is played by thousands and thousands of people in the region. It is a very short game; so there are always a lot of people coming and going. I think tournaments would provide a huge opportunity. Basketball ACT plays in a range of different regional and state tournaments. We could even start bidding for national tournaments, which we are being overlooked for, I think, a lot of the times—or they might go to the AIS or something. That would certainly allow us to bring a lot of interstate people from around the regions for our regular southern junior leagues, New South Wales leagues and things like that. The potential limitless. Having a big open space, if well planned, there would be no reason you could not use it for convention facilities or entertainment facilities.

**MS CARRICK:** Bands.

**Mr Keys:** Bands and all those sorts of things, yes—Wiggles or whatever it is.

**MS CARRICK:** If you have to appeal to Scentre Group, can you make a pitch to Scentre Group to—

**Ms Neumann:** I cannot speak for our peak body, Volleyball ACT, but I did get an indication of the number of people that they have playing volleyball at the moment, and it is close to 2,000 people. That is just your regular day-to-day local tournament. They also run a weekend tournament called Good Neighbour. I do not know if anyone has ever tried to book any facility in Canberra during Good Neighbour, but you cannot. People come from all over Australia. It is massive and it is great fun. If we could expand that by having a facility that can be the centre of that, it would be great. Currently we are in a run-down hall that leaks when it rains too heavily and we have to cancel games. When you talk about appropriate scoreboards, we have not had a working scoreboard in our venue for two years. We flip things manually because we cannot get the working

ones.

The Brisbane Olympics is coming up, I have been coaching personally a bunch of girls who have their eye on it. We do not make the Olympics in volleyball, but we get an entry at Brisbane. So they are all mad keen. They are going to be about 19 years old. They are ready. This sport is not going to die between now and then. We gave up the rights to a few games of the national competition to other states in the year just gone. That is the South Eastern Volleyball League and also the National Volleyball League, the AVSL. All of our athletes travelled to Perth, to Queensland and to all sorts of places to play, and we had one home game for our team—and that was it—because there was no real facility or possibility to bring them here.

So the need is there. Other states are doing it. We need to start thinking big like them, and we will bring people in. They will come. These tournaments will require people to shop for food, people to stay in accommodation and all of that sort of thing. At the moment, the home location where our peak body operates out of, which is the indoor hockey centre in Lyneham, always has and now more than ever feels like transient accommodation. We are just waiting for the roof to cave in.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay.

**MS TOUGH:** Where are the Royals currently based?

**Ms Neumann:** We currently train at Mount Stromlo High School gymnasium. Other clubs do not like us very much, because we have upped our training hours because our club has grown so much. We are now 14 hours a week spread over three days. In summertime, just because kids wanted to keep playing in the off season, we are now hiring it for another four and a half hours a week. That gives every one of our members, be they ex-Olympians, current Australian representatives, down to very, very beginners—one hour of training a week and they get one hour of game time—and that is it.

**MS TOUGH:** Are all the games in Lyneham?

**Ms Neumann:** All of the games are either in Lyneham, Harrison or Shirley Smith—and they just keep going up.

**Mr Miller:** That is the league games, isn't it?

**Ms Neumann:** Yes. That is open league. That is during the week as well. Because there are so many and so few venues, Volleyball ACT have now had to start the draw from 4.30 in the afternoon for the girls games until 9.30 at night. That is a one-hour game; so that is a timed game. They finish at 10.30 and go home. So parents will then sort of pull the pin and then the team cannot do it; the team forfeits; they do not get results; they lose interest; and they stop playing sport.

**MS TOUGH:** How many teams are there? I am sorry if you covered this today. How many teams are there across the ACT in volleyball now?

**Ms Neumann:** Across the ACT there are six clubs. Team-wise, I believe there were

roughly just over 60 teams in the last competition, of which 20 to 40 were Royals.

**MS TOUGH:** And Royals are Woden-based—like Weston Creek based?

**Ms Neumann:** Yes; Weston Creek.

**MS TOUGH:** Are there any other southside clubs at this time?

**Ms Neumann:** No. There is one that train in a facility in Campbell. Our membership are more the Tuggeranong and Kambah area. Coombs, Denman Prospect and Wright are all starting to flood in as well. Our hope is that we do not have to get to the point where we turn people away. We have had clubs do that. They have capped their numbers or they have said, “We are not taking anyone under the age of 15.” I have sat down with young women who have walked in with their hair over their face and talked to them for 25 minutes in the foyer and then they have gone home. The next week they have come and I have talked to them for another 15 minutes and they have slowly entered the gym. Then, two weeks later, they are running in to meet with their friends and hang out. It is definitely necessary and demand is huge. Seven of 10 teams in one of the lowest divisions last season were young girls from the Royals.

