



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

**(Reference: Inquiry into draft variation to the territory plan DV259—
Woden town centre)**

Members:

**MR M GENTLEMAN (The Chair)
MR Z SESELJA (The Deputy Chair)
MS M PORTER**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 13 JUNE 2006

**Secretary to the committee:
Dr H Jaireth (Ph: 6205 0137)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry which have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

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The committee met at 10.30 am.

CORBELL, MR SIMON, Minister for Planning

EKELUND, MS DORTE, Deputy Chief Planning Executive, ACT Planning and Land Authority

PONTON, MR BEN, Manager, Development Assessment and Territory Plan Variations Statutory Planning and Development Services Branch, Development Assessment, ACT Planning and Land Authority

BAXTER, MR ROD, Senior Project Officer, Urban Design and Projects Section Strategic Planning and Land Services Branch, ACT Planning and Land Authority

RIDSDALE, MS JANINE, Project Officer, Statutory Planning and Development Branch, ACT Planning and Land Authority

THE CHAIR: I open the hearing into the proposed draft variation to the territory plan No 259, Woden town centre. I welcome the minister, officials and committee members.

You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation, for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

This morning we are hearing from the Minister for Planning and officials from ACTPLA. If any questions are taken on notice, the committee would appreciate responses within five working days of the hearings. It is the responsibility of witnesses to ensure they meet any commitments they make made regarding the provision of information or answers to questions on notice. The secretary will email a transcript to all witnesses as soon as it is available. Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Corbell: I thank the committee for the opportunity to appear this morning. I wasn't intending to make an opening statement, but I—and officers of ACTPLA—am happy to answer your questions.

THE CHAIR: Regarding the draft variation and preliminary assessments, would you be able to explain why there is a reference to removing preliminary assessments for buildings over 7,000 square metres and/or 28 metres high?

Mr Corbell: I am happy to do that. The decision to remove the mandatory requirement for a preliminary assessment for the town centre, and indeed for all town centres, is consistent with the government's policy of streamlining the planning system in the city. It follows on from measures that were identified as needing to be taken in the government's planning system reform project.

The government decided to take the opportunity, with the release of this variation, to include a provision to remove the requirement for preliminary assessments in the town centres in this variation. Essentially the reason for that is that many of the preliminary assessments that were being undertaken in town centres, and indeed in Civic, related to buildings which could only ever be built in Civic anyway.

For example, significant commercial office buildings that may have a floor space of, say, 10,000, 15,000, 20,000 or 30,000 square metres could only ever be built in a town centre or in Civic. The government and many stakeholders were really questioning the need for a preliminary assessment in those circumstances. The purpose of the preliminary assessment is to assess the impact of the proposed development.

It was almost a contradictory position to say that buildings of that size can only be built in the town centres or in Civic, but you still have to assess their impact. So it was really a level of assessment that in many respects was not warranted, particularly when the sorts of issues that preliminary assessments were dealing with tended to be issues that would again be dealt with in the development application phase—for example, impacts on parking, issues to do with the provision of car parking, issues to do with overshadowing and issues to do with effects on wind circulation, which are particularly relevant at Woden.

Those sorts of issues would be dealt with anyway as part of a development application process. In many respects the preliminary assessment process was duplicating the level of detail that would be occurring anyway in the development application assessment process, so the government decided that this was a level of duplication and a level of assessment that really wasn't required for buildings of this scale.

Given that the government had already changed the territory plan to remove requirements for preliminary assessments in Civic, we thought it was important to maintain a level playing field for the other key commercial centres in the city—those being the town centres.

So this variation removes the preliminary assessments for the town centres. I think this is an important reform. It enables development assessment to happen in a more timely manner in the town centres and in Civic, and removes a level of duplication and detail which currently exists to no real benefit.

THE CHAIR: Would you explain if there are any implications of the recent budget on the Woden town centre redevelopment?

Mr Corbell: There is an initiative in the current budget, or in the recently announced budget, that flows on from the work that has been identified in the Woden town centre master plan and subsequently in this variation. That is to do with the opening up of the Woden east residential area, to the east of Callam Street. The Woden east residential development is to be serviced by a new access road—the extension of Wilbow Street from Callam Street through to Woden east.

That extension includes the development of a roundabout on the western side of Yarralumla Creek on the Wilbow Street alignment. That will also provide the physical infrastructure to facilitate a new turnaround point for public transport services, which in turn will allow the government to progress the redevelopment of the Woden bus interchange.

As committee members are probably aware, the government is exploring a range of options for the redevelopment of the Woden bus interchange. Those issues are outlined

in the Woden town centre master plan and reflected to the extent necessary in the territory plan variation.

The redevelopment of the Woden bus interchange will depend on negotiations with the owners of Woden Plaza. Those negotiations are ongoing in a similar way to those which are happening right now in relation to the Belconnen Mall expansion and potential relocation of the Belconnen bus interchange.

The Belconnen work is extremely well advanced and we should see an announcement on that shortly. The work on Woden is the next cab off the rank. There have been some preliminary discussions with the owners of Woden Plaza around the reconfiguration of the interchange and its integration into the retail facilities at Woden.

The budget provision for the extension of Wilbow Street facilitates the opening up of the Woden east residential estate, which will be released to the market for development later this financial year by the LDA. It also facilitates the turning circle infrastructure, or the turnaround point, needed for the proposed redevelopment of the Woden bus interchange.

MR SESELJA: In the variation it talks about shops being limited to a scale appropriate to providing convenient shopping and personal services for the local work force and residents. Are you able to expand on that a little bit, as to how that is going to be measured and what the criteria will be? It seems a touch vague to be talking about it in those terms.

Mr Baxter: Precinct B is the general business district within precincts A, B, C and D of the town centre. We concentrate the core retail activity in precinct A. Precinct B then allows for, if you like, the secondary retail activities. Primarily, that refers to the supporting services and smaller shops. The supermarkets would be retained in precinct A.

Could I just consult with Ben and Janine on the interpretation of that clause? The current restriction on shops refers to a maximum of 200 square metres for a supermarket. Is there anything else that would help us in determining a definition for convenient shopping and personal services? Otherwise, the words are there and I think it is an interpretation that would be applied to a development application at the time—convenience shopping and personal services for the local work force and residents.

Mr Ponton: Certainly at the development application stage—we accept that those sorts of words are a little bit vague—we would refer back to the objectives of the zone to help us determine what is an appropriate scale and also look at what is existing in the area. But certainly we could look at an opportunity to perhaps tighten it up a little, yes.

Mr Corbell: This clause is prevalent through a number of parts of the territory plan for this type of land use. The principles are well established in terms of how retail facilities are located in our town centres, and in our group centres, for that matter, as well. There is a recognition that there is a level of activity which is appropriate for the retail core which is clearly larger than that which occurs at the next land use policy down, or the next precinct down, which is precinct B. There is well-established precedent, but if there is a need to clarify that language, it is certainly something the government and the authority, I am sure, could consider.

MR SESELJA: I am just trying to get a handle on Phillip Oval. Obviously this proposal leaves Phillip Oval as it is, and it has a bit of a buffer around it. Is this a first step towards eventually seeing redevelopment around Phillip Oval, or would you see this as enshrining Phillip Oval as it is in its current use and not part of, I guess, a continuous process? I guess what I am getting at is that, once you start having more residential development in that area, it may become more likely, I suppose, that there would be a push for redevelopment closer and closer to Phillip Oval. Would you see this as the limit of where things will go in terms of Phillip Oval, or is it likely that we will see further changes that would see Phillip Oval potentially redeveloped?

Mr Corbell: The variation makes it absolutely clear that the oval itself needs to be maintained as public land as a sporting facility. We are putting in place a protection. If you look at page 9 of the variation, at figure 2.1, you can see that the overlay that is put in place by this variation is for public land. Public land, under the territory plan, has a specific level of protection which is not afforded other types of land. It is there to protect the provision of that land for public use.

This reflects the government's position that in the medium to long term this site is a valuable site for the community. We do not have many enclosed ovals in our community. As our community continues to grow, the provision of an enclosed oval, for whatever sport, is going to be important. That, combined with the fact that Woden is very central, means that Phillip Oval in particular is a real strategic recreational asset for the territory that should be maintained. That's what the territory plan change reflects.

