



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, TRANSPORT
AND CITY SERVICES**

(Reference: [Inquiry into ACT Budget 2021-22](#))

Members:

**MS J CLAY (Chair)
MS S ORR (Deputy Chair)
MR M PARTON**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

MONDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2021

**Acting Secretary to the committee:
Ms J Rafferty (Ph: 620 50557)**

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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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 2 pm.

Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women

Suburban Land Agency

Dietz, Mr John, Chief Executive Officer

Gordon, Mr Tom, Executive Director, Development Delivery

Tennent, Mr Simon, Development Director, Development Delivery, Greenfields Molonglo

Bulless, Mr Neil, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Program Solutions

Sharp, Ms Irena, Development Director, Development Delivery, Urban and Commercial

Thorman, Mr Rob, Senior Director, Program Solutions, Sustainability and Release Coordination

Holt, Mr Nicholas, Executive Director, Built Form and Divestment

Hillcrest, Ms Jessica, Program Manager, Housing Choice

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for coming to the 2021-22 ACT budget inquiry of the planning, transport and city services committee. First of all, the committee would like to acknowledge the traditional owners, the Ngunnawal people, and we would like to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and just note that sovereignty was never ceded. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are joining us here today from wherever you are.

The proceedings this afternoon will examine the expenditure proposals and revenue estimates for the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate and the Suburban Land Agency in relation to budget statements E. Before we start, we have got a little bit of housekeeping. I might just do a show of hands in the room: have all our witnesses seen and all our witnesses understand the privilege statement? If you can give me a thumbs up, that will be very helpful. Thank you. We are recording proceedings today and we are streaming those. You will get a chance to see the transcript and check that for accuracy. When you are taking a question on notice, if you can just clearly state you are taking that question on notice, that will help our secretariat.

With that, I will begin with the first question. Minister, we are a bit concerned about the practice of block scraping with SLA release blocks and we have been a bit concerned about this for a while. I note that some recent recommendations made by the National Capital Design Review Panel specifically recommended against block scraping, and I am just wondering if you have had a chance to integrate and absorb those recommendations and how you see that that might affect the SLA's work, moving forward.

Ms Berry: I am not sure that we have actually seen the recommendations that you are

referring to, but Tom Gordon can provide some information. Otherwise, we might have to take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: I will tell you a little more about what I was referring to. They made some recommendations in relation to some land releases in Molonglo, but they were fairly generic recommendations and they actually sounded like very good sense to me at the time. Instead of block scraping, which leads to a lot of run-off in our waterways and also leads to less ideal urban design, they were talking about mirroring the landscape a bit more rather than scraping blocks to build. That is the content that I am getting at.

Ms Berry: I will start with Mr Dietz and then Tom can maybe provide a little more detail.

Mr Dietz: I will pass to Tom and perhaps also Simon Tennent. There are some very specific project control measures that we have put in place at Whitlam. They are both our approach to block scraping but also our approach to ensuring that the work quality in Whitlam is also very much appropriate, knowing that it is a catchment area for the Molonglo into the Murrumbidgee River. I will hand to Tom.

Mr Gordon: I will hand to Simon to be more specific about what we are doing out at Whitlam, but generally in developing a suburb there are certain standards of grades and road inclines and open spaces for parks and ovals and things that necessarily require us to move large quantities of material around. As much as possible, we are controlling that through sediment control. Simon has been working with EPSDD in a lot of detail on improving upon the current standards, particularly in Whitlam. Simon, if you are there?

Mr Tennent: Certainly in the development of Whitlam there has been a real focus on trying to minimise the impact on the river reserve. The construction of stage 1 involved a couple of very large water retention ponds and until those were, I guess, activated there were some adverse outcomes from run-off. Since then, the quality of water leaving the Whitlam estate at the moment is very, very good. As Tom said, we have initiated, under our own steam, the Whitlam water quality project, which is something that we are doing in conjunction with EPSDD natural resource management team, as well as the EPA.

What we are doing there is just making sure that, right across all four stages, we are best managing stormwater run-off, right from design in terms of water-centred urban design right through to the construction phase. In Whitlam we have gone above and beyond what the EPA require of us, in terms of sediment and erosion.

We are seeing all sorts of measures like spray-on polymer on bare earth, as well as multiple-row sediment fences, additional water retention ponds and so forth. That has made a real impact, particularly now that we are into stage 2. The water monitoring, which we are also funding off our own bat, is suggesting that things have improved quite dramatically.

We are doing everything we can at the moment to make sure that Whitlam is, I guess, the best practice in terms of sediment and erosion control. It has been peer reviewed

by the natural resource management team in EPSDD and they have given it a fairly large tick. We think that we are on the right track with respect to water quality and also in terms of natural resource management.

THE CHAIR: Can you let me know when that practice changed?

Mr Tennent: Yes. That practice changed earlier this year. We had launched the project in April this year and this was to coincide with the commencement of construction in stage 2. There is a project plan that we are working to. We have got an independent water quality consultant as part of the team as well. Obviously we are just waiting for opportunities for that person to get on site and continue to monitor. That person has also had input into the actual construction contracts in terms of ensuring that our contractors are held accountable when it comes to not only setting up water quality measures but also maintaining and monitoring those measures as well.

It was around April this year and we saw immediate improvements in the months following.