**MS TOUGH:** It sounds like a great growing sport.

**Ms Neumann:** Yes.

**MS TOUGH:** I want to quickly touch on basketball. How many clubs are there on the south side currently?

**Mr Keys:** I am not sure how many. There are probably five or six. There are also the schools—Marist, Grammar and Girls Grammar. There is the Tuggeranong Vikings. We are the biggest club on the south side. There are the Woden Dodgers, Tuggeranong Vikings, Spartans and Warriors. There are probably about four or five plus the schools.

**MS TOUGH:** And they are all looking for training and comp places?

**Mr Keys:** Absolutely. Most of the clubs train and play out at Tuggeranong Stadium. So there are no available courts there and we do not use that. We are just using whatever space is available, like school halls. We have six school halls and one church hall, Wesley Church, that we have separate agreements with. Our venues manager is the hardest-working volunteer in the ACT, managing seven different contracts, keys, alarms and venue managers. Just trying to fit everyone into our grid, which was in our submission, is certainly a pretty labour-intensive effort. Every season we have to do that.

**MS TOUGH:** Are players able to go to the same venue each week or, because of games, are they having to keep track of different venues?

**Mr Keys:** All the competition games are held either in Tuggeranong or Belconnen. But, for training, it just depends on where we put you. You might be training at Tuggeranong Secondary College, you might be training at Wesley Church at Forrest or you might be training at Hedley Beare out at Weston Creek. It is just wherever we put you where we

can find time.

**MS TOUGH:** So families could have kids in multiple locations?

**Mr Keys:** Absolutely. Quite often, we have parents that are driving from Weston Creek up to Forrest or something to drop kids off and so forth. Not being on public transport lines certainly does not help a lot of those courts.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you.

**MR CAIN:** We are having a session tomorrow afternoon with the City and Environment Directorate and the Suburban Land Agency. I just wonder how much hope you have for what you would like to see happen at Woden when we see clear government plans and arrangements already made. What could we ask the ministers for on your behalf—apart from “please”?

**Mr Miller:** There was talk about more master plans. In a previous role, we went through a lot of the master planning stages. There have been several studies done. In my other submission, I listed all the studies that have been done and a lot of sports studies as well. The government is obviously—with its City Renewal Authority—looking after the city. It has the money for its aquatic centre and the feasibility study for the theatre and all that sort of thing. But I think there needs to be something that is done with the federal government and the ACT government that looks after the town centres—something like a town centre city deal. It could be, say, \$100 million, where the ACT government and the federal government put in half each. There was a similar situation with the Western Sydney City Deal that was done probably about eight years ago. What came out of that was a lot of community facilities for Western Sydney and upgrades to parklands and all the rest of it. So I would be keen to see something like that.

We have not really mentioned the pool except for in our submission. It is really five minutes to midnight with the Phillip pool site. I keep checking my phone daily and refreshing the page—because the development application is still under assessment. I have written to the Chief Planner and to the Chief Minister, and they have not come back to us on what is going to happen. If we cannot have that site, there are probably only three or four available sites. One of them is the site near Callam Offices, the car parks there. That could be a multi aquatic, gym and indoor facility there. There is a part of Eddison Park near the athletics track that could be used.

Then there is obviously the old Woden Valley High CIT site, which I think is a poor location for a school because of the way they closed the other school and the CIT was there. The CIT complained that it was not part of the town centre and it was hard to get to. But, if the government is wedded to this idea that we need facilities within a school, why not build a gym, a large multi-purpose facility, before they build the school? The school can come later, obviously. We need these facilities right now; so why can't we have something like that now?

**Ms Johnson:** Some of the co-location with schools or the facilities sitting within schools we have found prohibitive in terms of cost to hire school venues, and the schools always say that comes down to the rates that the Education Directorate set. I feel like there is a need to review the way in which school fees are set on venues for

community use, because it is not appreciating the social return on investment of community facilities. So that would be a big help, for starters.