In terms of development around the site, clearly both the master plan and this territory plan variation identify the opportunities for some development around the site, including the land immediately adjacent to the oval. Those opportunities have been identified to both support the viability of the oval into the future, whereby you could have some uses—for example, serviced apartments and some commercial uses—that would not conflict with its use as a recreational sporting oval, as well as, I guess, achieving better activation along Launceston Street, which is currently a real dead zone and a very undesirable area—between Launceston Street through to that part of the Woden town centre. In terms of residential uses, those will need to be managed very carefully. I might ask either Rod or Dorte to talk a bit about how this variation proposes to deal with that.

Ms Ekelund: Certainly throughout the study that we undertook for Woden town centre and in particular looking at the oval, as the minister indicated, we had sought to have an activation of Launceston Street and explore opportunities for commercial accommodation and other activities. We were constantly mindful, however, of the potential conflict that could occur if there were proposals for residential development. So we have been very clear in our thinking that residential development should not be permitted. The variation deals to some extent with noise control between potentially conflicting land uses.

In relation to the land adjoining Phillip Oval, we would seek to ensure that any lease did not permit residential development. The government would explore, at some future time, the release of a couple of sites immediately south of the oval along Launceston Street, but residential would not be an activity that we would seek to incorporate into those leases.

Mr Corbell: Obviously the key concern is noise and light—noise from the activity, the crowds and the traffic, but also lighting. We know that there are already conflicts, for example, at Manuka Oval. Clearly there is a parking issue at Manuka Oval which is very difficult to overcome because of its location. There are also the issues with lights. Phillip Oval into the future will have the capacity to be a venue that is used at night and to have significant lighting in place there if a decision is made to do that. We don't want that opportunity to be eliminated because of adjacent uses. So that is something that has been carefully considered.

MS PORTER: Callam Offices has been mentioned in heritage studies as being of significant heritage value. Could you explain to the committee what will eventually happen to the Callam Offices, or whether this stated heritage value has been taken into consideration? It is mentioned in Eric Martin and Associates' 2002 study.

Mr Corbell: The advice I have on that is that—first of all, Callam Offices is owned by the ACT government and is currently used as office accommodation for all ACT government agencies—the land use policy does not change as a result of this variation in relation to the site occupied by the Callam Offices.

There has, though, been a view expressed by people in the architectural community that Callam Offices is of a particular distinctive design quality that should be recognised and protected by our heritage laws. I am advised that there has been a nomination for it to be placed on the interim heritage register but, as yet, that has not been considered by the heritage council.

That is our understanding of the situation. It will be up to the heritage council to decide whether or not it should be given heritage protection. There are many physical problems with that building in terms of its physical construction, which need to continue to be managed, but it is a very distinctive building. Certainly all the thinking, as I understand it, from the government building managers is that the building will need to be maintained having regard for its potential heritage value. There are certainly no plans to remove the building or to do anything other than maintain it in its existing use.

THE CHAIR: Do you agree with the Woden town centre master plan that there may be significant potential to develop an enhanced sense of place in Woden by capitalising on heritage values, such as improved signage and perhaps heritage walks, for example?

Mr Corbell: I think there is certainly some scope for that. Woden has a number of distinctive buildings. As the first town centre developed in Canberra, it obviously represents the thinking, architecturally and otherwise, of its time. So it does have an important story to tell, and that does need to be more reflected in our planning policies.

That said, because Woden is the oldest of our town centres, it also has a range of buildings which are well and truly beyond their useful life. In some respects some of those buildings hold back the development of Woden. That is now being reflected in decisions being made by building owners. I think the most obvious buildings that I am referring to here are the buildings currently occupied by the federal department of health. I think it is Fishburn, Albermarle and another one of those buildings.

Those are extremely old buildings. They have little or no design value, they are substandard accommodation and they are holding back the development of Woden. I know that those building owners are considering the redevelopment of their buildings to keep that very major public service tenant, the federal Department of Health and Ageing, in Woden.

That is very important for the health of the town centre, it is very important for the continued viability of the town centre and businesses of all the different traders that are represented at the town centre, and it is very important in terms of maintaining the town centre as part of a decentralised network of commercial areas we have in our city. There has to be a balance struck between the value—the potential heritage—of some of the buildings in Woden with maintaining the viability of the town centre as a place that people are prepared to work in. Those are the issues which the government is really cognisant of, and certainly we attempt to take a sensitive but balanced approach to those issues.

THE CHAIR: Does Callam Offices fit within that category of buildings—you talk about the ones owned by the federal government—that could potentially be holding the town centre back in terms of development?

Mr Corbell: I don't think so. Callam Offices is quite a small building and is obviously unique in its design. For that reason there is probably an argument worth considering around its heritage value—because of the uniqueness of its design. No, I don't consider that the Callam Offices is holding back the Woden town centre. First of all, Callam Offices is at the edge of the town centre, not in the centre of it. It is a small building compared to the amount of floor space available in Woden. It accommodates a relatively minor tenant, compared to the very large commonwealth tenants that exist in Woden. Clearly it is those larger commonwealth tenants that drive the viability of the town centre, and it is important to respond to their needs.

MR SESELJA: It has a small tenant, but that is partly due to the design of the building, I would suggest. That area of land potentially could hold larger tenants if it were redeveloped.

Mr Corbell: I guess that is true. It is, though, outside of the core of the town centre itself. It is separated by Callam Street from the rest of the town centre. So it is very much at the periphery of the town centre, and I do not regard it as a major issue. The variation deals with that land use around Callam Offices itself. There is some vacant land or land that is currently utilised for car parking around Callam Offices. So in terms of long-term land use, there are certainly still opportunities, subject to those other issues such as car parking being addressed, at Woden in that area around Callam.

The government's perspective is really focused, I think, on the commercial and retail core of the town centre. That is what keeps the town centre vibrant and prosperous. Retaining those large commonwealth tenancies is very important for the long-term viability of the town centre. This master plan and this variation are designed to ensure that that is the case, as well as providing into the future for a range of other land uses, such as residential uses, which currently are only just starting to emerge at the town centre.

MR SESELJA: Can you tell us what the practical effect of deleting the one to one plot ratio would be in town centres?

Ms Ekelund: One of the objectives of the variation is to provide opportunities particularly for the activities in the service-trade area to respond to changing market requirements. We have certainly had instances where proponents have sought to undertake minor expansions of activities on their site but have been prevented from doing so because of the restrictions on floor space.

The change enables, I guess, a higher order development to happen on the sites and more efficient use of the land, rather than keeping it very low density. It also provides opportunities, as you would have seen in the variation, to, in some areas, locate residential development up above some of the service-trades activities in ways that would not be in conflict with the surrounding service-trades activities. We may be able to achieve residential development on third and fourth floors, but clearly that would not be able to be achieved with the restriction in floor space of one to one.

Mr Corbell: Certainly it is valuable to provide opportunities in the mixed trades area, or the Phillip business district I think it describes itself as now. There are relatively low-level land uses currently happening in those areas. There is certainly real development potential for someone who is interested in trying to provide a new and different product on the market to have a mixed-use retail or commercial use with residential uses on the upper floors. This variation confirms that that is possible. It is possible now, I think, in Phillip to do that, but this certainly increases the scope still further, in terms of height in particular, in that area.

THE CHAIR: The plot ratio is a quite a technical concept. Would you be able to explain to the committee or give us an example, perhaps, of a particular area in the town centre where you would see this occurring and what could happen with the change to the plot ratio?

Ms Ekelund: Rod, I know that you are aware of a certain circumstance. Is it a charitable organisation that has been wanting to extend?

Mr Baxter: There are probably two scenarios here. One would be a demolition and rebuild, which would result in a whole new building form. But there are several cases—and I use one: St Vincent De Paul—that has had its office in Phillip over the last 30 years. The original building is a two-storey building, built over 50 per cent of the site. Say it is a 1,000 square metre block. A 500 square metre footprint times two is 1,000 square metres of floor area of building.