MRS JONES: The economics of scraping down the land, can you go through that with us very briefly? I know certainly from my years of living in Gungahlin that it sometimes has been a very frustrating way of trying to build a garden and so on with not much topsoil. I know topsoil has been kept and replaced in some of these new suburbs, but can you explain why economically we do not just build on the land and only scrape down for the actual houses?

Mr Tennent: Tom, I am happy for you to take that one.

Mr Gordon: You may be aware that a number of the services that actually feed into the house or the home block are actually on a gravity basis. The sewerage and stormwater, particularly, are gravity fed. As I was mentioning earlier, we have certain limitations on the steepness of the roads that can go through.

Across the estate, generally what you are trying to do is direct the gravity feeds down to the lower point, which then connect into trunk services at the lower end of the suburb, which ultimately follow the low river courses or creek courses through a network of things down into the large water quality control ponds into the larger sewer network, which ultimately goes down into the lower Molonglo. Generally, in the suburb itself there is a level of land forming which needs to occur to ensure that every block can be serviced with those utilities.

MR PARTON: There was a ballot of 115 blocks in Taylor earlier in the month. Can anyone at the hearing tell me how many individuals registered to participate in that ballot and who was eligible to register? What was the eligibility to register for that ballot?

Mr Dietz: I will pass that question to Mr Neil Bulless. He has the specifics around the numbers for that particular ballot.

Mr Bulless: Mr Parton, the ballot was open to any individual or company. It was not

restricted to certain classes of potential purchasers. The ballot was open for a period of a week. We had in the order of 7½ thousand registrations. Once the registrations are finalised, there is a process of checking the validity of those processes. For example, we use a smart form now; when someone enters into a ballot process, the smart form has, as it suggests, smarts that eliminate people from putting in multiple registrations. Where it identifies similar, or same, names, email addresses, physical addresses or mobile phone contact numbers, it will prevent that person from lodging a second, third or fourth ballot registration.

After the ballot process closes, as you may know, we run a ballot draw. That puts all of the registrations into a sequential order. That is how people are selected to purchase a block. As part of that process, our legal service providers, Griffin Legal, will undertake a related parties check to ensure that people have not got through the smart form process and are putting in multiple applications for that process.

MR PARTON: That is sufficient information for me. So there were 115 winners out of this ballot, and 7,369 losers, by my count. I would direct questioning back to the minister. Minister, how can you possibly say that the SLA's intent is to support affordable living and housing choices when so many people have put their hand up to get a block of this nature? It is no wonder that Jon Stanhope has disowned his party over this issue. Can you convince me, Minister, that you are not letting down hardworking families?

Ms Berry: We can provide a little more detail on the process involved in making sure that we provide housing in suburbs where people want to live, while also making sure that we are providing homes in a sustainable way for the ACT community and delivering in such a way that the ACT government can deliver for the community with respect to free health care, free education and, more broadly, roads and other infrastructure.

There has been significant work through the housing strategy, which I know we will get to later on, and the Suburban Land Agency, in making sure that we deliver affordable land. It would be helpful for the committee to understand land provision not only across the ACT but across the region, and the price differences with respect to land provision in the ACT and across the region.

If we have missed something in your question, Mr Parton, we can come back to it. I will ask Mr Dietz to provide some of that detail for you.

Mr Dietz: As the minister states, one of the key expectations put on us is that we do the best that we can regarding affordability issues within the ACT. There are probably a couple of areas that we focus on, with guidance from our board, as to how we can help within the problem space.

Firstly, as the minister said, we deliver land as per the ILRP. It has been the government's intention relating to the ILRP to ensure that the supply that we are providing is in excess of underlying demand. When you look at the amounts that we have provided over the last four years, the ILRP, in its aggregation for those four years, has requested enough land for 14,663 dwellings over those four years. We have actually released 14,503, approximately. I think, by anyone's standard, coming within

one per cent of an indicative land release program is very good.

In delivering beyond the underlying demand, it takes the price pressure off the land. Within EPSDD—perhaps I will talk about that a little later—when they are looking to ensure that we deliver in excess of demand, they are using measures like population to ensure that they can estimate underlying demand.

MR PARTON: Mr Dietz, if I can interrupt, you are suggesting to me that these policies are taking price pressure off land. Over the weekend we had a block—granted, I know, that there is another private company that is involved in Denman Prospect—of 600-odd square metres go for \$1.2 million, or \$1,800 per square metre. How can you possibly suggest that what you are doing is taking pressure off the price of land?

Mr Dietz: If you look at the statistics since the SLA has been in play, from the time when the SLA was first established, the established housing market, as you suggest, has increased substantially. It has gone up probably 20 per cent over those four years. If you were to look at the price per metre of SLA land that has been sold, it has actually come down. I would argue that it has come down because there has been excess land provided over those four years.

Only 12 to 18 months ago we were in a position where we had between 600 and 400 blocks available over the counter. Anyone could walk in and say, “We need a block of land from the SLA,” and we could say, “Which of the 600 would you like to take?” That actually took price pressure off, and the statistics show that the price per square metre of SLA land has fallen over that period.

Ms Berry: Mr Parton, I believe—and correct me if I am wrong—that that is the most land that the Suburban Land Agency, or before that the Land Development Agency, has ever had available over the counter in the history of suburban land development, as I understand it—at least in the last decade.