Secondly, the arts minister is doing creative spaces mapping at the moment across the ACT to identify the need for new creative spaces. We are excited to see that work go forward, but I think we need to connect the dots between that and the woeful lack of investment in Woden town centre for creative activities. Warehouse is the only arts organisation that is funded in the Woden-Weston Creek area. As a town centre, it is the poor cousin of every other area in terms of performing arts. So I think it is more about equity within the ACT.

A lot of money is going towards the city. A lot of money is going towards cultural development in the city. Warehouse Circus has always been the advocate for disadvantaged young people and access. To your question about “Why Woden?”, we find it promotes access for kids who are not going to find themselves at Gorman Arts Centre or on that side of the city. It is just not their area. The way you create a venue is how you create accessible inclusion for kids who do not feel at home in swanky art centres, but they want to feel at home somewhere.

I think servicing Woden town centre in the same way other town centres have been serviced, but with a focus on emerging young artists and training the next generation of artists, should be seen as a government priority, because it is a social return on investment that really, really needs to be recognised. I had one more point, but I forget what it was.

**Ms Neumann:** I would like to add to that. You were talking about the hire. The venue hire has gone up in the last six years. We started at around \$70 per hour plus GST to hire a school hall. It has now gone up to well over \$80. So, that can be prohibitive. We are lucky in that we have got some very generous local businesses who help our club. But it can be very hard for organisations to even hire the school halls. And in my last hunt for a school hall for a local venue, it was completely booked out six weeks before it was finished being built. That is the kind of need we are talking about.

I think, also, I would probably ask that when you speak to the directorates, you do not have to start from scratch. You can look around at the potential rezoning and see that there are sites that already have the car park, or already have this or already have that.

Make rezoning them a bit easier to understand and more accessible to the services that need it. If it is an outdoor space—if it is a green space—I can understand. We do not want necessarily to work against the environment directorate; we want to keep the green spaces. We are not trying to stop that. We just happen to play a sport that requires indoor.

**Mr Miller:** We lost our sports and recreation zoning in Woden, anyway. That all went to a commercial development. So that was probably about 50,000 square metres of private sports facilities that was lost to high-rise development.

**Ms Neumann:** We were losing our indoor facilities to private, as well, for a while there.

**Ms Bryant:** On the Phillip pool, as much as anything—and on five minutes to midnight, Environment—10-12-25

which is really worrying—we have hoped that there is some opportunity to pause development until the aquatic strategy is properly processed and has been factored in. And there was an aquatic strategy that the government had drafted by suitors. So, this is not new information. We just want some of these things to be held back before it just races to the end.

We do believe that the ice-skating rink might help keep the pool open for that little bit longer, until that situation is resolved. There is also the Auditor-General's report to look into the whole process that has occurred around the change of the Crown lease variation. So, there is a whole number of questions that I think have yet to be answered, and it would be premature for the development to go ahead, even if they get the stamp.

**MR CAIN:** What is the last message you have got from the government on this?

**Ms Bryant:** It is not our responsibility. That is the last message of government.

**Ms Raisin:** Yes. It is a government responsibility to provide these facilities—all of these facilities, because I have had basketball experience as well, and it is problematic.

**MR CAIN:** So it is, but it is not.

**Ms Raisin:** It is, but it is not. Well, every local council does it, okay? They provide the facilities, they maintain the facilities, they run the facilities, because they understand the value to the community. Royal Life Saving say \$30.50 per pool visit is created in terms of economic value, and that is to the health system and to social cohesion and community. And drownings are increasing; less and less kids have the ability they need to swim. So only 40 per cent of those kids in Year 7 to 10 do not have Year 6 skills to save themselves. So, we need access to facilities.

**MR CAIN:** So, you have much more chance of persuading us than the government, by the sound of it.

**Ms Raisin:** Yes.

**Ms Johnson:** I remember my point, if you do not mind. In our submission we make the national comparison on investment from government into facilities, particularly for circus arts. There is a dedicated purpose-built circus venue in every major city in Australia except Canberra.

**MR CAIN:** You have got that in your attachment.

**Ms Johnson:** Yes, so I guess that is where we see government roles in public-private partnerships; to ensure that community zoning is increased or maintained, or that sites are identified for this. Because, at the moment, it does feel a lot like residents of Woden are expected to live there but jump public transport to somewhere else to get their arts, culture, sport, recreation. It is at odds with the with the strategy of wellbeing and access where you live.