In the yard at the back, if you like, there is parking and the back-of-house type activities. But what this particular lessee would like to do to accommodate their expanded office needs is to, if you like, extend the first floor level out over their car parking area to create another 100 square metres of office. That would then take them to a plot ratio of one to 1.1. Given that there is a numerical maximum in the territory plan, it is just not permitted.

Even though it might be quite sensible and they could deal with their generated car parking and a whole lot of other planning issues that we would need to take into account,

the fact that they have got a one to one plot ratio just means that the application needs to be refused. This particular lessee feels as though the option now is to look for other sites, to relocate out of Phillip, simply because their needs have grown beyond their existing building.

The one to one plot ratio, as I say, is relevant in the case of existing lessees, provided a range of other issues can be dealt with, and then with redevelopment to allow the sorts of outcomes that Dorte had mentioned earlier.

THE CHAIR: So what would have been the history of the development of that policy, the one to one plot ratio? Would they have wanted to see more open space or—

Mr Corbell: It would have been to achieve a couple of ends. The first would have been to focus higher level, higher order uses, more intense land uses in the town centre proper, so around the supermarkets and around that central core of the plaza itself. It would have made it clear that that is where more intense uses would be, and less intense uses would be around the edges of the town centre. That would have been the first.

The second would have been to provide for the type of accommodation needed for those businesses that have lower volumes of activity but perhaps require larger amounts of space without having excessively high rentals. Having lower order uses around the periphery of the town centre would have meant that the types of rents that could be charged by building owners would be commensurately lower and would accommodate the types of businesses that needed at that time to be accommodated in Phillip, remembering that the Phillip mixed trades area was really developed as an area that provided for all of your home needs and garden needs and semi or light industrial needs that were associated with building the new suburbs of Woden and Weston Creek.

That is essentially why the Phillip mixed trades areas and the other mixed trades areas were developed in the first place, to provide that immediate access to those types of businesses. As Ross explained, the one to one plot ratio control would have meant that buildings could only be of a certain size. They would have been more attractive to businesses that could afford lower levels of rental to occupy them and make their services available to the immediate community.

Clearly, the role of the mixed trades area has changed over time. It still provides that very important level of home-making type facilities, if you like—garden centres, timber centres, hardware, motor vehicles and so on—but increasingly is providing a range of other uses as well, such as commercial office space and retail uses. Given that it has been 40 to 50 years since Woden was first established, it is important to look again at the rationale for these types of controls. The proposed change provides for a greater range of flexibility while still maintaining the essential core provision of services that people in the Woden Valley and Weston Creek still need.

THE CHAIR: So with Mr Baxter's example earlier on, is it possible that we may see a current service building demolished and the current use of, I suppose, street side parking go underneath, undercroft, and then a new construction from there?

Mr Baxter: They would be the sorts of outcomes that would be generated out of the redevelopment model, yes. There would be a need to accommodate parking on site, and

the larger the plot ratio inevitably the parking goes into basements.

Just getting back to a question you asked about the plot ratio and the impact on amenity, the example I had used was a two-storey building over 50 per cent of the site. There is also a zero setback control. You could use virtually 100 per cent of the site as a single-storey building to achieve the one to one plot ratio. In some cases they are the sorts of outcomes that do exist. For example, in the motor trades, the earlier motor trades type buildings were more of the single-storey model with virtually full site coverage.

The effects on amenity are probably not relevant insofar as we have a build to boundary condition. The amenity in the courts is really provided by the open space that actually exists within the courts. That is why Phillip lends itself particularly well to this sort of redevelopment. The streets run east-west, so you have buildings with a northerly orientation to the landscaped courts with access from the back, virtually through laneway access at the back.

The public realm, if you like, is very well preserved—in fact, enhanced by awnings and building lines and new buildings and new activities. One of the things that are mandated is that the ground floor is actually the active uses. It maintains the range of interesting retailing and office activities that exist through the area. We would not be displacing those activities. They would be retained at ground floor level, and then residential and offices above that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR SESELJA: In relation to the height in the residential-mixed used area, how was that height arrived at? Why not go slightly higher in terms of these kinds of areas?

Mr Baxter: At this stage it is a maximum of five storeys, so four storeys and an attic on the Townsend Street corners, and then generally three storeys with a maximum four storeys along the edge. Because of the overshadowing and the general scale of the area, five storeys is probably a comfortable landmark on the intersections.

What we do not want to do with the open space that I have mentioned earlier is to actually be overshadowing those open space courts. The four-storey edge on the northern side of those courts would still be keeping, in mid-winter, at least 50 per cent of that area in sun. We do not want to create a heavily shadowed, very urban situation there. It is almost like a transition, if you like, from the very hard urban area through to a much more vibrant, sunny, open space precinct that we think that this area really lends itself to.

MS PORTER: Minister, you mentioned car parking before and you said that car parking is really something that needs to be solved in the DA stage. Is that right, that traffic issues and car parking issues will be matters that will need to be addressed later?

It seems to me, though, that the need for car parking to be taken into account should be part of what we are discussing now. Is there going to be enough room, do you think, for all those issues to be addressed in the DA stage? You were talking about Manuka. You said that we have ended up with a problem over at Manuka where we really do not have the car parking that we need and it is going to be difficult to solve. Are we going to get ourselves into a situation where this is going to be difficult to solve, notwithstanding that

we would rather people use the bus anyway?

Mr Corbell: There is always going to be a demand for car parking. The point I was making about Manuka, Ms Porter, was about Manuka Oval.

MS PORTER: Yes.

Mr Corbell: Manuka Oval has virtually no car parking other than that already provided for the retail area of Manuka itself. Whenever you have got 17,000 people at Manuka, you have got a problem. That is a consequence of the decision that Manuka is going to be our second stadium without making any provision for parking. Clearly that is the issue we face there. That was the point I was making there.

As to the issue with Woden, yes, there are certainly some deficits in car parking at Woden at the moment. That is a consequence of the redevelopment of a number of sites, some of which have been sold. The redevelopment where we are losing car parking at the moment is almost exclusively sites sold by the commonwealth for redevelopment. Nevertheless, that is impacting on people. The master plan identifies where the opportunities exist in the short to medium and long term for parking structures to accommodate the loss of surface car parking. I will ask Rod in a minute to talk a little bit about how the master plan identifies that and how that is reflected in the territory plan variation.

The point I want to make about car parking issues being addressed in the development application stage is that it is normal in the DA stage to identify what will be the parking demand of a new development. There are guidelines in place that specify the number of car parks that need to be provided for the amount of floor space that is going into a building. That is whether it is residential or commercial. There are parking guidelines for those types of buildings. It is normal also in a development application for other traffic issues to be taken into account, access or egress issues and so on.

All of those things are taken into account in the development application stage. But that does not in any way diminish the broader planning perspective or the broader master planning perspective of where provisions should be in the medium to long term for car parking. I will ask Rod to talk a little bit about how the master plan deals with that issue because it is, I know, an issue at Woden at the moment. While some of that will be ameliorated as development is completed and new parking is made available, there are some longer term issues that need to be addressed. So I will ask Rod to talk about those.

Mr Baxter: I guess we are seeking a change from what was probably a 40-year-old model of building buildings without any car parking and having all of the parking provided as public parking to a situation now where buildings provide some of their generated parking demand within the building with the balance provided in public parking.

As our surface car parking shrinks, there is that need to construct structures. There are two sites, which people would well know, on the eastern and the western sides of Woden, the two large surface car parks. This territory plan variation reinforces the importance of those areas, and all of our planning likewise.

It is an issue of where the next federal government moves are. Family and community services are in Woden and it is still unresolved whether they will stay in Woden or go to Tuggeranong. If it can be confirmed over the next 12 months, let us say, that family and community services will stay in Woden, we will know then that the employment numbers in Woden are pretty much shored up then for the next 15 years. I think it would be at that point that we would have to look at releasing the car park on the eastern side of Woden near the Hellenic club for the construction of a car park structure.

Part of what is causing the stress in parking at the moment is that there are three buildings under construction. We have got the construction workers getting in there at 7 o'clock in the morning—I do not know the numbers; 150 people, perhaps—and taking up a lot of space, taking up the prime commuter parking spaces simply because the tradesmen are getting there that much earlier.