The Suburban Land Agency has been doing its job, absolutely, having regard to the expectations of the ACT government. Some things have changed—and we have talked about this a number of times—regarding people’s decision-making over the last couple of years and why, all of a sudden, people are deciding to purchase homes rather than, perhaps, going on a holiday or making other investments. This is not a situation in relation to the ACT in isolation.

It would also be interesting for the committee to understand the price of land around the region compared to the ACT. Mr Dietz might have that information. We have had conversations about what that looks like. We can provide some examples of what is available around the region, in Jerrabomberra, Googong, Denman Prospect and Ginninderry, as opposed to what is available from the SLA.

MR PARTON: But the SLA drives so much—

THE CHAIR: Mr Parton, we probably have room for one more supp on this. Should it be your supp or Mr Cain’s supp?

MR PARTON: I am happy for Peter to have a crack at it. He is a good man.

MR CAIN: Mr Parton, right back at you. Minister, as Mr Parton has pointed out, the targets for the sale of blocks are not being met as we speak. Given the exorbitant prices on offer, it indicates that supply is way out of sync with demand. Why isn't more land being released to the ACT community for housing?

Ms Berry: As we were getting to in response to Mr Parton's question, Mr Cain, around the cost, which you are asking about now, and supply, we talked about the supply that was available 18 months ago—higher than has ever been seen in the ACT for at least the last decade. It is really helpful to understand the comparisons regarding the price of land across the region. Supply is one thing, but there are a lot of other factors involved.

Mr Dietz: I will ask Mr Neil Bulless to talk a little about the price comparisons regarding the developments, as requested by the minister. Before I do so, on the price analysis and the population growth, which is really part of that supply that is required, in the last year it has been estimated that 0.25 per cent of population growth was in the ACT, which was approximately 1,000 people. Given family formation rates, that suggests that there are probably about 400 extra families requiring housing in the ACT. In that same period, we delivered enough land for 3,000 houses.

When you look at the four-year period, it is a very similar figure. There is a population increase of about 21,500 people. We released enough land for 14,500 dwellings. Again, the family formation rate suggests that it is about 36,000 people.

Very much in support of the minister's position and most commentators would suggest, I would argue that a lot of the current peak in demand is from the demand side rather than the supply side. It is probably driven mostly by very low interest rates that have not been so low for a very long time. I will ask Mr Neil Bulless to answer regarding the pricing of different developments.

MR CAIN: But you are still missing your own targets.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, perhaps hold your supplementaries for a substantive question later on.

Mr Bulless: There are a couple of issues at play here. As is well known, the market over the last 12 months has been unprecedented. That is not unique to the ACT and it is not unique to any capital city or regional city in Australia. In fact, just last week the RBA issued the minutes from its meeting earlier in the month and it observed that this phenomenon is actually international. They quoted the US, UK, Canada and New Zealand as examples of where house prices are increasing.

The other issue, and Mr Dietz touched on this, is that we have been through a period of record low interest rates. Interest rates at the moment are around two per cent, which is about half of the inflation rate. Added to that, last year in particular, household savings peaked at 22 per cent in the June quarter. That has not occurred in the last 50 years. The combination of interest rates and savings has led to this strong market right across Australia and, in fact, internationally. The Reserve Bank noted that interest rates and the strength of individual household balance sheets is the

driving factor of house price increases.

The other thing I would say is that we are not selling land at \$1,800 a square metre. Last year we sold 1,400 blocks at a median price of \$406,000 or about \$770 a square metre. The average size, or the median size of those blocks, was 540 square metres.

We have no control over the fact that Denman has been selling land for prices up to \$1,800 a square metre. If a private individual chooses to auction blocks, and the market pays that, that is something that is completely out of our control.

Googong is also seeing increases in prices which are not dissimilar to those prices in Taylor. Where it was claimed that Googong was cheaper than Taylor, it certainly is not now. You are seeing private sector developers moving their prices to reflect the demand in the market.

The other thing that is quite obvious is that we are the only developer in the region that has continued to supply through the economic cycles. As you know, Mr Parton, there was a downturn in 2018-19. As Mr Dietz mentioned, we continued to deliver the ILRP through those downturns. Every other developer slowed down its development cycle and looked to reduce its inventories. When the market did come back, we were the only player that had substantial inventory available, and that is why we sold 1,400 single residential blocks last year.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Bulless. We might move away from this topic, but we can return to it. Ms Orr, do you have a substantive question?

MS ORR: I do. I also have a supplementary for that line of inquiry, but I will take the hint and come back to that later.

Minister, what place design consultations have you undertaken recently?

Ms Berry: Thanks for that question, Ms Orr; I know this is of particular interest to you as the Labor member for Yerrabi.

We have recently conducted some really important conversations with the Gungahlin community around the Gold Creek Homestead and the Gungahlin town centre. We have also been undertaking a program of place making consultation around Canberra. We have been doing it at Belconnen with the old police waterfront station and the circus site. For people who wonder why it is called the circus site, it is the site where the circus used to be in Belconnen when it came to town; it now has the unfortunate name of “circus site”.