**Ms Bryant:** The other concern we have is the lack of initiative by the ACT government to even explore the funding that has been available federally. We hear there is quite a

lot of money that was available—certainly in the previous financial year—for aquatic facilities, as well.

**Mr Miller:** There is the Thriving Suburbs program; \$350 million dollars and the ACT did not even put one submission in.

**Ms Bryant:** So, we are very concerned about that neglect.

**THE CHAIR:** We did pass in September—I put up a motion requiring government to bid for federal funding for every piece of infrastructure over \$5 million. And they have to report on those bids, so—

**Mr Miller:** I mean, we get plenty of money for roads and some of the rail infrastructure, and there is a little bit for active travel, but when it comes to community facilities we are lacking.

**THE CHAIR:** One cycle path. So, I think there are shared concerns that maybe government has not been asking for the funding that they could have had.

**Ms Raisin:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** With the Phillip pool, our pools are in a bit of strife, aren't they? We have got a bit of a market failure, at the moment, where we have got some pools that were built by federal government; some pools had a lot of generous funding from ACT government.; there is a new one that is going to be entirely government funded; and meanwhile some of them, like Phillip, are just sort of, "the market will sort it out."

**Ms Raisin:** And Big Splash.

**THE CHAIR:** Big Slash will sort it out! The market will sort it out. Do you think the aquatic strategy that you are calling for would change that?

**Ms Bryant:** Most likely, but I think it would be premature to answer that. It will involve community consultation. What we do know is that the current Phillip pool is the only south side pool offering 50 metres outdoors. It is a woefully limited capacity, or limited facility, compared to what we look at on our northern neighbours.

**Ms Neumann:** In Dickson.

**Ms Bryant:** It just does not match.

**THE CHAIR:** We have had a lot of negative communication from government about the future of outdoor pools. But then we also see some like Dickson do quite well.

**Ms Bryant:** Absolutely.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have a view on outdoor pools?

**Mr Miller:** I was just going to say, the NCDC built four pools around that lake. I think Dickson was the earliest one. So that is older than Phillip, even though they say Phillip Environment—10-12-25

is run down. They were all put on short-term leases, and the government resumed the Dickson facility so that stayed in government hands. But you can see what happened to the rest of those pools. One closed completely. That was Oasis, the Deakin facility. And then Big Splash: Big Splash has struggled over the years about financing, I have found. Then you have had the Phillip Pool, which had the cross-subsidisation, which is the idea of the government where you have gyms and dry areas, childcare, that sort of thing. I mean, that is fine. So, the ice rink subsidised the pool, but the previous owner never put any money back into the pool, to attract people.

I mean, it used to have a slide there, but they took it away because it was not compliant. But they never put anything back for kids. Plus, it does not meet the accreditation now, for the five-star accreditation. So public schools cannot use Phillip at all. So, they all have to go somewhere else within the city.

**Ms Bryant:** It comes to development by dereliction: you let the facility run down, therefore you prove that it is not needed. I think that is a totally unreasonable position.

We do know that, internationally, there is an increase in outdoor pools, even in London, Dublin, Copenhagen, Prague, Iceland—and Sydney.

**THE CHAIR:** Quite cold places that you are naming there.

**Ms Raisin:** Yes, exactly. Quite cold places all year round.

**Ms Bryant:** They are freezing cold places, where an outdoor pool is still valid and there is increasing demand, and we think there would also continue to be here in Canberra.

**THE CHAIR:** I am concerned that you have said you have written to the planning minister, and you are waiting back. What is the timeframe when you last asked, “Hey, what is actually happening with this decision?”

**Mr Miller:** Yes, I have written to the Chief Minister and the planning minister. I have laid out bare the issues with the decision on that, since what has been happening. It has been well over 12 months since the development application has gone in. They have had two pauses of that.

A development application does not get refused anymore. It seems to be just put on pause for further information or until they rectify it, and that can lead up to 18 months. So, I am not sure. From the first pause that is 18 months; from the second pause that is another 18 months on top of that. Plus, in the previous planning you would have a pre-DA consultation. None of that happened with this development application.

**THE CHAIR:** No, they got taken out with the new system.

**Mr Miller:** You have seen what is happening with Big Splash now. Mark Parton asked a question that said that the planning authority had been approached by a consultant, which led to them making a statement saying there is going to be better community consultation on that site, on Big Splash. None of that happened.