The buildings themselves are going to have basement parking provided, but whilst they are in construction we have got the effect of losing the car parks that they are building on and we have that 18 month to two-year lag time before the car park spaces within the buildings become available. But, all up, there are close to 800 spaces in three buildings currently under construction in Woden. That will certainly relieve some of the parking pressure. But in the end, if we know we are going to get an increase in employment, then a new public car park structure is pretty much inevitable.

MR SESELJA: I note that there are some comments from the planning and land council. Were you happy with the quality of their advice?

Mr Corbell: Yes. I always welcomed the advice of the planning and land council. They always provided a considered view, and one that was important.

MR SESELJA: But they are being abolished.

Mr Corbell: Yes, regrettably, the planning and land council is being abolished.

MR SESELJA: What are the reasons for that?

Mr Corbell: Budgetary. As part of the government's response to the demands it is currently facing, cabinet took the decision that all government agencies should consider the range and scope of the advisory committees and bodies they had working for them, both statutory and non-statutory. In the case of the planning and land authority, essentially it had one significant advisory body that was statutory, and the decision was taken by me that in the current budget environment the planning and land authority could no longer sustain the cost of supporting and running that advisory body. So it was with considerable regret that I had to make the decision to abolish that body.

MR SESELJA: Given the sort of importance you placed on their advice, where are you going to get that kind of advice now that they are being abolished?

Mr Corbell: Even though we no longer have that statutory mechanism, there exists a broad range of non-statutory consultation mechanisms that will continue to exist to get people's views and perspectives on planning policy. Clearly, the public consultation processes which the authority runs in the development of master plans and all other types

of planning documents will continue to perform a very important role in getting a wide range of perspectives and views.

I will also be exploring with the past members of the planning and land council what opportunities exist and continuing to seek their views and advice on a case-by-case basis. They have certainly indicated to me a willingness to assist, wherever practicable, in continuing to provide advice either to me or to officers of the authority, for example, on design and development issues, sustainability issues and so on. We will continue to explore those options with them and take advantage of that, wherever possible.

THE CHAIR: Minister, the National Capital Authority has made a comment regarding the draft variation. They have mentioned the retention of the inter-town public transport route. I note that the draft variation plan shows the route there on the northern end of the plan. It is figure 3.1 on page 21. At the moment my understanding is that there is actually nothing happening at the northern end of the draft variation but the route must stay in place. Is there an intention to use the route in the not too distant future?

Mr Corbell: My understanding is the NCA advised that they wanted to see the existing route for the inter-town public transport corridor maintained, and obviously this variation does that. There are no plans at this stage to physically construct right of way for public transport along that corridor parallel to Yarralumla Creek from Launceston Street through to the Yamba Drive-Melrose Drive roundabout.

It is important, I think, to continue to maintain that as a long-term option, because it does provide a more direct route straight into the heart of the town centre and I think it is sensible for that to be maintained. But the advice I have from Mr Baxter at this stage is that, given the location of employment currently in Woden, with that north-western corner of the town centre immediately adjacent to Phillip Oval and the Phillip pool containing an increasing level of employment—there is a new office building, for example, being constructed there right now—it will be important, at least in the short to medium term, to maintain public transport services along Launceston Street and then onto Melrose Drive simply because that is where all the jobs are and we want to get public transport as close as possible to those office locations.

If any members have caught the bus recently from Woden to Civic and gone along Launceston Street, you will know that that bus stop on Launceston Street adjacent to the Woden tradesmen's club is a very popular stop because it is the closest stop for people working in the offices immediately to the south of that stop. They do not go to the interchange. They just walk up to Launceston Street and get on the bus there. For that reason there are no plans at this stage to actually physically build a right of way for public transport along that corridor, but it is being maintained as a long-term provision. At this stage we see that public transport provision will need to be maintained to service, in particular, that north-western corner of the town centre.

I think it is important, though, to maintain that corridor to the north particularly if, at some future point, Phillip Oval becomes a much more significant sporting destination. There is a real opportunity to have public transport services come right up to the door of Phillip Oval, adjacent to Yarralumla Creek, and deposit people straight into the oval there. Obviously that is going to have real potential if Phillip Oval emerges at some point in the future as a major sporting venue.

THE CHAIR: Minister, we have heard some concern from community groups, as you touched on earlier, about the lack of public open space, arts and cultural facilities and community meeting rooms in Woden. Is this being addressed, particularly the lack of community meeting rooms?

Mr Corbell: Woden is well provided for in terms of the area of public open space that is available. Obviously there is the town park immediately to the east of the town centre itself that provides a very important amenity. There is also the grounds of Phillip Oval for more formal sporting activity and the other areas of public open space that have been identified in the territory plan variation, in particular in the mixed trades area.

In terms of community meeting space, there is a range of community facilities already available in Woden. There is the facility run by the Woden Community Service. There is also the youth centre, which also provides an important community asset.

In terms of community meeting rooms themselves, the master plan and the variation do not make specific provision for that, but clearly there is land available for those types of uses should a centre be chosen to be constructed, either by the private sector or the government at some point in the future. There is no need to change the territory plan to accommodate that use.

MS PORTER: You mentioned Yarralumla Creek a couple of times. Are there plans to do any restoration of that area as part of the work that is going to be done around that area?

Mr Corbell: Yes, there is. With the release of Woden east, one of the requirements that the land development agency put forward in its request for partners to joint venture for the development of Woden east was issues around improving water quality along Yarralumla Creek. That is certainly something I requested the land development agency to look at. I know the land development agency themselves are keen to see the amenity of at least that part of Yarralumla Creek being greatly improved as a way of improving the residential amenity for people living adjacent to the area in Woden east. So there is the opportunity for—I forget the names—two types of ponds, an off-line and an online, I think it is.

You can have an online pond, where you actually build a pond within the waterway itself and you basically have a small reservoir or dam that controls water quality and improves water quality online. There is another one, which is off-line, and the best example of that is the new pond on Sullivans Creek at O'Connor, adjacent to the O'Connor shops. That is an off-line pond. The water is diverted from the waterway into the pond for water quality control purposes. You can create a very pleasant urban aquatic environment there with appropriate plantings, and so on, as well as improving water quality. Then the improved water, having been naturally treated, if you like, in an off-line pond, is then redirected back into the waterway.

Those are the types of opportunities that exist for that part of Yarralumla Creek. Yarralumla Creek at the moment is a classic example of 1960's water quality control engineering, which was to build a dirty great big concrete channel to allow it to get away as quickly as possible. Obviously, that creates a very unpleasant and ugly environment

for 90 per cent of the time when it is empty.

There are other ways of managing water quality control and also floodwaters. The master plan identifies that and the LDA, in its joint venture proposal, is exploring those options with joint venture partners at the moment as part of the redevelopment of Woden east. I anticipate a joint venture partner will be announced quite soon for the Woden east development. I would like to see improvements, at least, to that part of Yarralumla Creek, made as part of that redevelopment.

MS PORTER: Thank you.

Mr Corbell: So that is being actively pursued.

THE CHAIR: Minister, some months back the committee supported a proposed variation which would have permitted office buildings to subsidise the refurbishment of the Oasis Leisure Centre in the Woden area. Is there any difference in Phillip, where the lessee is seeking commercial B zoning to diversify the development of the Phillip pool site to subsidise his refurbishment? I understand ACTPLA says the lessee needs to submit a detailed proposal, but is there any difficulty in principle?

Mr Corbell: There is not any difficulty in principle with the notion of having some additional uses there to help with the capital cost of upgrading and maintaining the swimming facility. To an extent, that has already happened at Phillip Oval with the ice skating rink, which was built for the same reason, to diversify operations and to help offset the costs of running an outdoor swimming facility that is really only utilised for three maybe four months of the year. So in principle, no, the government does not have any difficulty with that.

The devil is always in the detail, though. Phillip pool is an attractive open space and when it is utilised during summer, I know that people in the community value the fact that you have got the open grassed areas and the trees and so on that provide some real amenity for what is a very pleasant and well-loved catered swimming pool. But, clearly, if the owner of the pool can put forward a proposal that maintains that quality of amenity, provides some level of open space and landscape which people are going to be able to continue to enjoy in summer, but also helps them in improving the viability of the operation and the maintenance of the 50-metre pool, which is now a requirement embedded into their lease and into the other planning controls, then the government is open to looking at that.