The place making design consultation processes have been incredibly well received by all the communities that have been engaged in them. I might ask Mr Dietz to go through a bit of detail around the Gold Creek Homestead, which was probably the most recent one. There are Coombs and Molonglo, as well, with the new community site we are investigating down there. The Gold Creek Homestead was a great example of where we were able to use that consultation.

Mr Dietz: I might start by saying that it has been a strategic direction and intention by

the agency, backed by our board, to make place making essentially the way that we do business—to cement it as part of our core business as usual.

For those who might not understand place making, it is essentially ensuring that we are working with the community and with all major stakeholders to fully understand the history of a site—the past uses of a site and the current uses of a site—and how the intentions for that site, going forward, can be best managed.

Essentially, we come up with a vision based on the inputs of all of the appropriate stakeholders. We then help define that vision in what we call a place brief. If that is something like a greenfield development, then we can use that place brief to fully educate ourselves as to what success looks like through our development. If it is something like the release of land, then—as the minister said, Gold Creek, Belconnen, Molonglo, Moncrieff and Taylor are all sites that are now using it—it allows us to fully define to a prospective buyer what success will look like when they deliver.

We then go to the next step to ensure that when they respond to one of our tenders, we evaluate their response based on the criteria that have been defined within the place brief. That ensures that we are measuring the winner of that tender by the evaluation criteria that have been brought to us by the community.

In the example of Gold Creek, from memory, about 50 per cent of the evaluation criteria were on the place brief and the ability for the winning tender to meet the place brief; 30 per cent was on financials; and 20 per cent was on management experience and the ability for that company to actually deliver on their requirements.

Once we have sold, it is important that we can ensure that the contractor, or the buyer, fully delivers on their promises as part of that tender process.

Mr Dietz: Irena Sharp is the development manager for our urban renewal sites; she has managed the Gold Creek process and is also managing the circus site process. She may be able to provide a bit more detail.

Ms Sharp: The Gold Creek model was well developed together with the community panel that was put together for that site. The site was really significant, and we recognised its significance because it was a community-zoned site. We needed to not just produce the dwelling yield or the outcomes that were required from a planning perspective but also include the surrounding community and the broader community in the history and presence of the homestead, which is not heritage listed but clearly had value to the surrounding community.

It was really important to capture the ideas of people and the community about how they would like to use the site in the future when it is developed and to apply that thinking to the future design. Over and over through this place, we see design briefs where the design fundamentally changes as it takes into account future aspects of use by the existing community, not just the new community.

With the Belconnen lake shore release, we extended this thinking beyond the site boundary itself. We looked at what sites in a similar area we were looking to release. Apart from having the water police site still sitting on our inventory for re-release, we

had what we referred to as the circus site to be released in the 2021-22 year. A couple of years later, we still have the release of the Lathlain Street precinct in the indicative land release program.

It became evident to us that these three sites were linked, or should be linked, in the future, and that the residential component of the Lathlain Street precinct should have access to the circus site and the water police site or that inlet area. Connecting these sites and looking at the broader use beyond just the sites themselves was extremely important.

So we have developed another level of place design brief that deals with what the communities want to see within sites themselves and also how they see transitioning from one area of Belconnen down to another area of Belconnen. That was absolutely recognising that Emu Inlet is becoming largely the backyard for most of the high-rise developments in the area and we should not be delivering developments without the opportunity to have pedestrians travel from one end to the other.

This was an amazing process to undertake with the Belconnen community, which was very much on board and understood what we were looking for. We had a great diversity of participants, from schoolchildren to teenagers, the sea scouts, residents next door and the Westfield shopping centre. Industry came on board to tell us what they feel should occur in this area.

What was really important, because we undertook this consultation during the tricky COVID period, was that we were very flexible about the types of engagements we could undertake, when we could undertake them, and the variety of ways we could approach communities to talk about this site.

It ultimately resulted in a document that tells us a lot about what is not desirable from a community's perspective and also about what is desirable but what would be the ultimate solution if we could achieve that. This is the message that we have embedded in our tender documents for the Belconnen lake shore.

As Mr Dietz pointed out for the Gold Creek project, we applied the same process as for the Belconnen lake shore project. That means that 50 per cent of the weighted criteria of the design solution for these sites is attributable to the response to the place design brief; 30 per cent is attributable to the financial offer; and the remaining 20 per cent is split between capacity, capability and the project delivery time frame.

MS ORR: That is good; I was going to ask about the different elements of the land release and how it is all covered in this place making.

Mr Dietz, on behalf of my former lecturers, I would like to thank you for your very good definition of what place making is. I think that they would be very proud and give you a HD for explaining that so clearly.

You made a comment that during COVID you have had to push out and find different ways to engage with communities and that it is giving you a really good brief. I am interested to hear some of the ways that you have failed to communicate—things that you would not necessarily have done previously or things you might be more open to

use in the future that bring more people into the conversation of planning and planning outcomes.

Ms Berry: COVID has definitely presented some challenges in how we communicate with community as a government and also within the Suburban Land Agency. I might ask Mr Dietz to talk through some of the ways that we have utilised—

Mr Dietz: Thank you, Minister. I might talk a bit about communications within the agency and then throw to Mr Neil Bulless to talk about the Mingle program, which had some significant challenges when we were working through the COVID period. Then there might be a chance for Simon Tennent to talk a bit about some of the approaches we were taking in the Coombs-Wright area as we were doing a place making-type approach there.