There were meetings with the planning consultants, with the Chief Minister before the Environment—10-12-25

ACT election, and the planning minister before the ACT election, and I have seen a timeline that said that the development application should have gone in in August 2024. But that was delayed until after the ACT elections, so—

**THE CHAIR:** Martin, the most useful thing, when we get a government official, is to say, you were written to on this date and they still waiting on a response. Do you know the last time you wrote to the Chief Minister, and you have not got a response yet, on this?

**Mr Miller:** I have written to the chief planner as well.

**THE CHAIR:** If you are still waiting on a response of this quite reasonable question on the status, when was that?

**Mr Miller:** Within a couple of weeks for the Chief Minister and planning minister. Before that, probably a month in October, and November.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. That is spot on. That will do me. And I can probably predict pretty confidently what sorts of answers we will get from directorates, if we ask about Phillip pool. We will be told it is an independent planning system and there is a DA in the system, and “we cannot tell you anything about it.” I suspect that is how that will go.

**Mr Miller:** Just quickly: in my letter to the Chief Minister, I said that because the planning authority made a decision to change the site and remove the 50-metre pool, that it is difficult—from my perspective—that they can make an independent decision on that site. A decision has been made that helped the developer. Like, they bought it the next day—the next day after the draft planning thing came out, they bought it the next day.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you see any planning pathway, within the current rules, that things might change?

**Mr Miller:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** So, the only useful planning pathway, where things might change, would be if there’s another place for a pool?

**Mr Miller:** Or, as we have said, the government negotiates a surrender of that lease. And they should do that with Big Splash as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**MR CAIN:** Well, they should on Big Splash, yes. But I think the Phillip one has gone way too far now.

**MS CARRICK:** Well, it has not been built.

**Ms Bryant:** It has not been built, yet.

**Ms Greene:** Just before the election, I asked Chris Steel why they changed the plan. He

said it was because they did a survey, and that is what people wanted. So, then I asked him on air, “Where is the survey?” And he said, “Oh, it is in the Assembly notes”. But there was no survey, that I am aware of.

**THE CHAIR:** It is probably filed with the Phillip pool needs analysis.

**Ms Greene:** Yes, of course, that is where it is. So, I think that is a very valid point. We have been lied to, basically.

**Ms Raisin:** It is hard to have confidence in government when these things are blatantly untrue.

**Ms Greene:** Woefully inadequate for all of these sports that we have, here at the table—woefully inadequate facilities.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. Are there any more questions for the panel?

**MR CAIN:** I am just trying not to go political here so, no.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, likewise, Peter. We are all restraining ourselves.

**Ms Bryant:** Do you have any power to help us with these requests?

**THE CHAIR:** In this planning committee, our only power, really, is information—particularly on a self-referred inquiry. This inquiry is not a statutory process. It does not stop any rezoning or DA decisions. It has zero impact on the actual planning system that is rolling out.

So, what we can do is: we can review information, and we can make recommendations to government. If we make recommendations to government that are not legally possible in the planning system, that probably will not lead to anything. That is partly why we are probably asking you questions that sound very unsatisfying. We are trying to—from this point in time, which is not a satisfying point in time—think, “what could we usefully say?” We actually do not have any statutory power on this one, I am afraid.

**Ms Bryant:** But we are still waiting for a response from the Auditor-General, I think, to a letter written in August.

**Mr Miller:** I was told in about March or April next year.

**Ms Greene:** Could you help us pause the development? I mean, you cannot tell the planning authority to approve it, or not approve it—or tell government to do that. But is it possible to request that it be paused?

**MR CAIN:** We do not have the power to pause.

**MS CARRICK:** But the problem is if they build the site out, then the options for the ice facility and the pool to ever stay there and co-exist is built out. We lose the opportunity.

**Ms Greene:** Yes.

**MS CARRICK:** So, until they find the solution to what the ice rink is going to be, they should not build out the Phillip pool site.

**Ms Greene:** They should not build anything. That would be a very good point of appeal.

**Ms Raisin:** And the site could be used for either. If one goes, then the other one can make use of the whole site. So, it could be all pool or it could be all ice rink, potentially—finding other sites for the alternate one. But the risk is higher if we lose the ice rink all together.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Raisin:** Because, in 2015-16 we were promised the ice rink, and it is not happening.