The devil is in the detail. We do not want to see the diminution of that important recreational facility or its amenity. But if that can be addressed in a positive way, then certainly we are willing to have a look at that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Are there any other questions, members? Thank you very much, minister and officials, for coming in to this hearing. We will get any questions on notice to you as soon as we can.

Meeting adjourned from 11.29 am to 2.48 pm.

KNIGHT, Mr MICHAEL JOHN, Committee Member, Canberra Lapidary Club
FOWLER, Ms MAVIS FLORENCE, Vice President, Canberra Lapidary Club
LEONARD, Mrs HEATHER NOREEN, President, Canberra Lapidary Club

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon. I now open the second half of the public hearing into the proposed draft variation to the territory plan No 259, Woden town centre. I welcome from the Canberra Lapidary Club Ms Florence Fowler, Mrs Heather Leonard and Michael Knight to the committee this afternoon.

You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation, for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

If you have any questions that you wish to give on notice this afternoon, the committee would appreciate—or if we give you any questions on notice—responses within five working days of the hearings. It is the responsibility of witnesses to ensure that they meet any commitments they have made regarding the provision of information or answers to questions on notice. The secretary will email you a transcript of the hearings as soon as it is available. Ms Fowler or members of the club, would you like to make an opening statement to the committee?

Mr Knight: First off, we are not perfectly clear why we are here. We have submitted an objection to the 259 rezoning and we have also, as a result of the rezoning, requested the availability of some alternative accommodation, shall we say, for our club. So if you will excuse my saying so, we are not 100 per cent certain why we are here. On which basis are we here? Are we objecting to the rezoning?

THE CHAIR: The invitation for you to come here this afternoon is to give you an opportunity to address the committee about your concerns. Whether it is the same as the submission you have made to ACTPLA or whether it is different from that is up to you. We have the submission that you made to ACTPLA, but there may be something you want to add to that.

Mr Knight: Basically there isn't, no. It is just basically that, as a result of the rezoning, we will inevitably be required to move from our current premises. We are a small club. We use the premises there as a workshop and a general meeting place. We pay a rental, although we do not have any lease agreement. If this variation goes through, we do not know our length of tenure there, shall we say. We have heard a rumour that we might be asked to move out by the end of this year. But we don't know that for certain, so this is the reason why we are querying it.

Basically, the club's objectives are to promote interest in fossicking, lapidary and general geological things. We maintain a workshop where members learn and practise our crafts—lapidary and that sort of thing. We promote and assist conservation, Australian mining, history, heritage and mining sites. We assist in promoting the Australian gemstone mining and processing industry and manufacturing of jewellery et cetera in Australia and to do all such things as are conducted or are incidental to the attainment of

the above objectives.

The implications of the area being rezoned as commercial will mean we have to find alternative premises, obviously. If we are looking at commercial, we will obviously have to pay a lot more rental than we are currently. That is our biggest concern—paying commercial rent, if you will excuse that.

If we had to pay commercial rent for premises the size that we have now, which is about 140 square metres, which is a fair size, through an estate agency, the estate agency would be prohibitive to our members, first of all, most of whom are pensioners, shall we say—with a few younger ones.

So this is our objection to the variation—perfectly selfish, we realise that, because it will involve quite a lot of cost to our club and our members, and we would like to stay where we are. Our original tenure there was through the Southern Cross Club, who promised us comfort for life, basically. This hasn't materialised. This is our objection to the proposal.

MR SESELJA: What's your current tenure?

Mr Knight: We don't have one.

MR SESELJA: You do not have any tenure?

Mr Knight: No, we have no lease. We pay our monthly rental, which is \$800 a month. We believe, from other people around about who occupy the same zoning area that we do, that at the end of the year, December, it will be final; it will be the end of us there, although we don't know. We haven't been informed. We are sort of living from day to day, basically.

THE CHAIR: You are in section 1 of 22, which is the old YMCA building?

Mr Knight: No, that is not correct. We are not in the old YMCA building, we are in what I suppose you'd call a demountable building. It is like a builder's shed type of thing.

Ms Fowler: It was the YMCA old building as well.

Mrs Leonard: Yes, it was part of the Y.

Mr Knight: Was it? Was that part of it? Okay. But it is separate to the actual established building. Balloons Aloft and a few other businesses are in there. There is a creche, I believe, in that building as well. So we are separate to that. We are in that car parking area.

THE CHAIR: What would be the size of the area that you would need for the club to continue?

Mr Knight: At the moment we have about 140 square metres on one level. My own feeling is that anything over 100 square metres would be very satisfactory for us. We could accommodate ourselves in that. We have a certain amount of cash in our bank

account—insufficient to buy anything on a commercial scale; but if somebody were to make available a piece of land for us, we could afford to put a structure on it and equip it ourselves.

MS PORTER: You would obviously be looking for something in that particular general location.

Mr Knight: It would be nice. We have a lot of members who do not have their own transport and rely on public transport. Where we are at the moment is a nice convenient spot for the majority of the club members, but it does not have to be in that immediate vicinity. Anywhere, really, in a relatively accessible position would be very satisfactory.

Ms Fowler: On bus routes is very important because we have a lot of older members. One of our concerns is that we have a lot of older members as well who come and use the workshop each week, and they rely on public transport. I think it is good they're using public transport, but if we were to go into a location that was rather remote, it would make it very difficult for those members to come.

The thing about the workshop is that we have equipment there that people can't own privately and use at home. But by having it as a central resource, we can run courses there, we can run workshops there, and it gives access to all our members. We have a range of ages. Some young students from some of the colleges come across, and we have some older members. So the availability, transport-wise, is a very important issue for us.

Mr Knight: Incidentally, we have equipment which is quite valuable, so security is also an issue with us.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Mr Knight: We would not like it to be too available to the casual passer-by. Sorry. What I am trying to say is, we couldn't accommodate shared premises.

THE CHAIR: I understand, yes. Have you had a response to your submission to ACTPLA on the draft variation?

Mr Knight: No. That is why we weren't sure whether we were—we wondered whether this was it.

THE CHAIR: Well, to give you a heads up there, ACTPLA has advertised that it is doing a draft variation of the territory plan. You had an opportunity there to make a submission to them, which you did.

Mr Knight: We did, yes.

THE CHAIR: It has now come through to this committee to investigate as well. That is why you have had the second opportunity now to come to the committee and voice your concerns about the draft variation. I hope that clears that up for you.

Mr Knight: Yes.

MS PORTER: I was just wondering: if you do not have a lease, who are you actually paying the rent to now?

Mrs Leonard: We pay it to Space Developments Pty Limited, which is a construction site. It is sent up to Queensland—Surfers Paradise. That's all we know.

Mr Knight: That's all we know about them. We were informed because we had two changes of ownership in the last couple of years. Our only knowledge of a change of ownership was a demand from a different source for money. So we have very little knowledge of where the money goes, except that it goes. We pay our rent regularly. We don't owe anybody anything. We always pay our debts, but we get no response from the other direction.

THE CHAIR: Okay, yes. Is there anything further you would like to let the committee know about the club?

Ms Fowler: I would like to add in that, since we were with the Southern Cross Club, De Marco's bought the property and De Marco's more or less said to us that, when they redeveloped, they would build in a workshop that we could rent from them at similar rent. But then De Marco's sold it to this other group that we had trouble locating, even to pay the rent for a little while. But we haven't been able to have a lease; we have had to pay monthly. So, legally, someone could say to us tomorrow, "Pack up your stuff and go."

If you look at our equipment, that is a big task and we don't know where we will go. We have been actively trying to find somewhere. We have been to Queanbeyan looking at premises; we have looked at shops in Canberra which are far outside of our budget; we have had a number of meetings with different planning authorities within ACT; I've been to Dickson and I've been to Kingston.