THE CHAIR: It would be lovely to hear all that, but I note that we have a number of visiting MLAs, so I will jump in soon and move this along to make sure that everybody gets a chance to ask a question.

Mr Dietz: Fantastic; we will be very quick. Internally, we looked for engagement that was outside the norm. We had collaborations with staff; there were singing collaborations and dancing collaborations. It was to ensure that our staff remain engaged. I might hand over to Neil Bulless to talk a bit about Mingle.

Mr Bulless: The main thing we have had to do, given the disruption paragon that has very much been prevalent for the last 18 months, is use communication through electronic means or social distancing means. Whether that be through Mingle, stakeholder engagement or our marketing, it has been done through electronic direct messaging or mail, social media channels, and subscriber lists. There has been direct contact between us and our customer bases, our Mingle communities.

When we were allowed to, based on restrictions, we did things like socially distanced events such as walks, coffee crawls and things like that. That allowed us to have contact with the community in an appropriate way. Another thing that we did, which we have never done before, is kick off Mingle in Whitlam well before people had moved into Whitlam. We started our presence there in April this year. Recently we had our first resident move in. That is a very different model; it is about establishing a really strong community connection between the SLA and the community well before the people physically move in.

Perhaps Simon can talk about some of the stakeholder engagement we have undertaken.

Mr Tennent: Very quickly—I am mindful of time—I can say that, similar to what Irena described for the circus site, the Coombs and Wright village was taken to the community through both the YourSay survey and a targeted community panel. The outcome of that was a very clear message back to the SLA about the uses on that highly contentious enclave of sites around the Coombs shops. We have ended up with a really good result, but what is even more pleasing is that we have gone to tender on that and the response from the industry has been extremely good.

Just to pick up on the place making theme, it has been very successful. That consultation was very effective, particularly with the Molonglo Valley Community Forum.

MR BRADDOCK: I would like to draw attention to the government commitments to 30 per cent tree canopy cover and the 30 per cent permeable surfaces in the living infrastructure plan. Can you please explain how the SLA is incorporating those targets into its activities?

Ms Berry: Whitlam is a good example of a site where we are using innovative ways to make sure that we have trees that provide that canopy cover but also trees that live into the future to be able to provide that canopy cover. I will ask Mr Dietz to provide some more detail.

Mr Dietz: Essentially, there are two aspects to the way the SLA ensures that we are delivering on government policies such as tree canopy and the others that you identify. The first is that we need to ensure that we deliver the legislation. The Territory Plan has a lot of requirements when we are building a development—things like tree retention, environmental impact statements, and statements of heritage effect. All of these ensure that we are providing an appropriate outcome that meets government legislation requirements. The second is that, through the minister's letter of expectations, she requires us to look at other ways we can ensure we are meeting the government's policy. That essentially is a decision through our board as part of our strategy.

We then have a very specific strategy around sustainability which ensures four key themes: resilient communities; zero-emissions suburbs; responsible consumption and production; and healthy, prosperous and inclusive places. When we look at what that has identified, there are very specific projects that we are looking at in different developments to meet those strategies.

In Molonglo, we have not yet talked about no gas but we did talk about the water quality project. The community hub is also a project which provides us with ways to help educate and pilot certain schemes around the types of water-sensitive urban design on a home, which is beneficial. Probably Rob Thorman is the best person to talk about that. Rob can also talk about some of our approaches towards ensuring that the 30 per cent tree canopy initiatives are in place there.

Mr Thorman: My Webex is playing up today, so I apologise if there is a technical glitch. I was going to show you the beautiful *Climate Wise Garden Designs* book that I have in front of me that we put together to assist residents who are moving into our suburbs to assist them in their own gardens as one way of increasing canopy within the suburbs. But a lot of the requirement for the 30 per cent canopy target is going to be met in the public domain in the area that we have control over, both in the street trees and in the public parks and the protection of remnant vegetation.

If we look at Taylor, for example, if we look at the suburb boundary within Taylor, it borders the hills. We have been able to protect quite a lot of vegetation that comes out of the hills down towards the suburb, so we have the trees that we have been able to plant—in Taylor, for example, we have planted 8,100 trees—and the remnant

vegetation that has been left in the suburb. It is difficult to say right now what the canopy cover is going to be at maturity; it is going to depend on how well the trees grow. But we are pretty confident that we are heading towards the 30 per cent in that example.

One of the things we have identified in our sustainability strategy is the need to do some more baseline data collection and some estimates. It is one of the bodies of work we have identified to do a bit more research on.

Another thing I would like to draw the committee's attention to is a joint project that we have done with EPSDD to pilot the living infrastructure policy. We have done that in the Whitlam display village. As John said, we have a lot of requirements on us when we develop estates, and that includes municipal standards. TCCS has a set of engineering requirements. Engineering requirements, by rights, need to be conservative, because we do not want systems failing. But one of the things we are testing with TCCS is some different ways of getting water off the roads into tree pits. We have been doing some experimental pilot testing on the basis that the SLA is holding onto the display village public assets for a number of years and together we can research and see how these systems work. If they are successful, we may be able to roll them out, and it may be able to inform the standards across the ACT. So we are doing some piloting work, and we have some monitoring going on to test the additional tree growth and test whether we can get better canopy by getting greater infiltration and more use of permeable paving. We are piloting a number of applications there.