And it is very busy. I swim in the mornings, and it is very busy all of the time.

And the infrastructure there is struggling. Yesterday, the manager was checking the pool water, because it had gone cloudy the day before. He said, “Then I lost the ice rink. I had to close the ice rink down.” So, it is struggling because he has not got money for maintenance. The pool cleaner is 100 years old, that kind of thing. Everything is struggling there.

**MR CAIN:** One thing the committee can do in its report is to express criticism of the government and its processes.

**Mr Miller:** Yes.

**Ms Raisin:** Please.

**MR CAIN:** Now, whether that matters or not to the government is really up to them. But we have issued—well, very recently, reports on MyWay transport system were probably a big factor in the transport minister being censored by the Assembly.

**THE CHAIR:** Have you got any more questions, or any final words?

**MR CAIN:** I do have an idea that there could be a circus training and theatre in Belconnen somewhere, maybe. That’s my electorate, by the way. If Woden does not work out.

**Ms Johnson:** We are not married to staying in Woden. The right facility is what we are looking for.

**MR CAIN:** You need to talk to me then.

**Ms Johnson:** Yes, we are open to ideas!

**Ms Greene:** I thought you were not being political.

**MR CAIN:** Local member; that was just my local member voice.

**Ms Johnson:** We do not want to be co-located in the city.

**Mr Miller:** Maybe circus and gymnastics can work together.

**Ms Johnson:** They do go together, absolutely.

**Mr Miller:** We have Woden Valley Gymnastics that needs a new facility.

**Ms Neumann:** My last words would probably be just that I came into volleyball not knowing anything about the sport at all; my partner liked playing, so I said, “Let’s start a club” and so we did. And I say this to him all the time, and I say this to Volleyball ACT—we started doing training on Saturday morning because that is the only time we can get the gym, and someone said to me, “No, we cannot. We are going to lose kids to soccer and to footy, because they have got Saturday morning. We would have to do something else”.

Until we start to think like the people we want to be, living in the place we want to live in, playing the sports and facilitating the community the way we want to, we are not going to.

So we went ahead and booked our Saturday mornings, and guess what? We had to book from nine o’clock in the morning until one o’clock in the afternoon because all the kids said, “I do not want to play soccer, I will play volleyball!”

So, just take a punt. Start acting like it.

**Mr Keys:** Built it, they will come.

**Mr Miller:** Being a division-two volleyball player, I can attest that—this is about 25 years ago—our games were played at 10 and 11 o’clock at night. That was at the hockey centre. That is about 25 years ago.

**Ms Neumann:** I cannot believe it is still standing somehow.

**MS CARRICK:** So we have been beating our head against the wall for 20 years.

**Mr Miller:** That just shows you.

**Ms Neumann:** I do not think it has been touched since then, either. But it is a hockey owned venue. So, we cannot make them do anything that they are not doing, either. So, it would be great to have a new home.

**Ms Bryant:** It would be good to see some accountability. As you look at the development at Woden, it seems to be ad-hoc and driven by developer opportunism, and some relationship with government, clearly, to collude with that.

Residents of Woden, I think, have watched with horror to see more blocks go up, and that are inadequate to family needs, as well. They are just one-bedroom, two-bedroom, Environment—10-12-25

empty units. And that is robbing us of all the facilities that we need, the vital land and facilities. Once they are gone, they are gone.

**Mr Miller:** And we should not be begging for facilities, so that a high-rise developer or a shopping centre can have 55, 44 storeys, 17 towers in their development.

**Ms Neumann:** When there are also outdoor venues that are being neglected, not being used, and not zoned to be able to put a building on them.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. Agreed with all of that. Some of us have been calling for a sports facilities plan. But anyway.

**Ms Neumann:** Yes, and there are outdoor facilities that are now just derelict.

**Ms Greene:** That is why we want to build new ones.

**Ms Bryant:** Yes, there does not seem to be much long-term planning, or foresight at all.

**THE CHAIR:** No, there is not.

Thank you for your time today. Thank you for your suggestions, and the little bidding fund. That is a nice one.

**MR CAIN:** Yes, and your passion.

**THE CHAIR:** I do not think we took any questions on notice, but if there is anything that you wanted to table, or anything further that you wanted to put in, get in touch with our secretary, superfast. Thank you for coming in.

**The committee adjourned at 5.10 pm**