I've been to all kinds of interesting places but, at the moment, we seem about to be homeless. It is a real concern to us as the committee, and to our members, that suddenly we will have no home, and we will have to find somewhere to put equipment that won't be able to be used, which seems rather sad.

Mrs Leonard: On what Mavis has said, we have been going through LDA, Land Development Authority. I tried to ring again today but I think Alvin is avoiding me the last week. He has not answered my phone calls. But what worries us is that, once a club has no clubrooms and you have to close the doors and people can't come there to the workshop and that, it tends to dissipate and the club then becomes no longer a club. It is very hard then to try and get all your members back. Members like to be able to come to a central meeting point. If there is not one, then I have a feeling that the club will no longer be a club.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming in and giving us that submission. As I mentioned, the secretary will email a transcript of the proceedings to you so you can have a look at those. Then, of course, once the committee has done the report and tabled it in the Assembly, we will be able to forward that to you as well.

Mr Knight: Thank you very much.

STEWART, PROFESSOR JENNY, Associate Professor in Public Policy, University of Canberra

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, Professor Stewart. Thanks for coming along to the committee's inquiry into draft variation 259, the Woden town centre. Just for members' advice, we are hearing from Associate Professor Jenny Stewart of the University of Canberra and her presentation on this draft variation. Professor Stewart, I will just read you the script for the committee.

You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation, for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter. Professor Stewart, the floor is yours.

Prof Stewart: Thank you very much for the opportunity to make this presentation. I do so from my perspective as an academic with professional expertise in the analysis of public policy and also as a resident of the Woden Valley. I have lived in Torrens for the past 25 years. As I explained in the written submission that I made to the committee, I am a regular user of the town centre and feel a good deal of personal interest in it.

Let me say at the start that I am not advocating that the Woden town centre area stays as it is. It certainly needs major improvement. My concern is that a wonderful opportunity to show some real civic imagination in the future of Woden town centre is being wasted.

When I first saw the Woden town centre master plan a few years back, I thought then that the planners had many of the answers, particularly as regards connecting the town centre to the park on the eastern side. But what we have actually seen so far, particularly the Sky Plaza development—and I would also have to say the sad fate of Phillip Oval, although that is not directly the planners' fault, of course—suggests to me that the public and community aspects of the plan will lag far behind the commercial aspects.

There is general agreement, I think, that town centres are properly areas for relatively high-density commercial and residential development, but my question is how much of this activity can be crammed into these areas before the negative impacts start to outweigh the positive impacts.

My written submission sets out the problems as I see them: the loss of ground-level parking; the potential for overbuilding and loss of human scale that the draft variation makes possible; increasing traffic congestion; erosion of already inadequate public space; and the potential for monoculture, if I can call it that, of multistorey residential developments to invade the area around Phillip Oval and the services area in Phillip.

What I want to do, now that I have the opportunity to speak to you in person, is expand on a number of the points that I made in the written submission and perhaps to bring them to life a bit more than is possible just using the written word, by using some photographs that I took a couple of weeks ago in the Woden town centre area, using my snazzy new digital camera.

The area that is covered by the draft variation is, as you know, very significant. I thought it would be worth while just showing this. I will bring that up even bigger. This is the Phillip Oval area and this is the town centre area itself. This particular view from the Woden town centre master plan does not include the area to the south of Hindmarsh Drive, which is the mixed services area in Phillip. So it is very substantial. The changes that the draft variation makes possible will affect a very large area indeed.

The proposed changes to the draft variation make possible a number of significant changes, as I have said. I have a picture here. If you look at the hard copy I have handed out, you can see it. This is figure 2. This shows the precincts as they currently stand. The D areas are the ones that are reserved for parking. If you turn over now to figure 3, you can see that the draft variation means that the D areas become reclassified into B areas.

In those B areas a very wide range of activities is permitted, and also there is no limitation on building heights. This gives the planners maximum flexibility to do pretty much as they want with these areas. But my argument is from the point of view of the public interest: we might want a little more prescription there about what is going to take place and where. My concern is that the area could end up looking a bit like a concrete jungle.

To show you what is there already, if you turn to figure 4 in the copies of the photographs that I took you will see that this is the view from Launceston Street. This is from the northern side. You can see that there are already a lot of buildings crammed into this particular area. More to the point, there are a lot more to come.

In particular, there is a building which I love to hate and which everybody I speak to loves to hate. If you look at figure 5, you will see that this is the Sky Plaza building. This is as it is seen from Hindmarsh Drive. This is a building, of course, that is already there, but my concern is that there are going to be rather more buildings like this one.

This type of building is what ACTPLA terms a gateway or marker building. They believe that it gives a kind of strong signature to the entrance to any particular area. Personally, I find it completely overwhelming. This one, Sky Plaza, is a 20-storey building but there are plans for a further, I think, five gateway or marker buildings at strategic points around the town centre area, and they will be of roughly 15 storeys in height. That is as indicated in the Woden town centre master plan.

What could happen in practice is that they could be as tall as or taller than Sky Plaza. There is nothing to stop them being even bigger. I wonder whether this sort of mini-Manhattan effect that seems to be in the planners' minds is really what we want, even for a town centre area where I think most people agree an increase in density is warranted. I guess if we wanted a mini-Manhattan effect we would be living in Sydney. One of the reasons I like Canberra so much is that we don't have so many very tall buildings.

I am concerned about reductions in open space. I used to work in what is now the Lovett Tower in the town centre area. Whenever I had my lunch, it would be in one of these little park areas. If you look at figure 6, you can see it is an existing pocket park to the west of the main north-south walkway in the office area of Woden town centre.

That is a nice little breathing space. On the other side of this very walkway, however, if you look at figure 7, you will see the Centra Plaza development. I never quite know where the “plaza” element is supposed to be, but this is a building called the Centra Plaza development. As you can see, it is a very substantial building which is going up now on the eastern side of that north-south walkway. So it is crowding in what was once a much more open area.

I understand that the Woden Valley community council actually fought very hard to prevent the demolition of the much lower-rise canteen building that preceded this one, but they were unsuccessful. This is the sort of development that we are faced with: not necessarily bad in itself. It is just that the ensemble of developments such as this will create a very congested, overbearing sort of atmosphere for people using the area.

Public space also includes street-level car parks. The original design of Woden town centre: not a place of great beauty, as I have said, but it was very convenient and practical. It had lots of ground-level car parking spaces. When the redevelopments are finalised, if and when they all go through, almost all those parking areas that I showed you on the plan will be obliterated. Obviously, if you are going to obliterate ground-level parking areas, you have to replace them with multistorey parking structures.

I have included figure 8 here, which shows an existing parking structure. There are going to be two or three more of those as the ground-level parking areas are progressively removed. Obviously the car parking areas that are already there perform useful functions, most obviously for parking.

If you look at figure 9, this is the existing parking area off Corinna Street, on a Saturday afternoon. As you look into that photograph, that is the site of another gateway building. So there will be a very tall building that will replace those cars, and the cars in turn will have to go into multilevel parking structures.

I have also included, if you look at figure 10, a kind of vernacular existing use of a car park. This is the one in Callam Street which will be replaced by tallish buildings. You can see that that is currently being used as an auto fair or car market. Now that will be relocated.

THE CHAIR: That is currently alongside the police station?

Prof Stewart: That is right, yes. That will be replaced, it is intended, by another tall or tallish building. If you look at figure 11, this was a photograph I took looking towards Mt Taylor, across an area that is currently, as you can see, a car park. You might think a car park is a rather uneventful way to use a space, but it does have the effect of opening out the area a little bit. That area you can see in the photograph will be occupied by yet another big, massive office and/or residential building. So it will block out that view completely.

The next photograph I took, figure 12, you can see shows the traffic congestion as it exists already in Corinna Street. This was taken on a Saturday afternoon. All those cars are actually queuing up in that street because there is a multilevel parking structure just down to the right as you look at the photograph. So there is inevitably, even with

additional access streets, going to be a lot more of that.

When I have spoken to the planning people, they have taken the view that this kind of development and the extent of it means that the Woden town centre, particularly the western side of it, will be much more lively and vital and busy and all those words that they use quite a lot. But I am wondering whether there are not a number of assumptions made in making those assertions. Vitality in an urban area comes from people coming into the area, and they will come into the area if there are things for them to do.