MR BRADDOCK: You say you are pretty confident you will be able to get to 30 per cent in those suburbs. What do you base that confidence on? Do you do modelling? How are you coming to that assessment?

Mr Thorman: Yes. When you say modelling, it is assumptions of the ultimate tree canopy. It is a very good question, because often assumptions are made. If we have another decade of drought, for example, that is going to affect tree growth. There are certain assumptions based on looking at what has happened in the past with tree growth.

With a change in climate, one of the issues that we need to look at is what are the most appropriate species to plant that are still going to thrive. That is some work that TCCS has been doing, but we need to make sure that the plants we are planting now are going to be thriving in 30 years.

MRS JONES: Minister, was the Suburban Land Agency consulted about the two-year delay to the first commercial land release for the Molonglo commercial centre?

Ms Berry: We will see if there is some information on that; otherwise, we might have to take a bit of it on notice. We will do what we can.

Mr Dietz: To answer the question directly, we are part of the consultation that EPSDD does as part of its ILRP.

MRS JONES: So was that a yes?

Mr Dietz: Yes; we were involved in discussions around that.

MRS JONES: Has the Suburban Land Agency advocated for the en globo release of the core commercial land at that same Molonglo commercial group centre to a single developer?

Mr Dietz: Could you repeat the question just to make sure I understand exactly your point?

MRS JONES: Yes. Has the SLA advocated for the en globo release of the core commercial land at the Molonglo commercial centre to one single developer?

Mr Dietz: No.

MRS JONES: Is the two-year delay to the commercial centre consistent with the Suburban Land Agency's aspiration for the development of the Molonglo Valley?

Mr Dietz: I am not sure it is consistent with the aspiration of the development of the Molonglo Valley. I will say that the Molonglo commercial centre has not yet completed the appropriate strategic planning and due diligence for it to be handed to the SLA for—

MRS JONES: Correct. Thank you very much.

MR CAIN: I am looking at a summary table of the release targets versus actual sales from July 2018 to pretty much current. It appears that of the target of 3,500 single residential blocks, fewer than 1,500 blocks have actually been sold. Please explain this. That is about 40 per cent of the target. We should expect a satisfactory release under the indicative land release program.

Mr Dietz: I would not mind understanding a bit more about the figures you provide. When I look at our ability to meet release targets, our release abilities in the last year were very close to the 3,000 that were required. When I aggregate over the four years, again, it has been very close.

I would remind you that the indicative land release program is indicative. It is put in place with the best understanding at a particular point in time. However, with the complexities of developmental land release where there are significant approval processes and environmental processes contingent on engagement, if there were not some changes that occurred, we probably would not be providing integrity on the process. However, I seem to have a different view on our ability to meet the release targets, and I would be very keen to understand where your figures have come from.

MR CAIN: I am talking about the actual sales that have occurred.

Mr Bulless: This is of single residential blocks?

MR CAIN: Yes.

Mr Dietz: Something to understand there is the disjoint between release, exchange and settlements. There is always a time frame between when product is released and when it is registered as a settlement within our system. That can be as short as three months, but often, over time, it can be as long as a year. That probably goes to some extent to answering your question. But when I look at our budgeted revenue for this year, we budgeted 806 million and delivered on 806 million—807 million, sorry.

MR CAIN: I have some familiarity with this. I fail to see how the delay between exchange and settlement accounts for a 40 per cent shortfall from your target.

Mr Dietz: I will throw to Mr Neil Bulless, who I know has done some research on these particular numbers. Neil, could I ask you to talk through some of the differences that are driven by whether the number that Mr Cain is talking about is in the Ginninderry joint venture numbers or whether it is just for those that were released or settled. Could you take us in detail through what we believe is the resolution between the two figures?

Mr Bulless: Yes. Mr Cain, I am not sure where the 1,500 comes from, but I am assuming it is coming from, perhaps, some of the land and property reports, which really only record the SLA sales. What our records suggest is that if you were to add the SLA settlements plus the joint venture settlements plus our inventory and our put and calls that are currently sitting with builders, and you also take into account in this financial year blocks which have exchanged from previous releases which are to settle this financial year, that gives you, purely for single residential blocks, about 2,900 dwellings. If you then add to that the compact blocks—when we release stock to the market, we call it compact, and the ultimate outcome of that, whether it is a single residential dwelling or it is an attached product such as a terrace, for example, is ultimately beholden to the developer who purchases those blocks—the difference between the 3,500 that you are quoting, which I believe comes from three ILRPs and figures quoted in those ILRPs about the release of single residential blocks, with, we believe, about 500-odd attached dwellings, then, if you sum that to the 2,900, that gives you about 3,400.

As Mr Dietz explained, over the period of the last four years since the SLA was created, there will always be reasons why there will be variances across each year in terms of the ability for us or the joint venture to release the numbers in the ILRP. For example, the joint venture, when it started to release land some four years ago, was delayed through various ACAT processes, which meant that it was unable to release the planned number of dwellings in the first two years of its life, in 2017-18 and 2018-19.

There are other impacts where yields within the suburb are different from what was put in the ILRP once it has gone through the processes and the due diligence that is handed over to us from EPSDD. These impacts will result in minor variations to the program.