I have included in the photos I took, at figure 13, the cafe in Bradley Street on a Saturday afternoon. You can see that it is quite busy and lively, quite well patronised. Most of those people would have been attracted by the cinema just adjacent or other activities nearby. But if you turn now to figure 14, here is the cafe at the entrance to the Sky Plaza building at exactly the same time, 4 o'clock on a Saturday afternoon. It is completely deserted. So the people that live in that building are not using that cafe. If they are using a cafe, they are using the one in Bradley Street.

It seems to me perhaps an unwarranted assumption that, if you build a lot of residential buildings and you put cafes or something at street level, somehow these are going to automatically operate as busy and attractive business premises. Obviously, at least so far, that has not happened in the case of the Sky Plaza.

Just to wind up, I want to make a bit of a plea for Woden town centre and the other areas covered by this draft variation. I think that Woden town centre has been a bit short-changed relative to the other town centres in Canberra. We do not really have a lake; we do not even have any nice water features. As I said, it has always been a bit deficient in public space. It certainly, as I think the committee has been informed, has been deficient in community facilities.

When the town centre master plan was put together, I thought—and many others did too, I think—that here was an opportunity for the government and the planners to give something back to the Woden town centre and the people who use that area. But it has not really turned out that way. Public parts of the redevelopment, the new bus interchange, for example, I just wonder when they are going to happen. The reconnection to the town park on the eastern side, when is that going to happen? As I have said, the scale and obtrusiveness and height of the developments on the western side, which are going ahead apace, make me think that there is not going to be much overall improvement there either.

Canberra is a wonderful place to live because of the way planners have contributed to its civic amenity, and in this rush to develop quickly it seems to me that important aspects of that civic amenity are either being sacrificed or are not being further developed when they might be. My point about these gateway or marker buildings—I have had this conversation with some of the planners at ACTPLA—is that planners seem obsessed with the idea that the only way you can really announce “this is Woden town centre” to people who might be approaching it is to have a really, really tall building on one of the corner areas. I think that is overkill and perhaps the planners might be persuaded to scale down their ambitions for those marker buildings to something that is a bit more on a human scale.

I will end there. I am sorry that I could not display the photographs on the screen as I had hoped to do, but I think you have got the general idea from the photocopies. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Professor Stewart. Ms Porter, do you have any questions for Professor Stewart?

MS PORTER: I think is very self-explanatory, really. It is very graphic, is it not, from the photographs and things?

THE CHAIR: I guess, Professor Stewart, your main concern in your submission, and again today, is public space?

Prof Stewart: Yes.

THE CHAIR: And that amenity aspect of being able to view out over a flatter area, rather than to look at high-rise?

Prof Stewart: Yes, that is exactly right. I think it is just too much.

MS PORTER: If I am reading you right, you are saying that there is a danger of feeling closed in by a number of high buildings. Even if you do have the public space, it will be crowded by these tall buildings?

Prof Stewart: Yes, that is exactly right. The commercial and economic aspects of the planning for Canberra seem to have overwhelmed the community and public interest aspects of it, and I certainly feel some concerns about that. The draft variation is a broad-brush instrument, I suppose, but I guess it does give a welcome opportunity for people like me, and I understand others as well, to express our concerns about what is going to happen.

We get to have a say when development applications are put in, but very often one can feel quite powerless when it comes to that stage, and although buildings can be changed or sometimes even not go ahead as a result of objections, for the most part they do. So I thought I should take this opportunity to express these views to you.

I know the planners obviously have their own views about this area. But planning is necessarily a function that involves a balance between community and public interests and private and commercial ones. I am concerned that in relation to the town centre that balance may have moved too far in the direction of commercial and economic interests. Of course, the area around Phillip Oval is a part of the draft variation area as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Professor Stewart, for coming in and providing that submission for us. It has been most informative.

MS PORTER: Yes, thank you.

Prof Stewart: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: We will get back to you shortly. If there are any questions on notice that the committee wants to give you, we will get those to you shortly. The committee

secretary will email a copy of the transcript to you.

Prof Stewart: Thank you.

ADAMS, MR TONY, Senior Town Planner, CB Richard Ellis

HOUGHTON, DR WAYNE LAWRENCE, Director, Glencora Pty Ltd

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, gentlemen. Welcome to the planning and environment committee hearing on draft variation 259 to the territory plan. You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

Gentlemen, this afternoon the committee has to rise at 4 pm, unfortunately, but that, I think, was the time allocated for you. Mr Adams, I would imagine that you would like to give an opening statement for CB Richard Ellis?

Mr Adams: Yes. Thank you, Mr Chair. If I may, I will present a brief opening statement. I have got a few diagrams I would like to show. We apologise for being late. Dr Houghton had some commitments in Sydney. He will make a brief statement and then we are open to questions.

You have seen the submissions that we have put to the planning authority regarding variation 259. In their essence, variation 259 is seeking to set in place a new planning regime for the Woden town centre that will see it through for the next, I guess, 20 or 30 years. It is looking to achieve a range of objectives, and all of those objectives come from some very substantial master planning work that has been done for the town centre over probably the last five years.

One of the very significant community facilities in the town centre is the swimming pool, which is what we are here to talk about. The swimming pool is obviously highly valued by the community at Woden and elsewhere in Canberra. It has got widespread use. It is a valuable facility, and that has been recognised in that the territory plan now requires that that facility be maintained and kept open to the public effectively in perpetuity.

It is a well established fact, we believe—and Dr Houghton might elaborate on this—that the swimming pool was originally a public pool. It has been in private ownership for some years and the commonwealth made the original capital investment a long time ago. The swimming pool is now old and tired. It needs substantial reinvestment if it is to carry on and, as is evidenced out at Belconnen in particular—and this is happening in other pools elsewhere in Canberra—there simply is not enough money in the revenue that you make from a swimming pool to cover the capital costs as well as the operating costs. The site needs to be reinvigorated. The money has to come from somewhere and it will not come from swimming pool revenues, if that facility is to be maintained into the future.

Balanced against that is a range of objectives of the Woden town centre master plan. There are a whole lot of objectives that go to urban design and increasing the level of activity and the intensity of business and residential development within the town centre to increase its liveliness and vibrancy. All of those are coming through in the variation, which is suggesting more intense levels of development in other parts of the town centre,

but it specifically excluded the swimming pool site. That means that in the long term we are going to end up with a vibrant, reinvigorated town centre with essentially a little cut-out of it with a very sad and tired swimming pool.

The opportunity exists—and this was presented in our submissions—to rezone the swimming pool centre site to commercial zoning in line with the neighbouring land so that development opportunities there can be increased, with the very important proviso that it is still completely possible, and should indeed be done, that the caveat that says the swimming pool has to be retained should be retained in any change to the territory plan.

That is currently an overlay on the current zoning. It is zoned for entertainment, accommodation and leisure with an overlay that says this swimming pool must be retained in perpetuity. If it were zoned commercial, that overlay could just as easily be applied and can be retained. So the effect of maintaining the swimming pool function will be equally enforceable and equally a fact under either zoning.

Under a commercial zoning, other development opportunities open up. They could, and should, fund a redevelopment of the pool, but they would also achieve the other objectives of the town centre master plan, which include basically a more intense level of development, more activity and a better level of amenity within the precinct.

I will turn to some diagrams that we have had prepared, starting with this one. This is Melrose Drive and this is Launceston Street, and the swimming pool site is on the corner. This illustrates the size of the site. It is a very big site, much bigger than necessary for a swimming pool. There is a lot of vacant space that will always be vacant under the current proposal. This scheme involves construction of some buildings that provide active frontages to the two streets and a reconstructed swimming pool on the site. There is still, as you can see, plenty of open space and a very high amenity pool.

North is straight up the page, so the sun is coming in over the pool and the buildings are looking over it. That is one scenario. These have been prepared by Bligh Voller, who are architects in Canberra. You might have seen their work before. These are quite simple concepts. They are not highly developed.

This is another scheme where the pool is internalised. There is a building on four sides, which provides active and interesting frontage to Melrose Drive and another one to Launceston Street—personally I favour the other one, but this is just another way of doing it—which shows that the pool can be retained with substantial development on the site. To illustrate how that might look, this is an aerial view, if you like, looking down from Curtin. Imagine you are in a helicopter above Curtin. There is a building there and a building there with Launceston Street, Melrose Drive and the tradies hotel across the road. There will be redevelopment in the vicinity as the master plan and the rest of the territory plan rezoning comes into play.

This is the L-shaped building configuration, with the pool and the existing trees along Melrose Drive. They are drawn to about the right scale. There is a sun trap effect with the pool surrounded on two sides by buildings. We got the architects to soften these a bit. I thought it looked a little bit like a large building, but that is one way that it could look. That is a very quick sketch, with them grabbing something off their computer and putting

it on the page.

THE CHAIR: That relief there is from the south-east corner?

Mr Adams: That is looking from the Hellenic club corner—

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Adams: back from that direction, yes. It is south-east. You are right. This is another version of the same thing. This was the one building on the minor street, Launceston Street, and then a second building down Melrose Drive. It does not matter how you configure it. There are different ways of skinning the cat. These illustrate that there is potential for very active frontages along Launceston Street and Irving Street, with retail or cafes or restaurants. Within those or behind that building is the pool.

As you break through the other side of that building—you walk through somehow—you actually come into an enclosed suntrap area, which has got the pool in it. That is assuming it continues to be an outdoor pool. It might turn out to be worth while having an indoor pool if it is being substantially redeveloped because there is a better return. One of these buildings could be residential, with apartments, or they could both be, and this could be at the upper levels. They might get some spin-off from having access to an enclosed pool because it is part of the facility.

All of those things are possible, but not at the moment as the rezoning is currently configured. To be honest, I cannot understand why the commercial zoning was not extended with the continuance of the overlay requiring a pool. I will stop there and hand to Dr Houghton, who might make a few comments about the cost of maintaining the pool and the reality of this pool, which has been operating for many years.

THE CHAIR: Dr Houghton, would you state your name and position for the *Hansard*?

Dr Houghton: Yes. My name is Wayne Lawrence Houghton. I am a director of the lessee company, which is Glencora Pty Ltd. It is a family company. The other directors are my wife and my children.

Just a bit of history. How did we get to this position? We have been at the pool now for 27 years. We took the lease in 1979, on condition that we build the ice skating rink. We had a concept there. At the time they were heating the pool. Heating costs had risen and it was uneconomic. So we built the ice rink and the heat rejected for the ice heated the pool. It worked very well. We have been open every day for 27 years. The ice rink is open and the pool is open in season.

About 15 years ago we started renegotiating our lease to try and get some security so we could spend some capital on the pool. That has been unsuccessful, and ultimately we have come to this point. In recent years the commonwealth was responsible for the maintenance of the pool, but they have not been able to get the finance to do it. So the pool is in a steadily deteriorating position. We had a report about 18 months to two years ago that showed that just to bring the pool back to its useable condition would require over \$2 million in expenditure.

It has a major crack right down the spine and we are leaking water into the groundwater. There are a lot of other mechanical problems and every year we banded it to get it open in November to just last till Easter, when we close again. We think, “Well, that is the last year. The government is going to come and fix it.” But the government has not come and fixed it and that has been going on for a long time now.

All this time we have been trying to negotiate a 99-year lease so we could put some capital into it and develop it. We got to the stage about a year ago when we were offered a lease, but part of the conditions of the lease was that the pool be extensively redeveloped and covered. So now we are in a situation where we are offered the lease, but the lease entails a considerable expenditure of money just to get the pool to the condition where it is operable, and that would not be able to be paid from admissions to the pool.

We have been only able to keep the pool open because the ice rink subsidises the pool. The pool is a loser; it loses all the time. But the revenue from the ice rink has been able to keep the pool open. So now we are confronting a situation where, if we cannot do any other development on the site, we do not have a viable operation.

THE CHAIR: Just as a comment, the committee has already dealt with a similar situation with the Oasis Leisure Centre in the Woden area. It had similar problems. Ms Porter, do you have any questions for this submission?

MS PORTER: You said you preferred the one that is not totally surrounded, like a doughnut. Would the smaller version still be viable?

Mr Adams: It depends on how high the buildings are. This one actually has a higher building there. The other version had lower buildings, but does not—

MS PORTER: I see.

Mr Adams: I think they have got the same amount of floor space.

MS PORTER: So it is to do with height restrictions, really?

Mr Adams: Technically there are no restrictions. I think the landmark location of this site warrants a tall entry building—

MS PORTER: Yes.

Mr Adams: for urban design reasons. This sketch here is of a 10-storey building, which responds reasonably well to the hotel across the road.

MS PORTER: Yes, across the road, yes.

Mr Adams: It is actually four storeys, but it is a very tall four storeys. It looks bigger than that. But it is a major entry to Woden and our design input was that we thought it warranted a fairly large signature entry building. We have suggested in the submission we made that 10 storeys would be a reasonable height. Sky Plaza is, I think, 20. There are some odd building heights that the master plan suggests around Woden, and I am not

sure what the logic to them is. There are 14 storeys further around here on the corner and there is, I think 10 storeys or eight storeys on the two sites on either side of the oval. It seems odd to have a low building height at a major entry point. We were looking to get sufficient return from the development to get some height there.

MS PORTER: And the shadow will not be a problem?

Mr Adams: It is excellent for shadowing because the shadow just falls into Launceston Street. For the pool area itself, the sun comes in from here. This one is lower, so the morning sun gets to it and the afternoon sun comes in. All the overshadowing of the tall building is out on Launceston Street.

THE CHAIR: You would suggest though, Mr Adams, with the drawing that you have there, that the area just north of the pool, which is section 22—

Mr Adams: This one here, yes.

THE CHAIR: may overshadow from the northerly aspect anyway.

Mr Adams: We have drawn it as, I think, a four or five-storey building. We would object pretty strongly to any development on that side overshadowing a pool site where we are obliged, under the territory plan, to run a swimming pool. We would be looking for some protection if such a thing were proposed.

THE CHAIR: I suppose at this stage you probably have not looked at the period that you would need to shut down if you were refurbishing the pool?

Dr Houghton: No. We also have the problem with the ice skating rink. It is the only ice skating rink in the ACT. It services the whole of the ACT. It is very popular. It has to be considered, too.

THE CHAIR: The reason I ask the question is because the other pool had those issues. We did ask whether they would refurbish the pool before they began to construct any other commercial offices on the same site.

Mr Adams: This would involve a constructing a new pool rather than refurbishing the existing one. These designs have the pool in a slightly different location. So it would be a new construction and for it to stack up financially and to make the construction work, I think you would want to do everything at once, or a substantial part at once. At the very least, there would be a closure period because the pool is half on top of the other pool, or whatever. You would have to close the pool. But the pool is closed through winter for seven months of the year—

Dr Houghton: It closes at Easter, yes.

Mr Adams: every year anyway at the moment. I guess the community would accept a closure for however long it took to get a better facility in the future. Realistically, a construction program would be a year or something, I guess. You would probably miss a season.

THE CHAIR: And parking with the pool—I need you to tell me, I suppose.

Mr Adams: The parking at the moment is largely across the road in a public parking area. Again, in a new and improved development these buildings would have basement parking, some of which would be visitor parking. There could be some parking on site, but that detracts from the site.

We would be interested to find out the territory's plans for the car park across the road. There could be a structure car park over there. It needs car parking. At the moment there is plenty of car parking, but the territory is probably going to redevelop the car park. I do not know what their plans are for replacing the actual car parking. The detail we have not got into yet. It can be managed.

THE CHAIR: Ms Porter?

MS PORTER: I do not have any more questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming along. I understand, Dr Houghton, you have had to drive from Sydney for us. Thank you very much for that.

Dr Houghton: I do it all the time.

THE CHAIR: If we have any questions on notice, we will get back to you within a short time and ask that you respond to those within five working days. The secretary will email a transcript of the proceedings to you as well as soon as possible. Thank you very much, once again.

Dr Houghton: Thank you.

Mr Adams: Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 3.48 pm.