If you look at the totality, we believe that the figures you have quoted are broadly the figures in the ILRP, which the SLA and the joint venture have delivered.

MR CAIN: My focus is single detached dwellings—single detached blocks of land,

not dwellings.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, if you have a specific report with specific figures, would you like to put it on notice and get a specific answer?

MR CAIN: Thank you, Chair. I will do that.

THE CHAIR: Minister, in our latest indicative land release program, 54 per cent of new residences to 2025-26 will be infill, but we have a 70 per cent infill target. What steps are you taking to make sure we meet that 70 per cent infill target in light of those 2025-26 figures?

Ms Berry: That is a question you should ask of EPSDD and Minister Gentleman.

THE CHAIR: Sure; in which case I will hand over to Mr Parton.

MR PARTON: I have seen some correspondence from a very disappointed young first homebuyer who believes that they were misled about the Whitlam land release ballot. I want briefly to run this past those here and see whether I can get a response.

This person received a series of marketing emails about the Whitlam ballot, including one notifying them that they had managed to secure one of the 200 sales appointments drawn from the 7,566 individual registrations for the ballot. Although it was on your website, nowhere in the communication did it say that only 92 blocks would be available.

On the day of the appointment to purchase the block, and having prepared everything, including the deposit, a conveyancer and a mortgage broker, this first homebuyer received an email at 8.52 am stating that all 92 blocks had been sold. Why wasn't the actual number of blocks for sale transparently and regularly communicated to participants in the Whitlam "book to buy" event?

Mr Dietz: At a very high level, we have received 27,000 registrations in the last 12 months for our blocks that we have released. I remember hearing about and responding to this particular issue. From memory, our review showed that the information that provided the number of blocks was clearly available in our communication with the particular person. I might ask Neil Bulless whether he remembers this specific case; if not, I am happy to take that on notice.

Ms Berry: Mr Bulless, without going into detail on the individual, perhaps you can provide some broader information around the ballot process in Whitlam.

Mr Bulless: Obviously, we are dealing with an individual, and we have had correspondence with the individual you are quoting, Mr Parton. When we investigated the issue, it was very apparent to us that there were multiple communications from the SLA about the number of blocks that were being offered, and that was from the very outset of the offering of these blocks.

I can understand that the person was disappointed to miss out on selecting a block. At the end of the day, though, it was also very clear that we were over-allocating the

number of appointments, because our experience in this process is that if you have 92 blocks, you will need more than 92 people to be invited to attend the appointment process.

The reason is that some individuals have their heart set on one particular block, and that goes before they get their appointment. It could be that they have a price range, and the blocks that they are interested in have sold previously. It could also be the fact that they want a particular style of block, whether it is a sloping block or a flat block and, when it gets to their appointment, those blocks are no longer available.

We did investigate this issue. We were very clear in our communication. I appreciate that the person was disappointed, but we are confident that our agents did not mislead that person.

MR PARTON: Does the fact that 27,000 people expressed an interest in detached blocks suggest that maybe you are not releasing enough?

Mr Bulless: As Mr Dietz indicated, we release the indicative land release program. We release what is given to us each year. I would also note that, with the 27,000, I would suspect that a number of people have registered for multiple events over the last year. I do not think it is 27,000 unique people. I think there are a number of people who register for every one of our events. As I mentioned before, what we have seen in the last year is unprecedented. We have never seen interest in buying land like this in the ACT in the history of land supply.

MS ORR: Can I get a little information about the affordable home sale scheme and how you are making more homes accessible at different price points?

Ms Berry: To do it justice, it does need more than three minutes, but we can have a crack at providing a bit of information about the affordable home process, which, of course, is in the government's statement of expectations to the Suburban Land Agency, and it is supported by the board of the agency as well. It is something that we are all working very hard to deliver on, in a whole range of different ways.

Mr Dietz: You are right; first is definitely the ACT government's Affordable Home Purchase Scheme. Fifteen per cent of our developments, on average, are allocated to the scheme. People who are in a particular income threshold and who have not owned property are then eligible to purchase, within a ballot process, this particular stock that comes from our developments. I will hand over to Nick Holt, who is responsible for delivering the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme.

Mr Holt: I might defer to Jessica Hillcrest; she is the program manager. She might be able to give a bit more accurate information in the time frame available. I would just be talking generally.

Ms Hillcrest: With the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme, as the minister and John outlined, when we sell blocks of land, where there are housing targets in place, we apply requirements to those sites for a certain number of dwellings to be sold at certain price thresholds. Those dwellings are sold to eligible buyers who meet the criteria, and we provide an opportunity to match the eligible buyers with properties

that meet their needs. We provide offerings through a ballot process, which gives eligible buyers the chance to identify whether those properties suit them. The fixed price thresholds are consistent with what is established for us by EPSDD in accordance with the housing strategy.

Also, in the affordable space we are investigating some other initiatives which will provide additional options in terms of shared equity. That is something we are looking at. We are also looking at build to rent. Those are some of the initiatives we are looking at in the affordable housing space.

THE CHAIR: We will move on to our next session, with different witnesses. That is the end of our session with the Suburban Land Agency. Thank you very much for appearing today. You will be sent a copy of the transcript for review.

Short suspension.

Appearances:

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

Ponton, Mr Ben, Director-General

Brady, Dr Erin, Deputy Director-General, Planning and Sustainable Development

Sendaba, Ms Bethel, Executive Branch Manager, Planning and Sustainable Development

THE CHAIR: Welcome again to our second estimates session of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport, and City Services. We are now with the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate officials. Could anyone who has just joined the room, please do a thumbs-up that you have read and you understand and agree with the privilege statement. Thank you very much.

Minister, I would love to have a bit of a chat about what work is going on to get greater access for community housing sites. This has come up in a few contexts recently. We had a bit of a call, on our first community day, from the MBA and the Property Council for making more community land, church land and other sorts of things available for community partnerships. Are you able to talk us through that in this session?

Ms Berry: Thanks, Ms Clay. I can probably talk about bits of it, but not entirely. It sits across a number of different portfolio areas and particularly in the indicative land release program as well. Of course, we will work very closely with community housing providers. Sorry, I should say that there was also work done under the previous hearing with the Suburban Land Agency around supply of land for community housing providers to purchase. I might take that part of it on notice—because there is a pretty easy answer to that—so that you will be able to understand what the Suburban Land Agency has done in that space, in having land available and working with community housing providers to ensure that it meets their needs and the needs of the community. I might have to—

Mr Ponton: Sorry, minister, if you are comfortable, I was just going to note that in relation to the community needs work, and then feeding that into the indicative land release program, that really is a matter for the planning sessions on Thursday. Minister Gentleman has portfolio responsibility for that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Ponton. I will be happy to hold that question for Thursday's session, in which case I will pass over to Mr Parton.

MR PARTON: Minister, in regard to the housing strategy output—budget statements E, output 6.3, pages 22 onwards to 31—one of the major initiatives is the next phase of the growth and renewal program, including your commitment with your junior coalition partner to add 400 more dwellings to the public housing stock. Could I ask how many of the 400 have been completed so far, either through construction or purchase?

Ms Berry: Sorry, Mr Parton. We are in the wrong session, and that is a question you should have asked in the previous housing committee.

Mr Ponton: I can probably explain. Sorry, minister; Mr Parton is looking puzzled. It does appear in our statement because you will see that there is a zero against 2021-22. That is because we were accounting for when this was the responsibility of the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, but it has not been there for about a year or so now. It is now with Housing ACT.

MR PARTON: Okay. So we are making that null and void, and we will go on notice through another session. Chair, I am in your hands as to whether I have now bombed out or whether I have another real question.

MS ORR: Chair, I have a supplementary question. Do you mind if I check if it is a bomb-out like Mr Parton's, before we move on?

Ms Berry: I was just going to suggest it is for Friday's session, Mr Parton.

MR PARTON: Friday's session. Okay.

THE CHAIR: Go ahead, Ms Orr. We will come back to you, Mr Parton.

MS ORR: Yes. Can I just check mine? I did want to ask about the public housing investment and just how important that was to the overall housing strategy. Is that something I would ask today, or is it something for Friday?

Ms Berry: Probably Friday.

MS ORR: It looks as if Mr Parton and I have our first questions for Friday.

THE CHAIR: Mr Parton, I am happy to go back to you for a fresh question, if you would like.

MR PARTON: All right. I will see how I go here. Budget statements E, page 9, build to rent. In relation to that scheme, is it expected that build to rent projects will have their own zoning controls and category?

Ms Berry: I think that is planning, Mr Parton.

Mr Ponton: Mr Parton, if you had a question on build-to-rent, we could talk in terms of this portfolio—the budget item that relates to the feasibility for build-to-rent in Gungahlin—but in relation to the question that you are asking, that is for the planning session on Thursday.

MR PARTON: Let me reassess. Chair, you can move on and come back to me when it suits.

THE CHAIR: There will be time.

MS ORR: Chair, can I make a quick suggestion. Could the minister or Mr Ponton just give us a quick update on where the different bits fall so we know where to prioritise our questions for this session?

Ms Berry: Yes. This is confusing for the committee; I understand that. This part is the actual delivery of the housing strategy, but not on the public housing. So it is on things like the affordable housing dwelling commitments, the PAGA agreement items.

Mr Ponton: Correct. The housing strategy itself, of course, has a number of responsible agencies. So if the questions relate to those particular items, that would be for those agencies. If it relates to the broader strategy itself, and reporting on the strategy, then we can take those questions. But this session is about the housing strategy itself and the policy work that sits around that. So EPSDD has responsibility for housing policy, so if there are particular housing policy questions, we could take those. If it would help, we could give an overview of the status of the actions in the housing strategy, noting that the government is currently considering the third-year report card on that—as, of course, we do issue a report card at the end of each year.

THE CHAIR: Ms Orr, would you like that overview for your substantive question?

MS ORR: I think I will have time to ask my other substantive question later, so that is fine. Do that and I will come back with another question after, yes.

Mr Ponton: Okay. Before we do that, I should also just note that, given that there are a number of questions relating to the indicative land release program, the policy aspects of that relate to the planning portfolio and Minister Gentleman. Whereas in the previous session, Mr Dietz was about the delivery of that then. So I might ask Dr Brady in the first instance—unless Dr Brady suggests I go to Ms Sendaba directly to give, perhaps, an overview of the current status of the housing strategy.

Dr Brady: Thank you, Mr Ponton. I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. As Mr Ponton said, we are just doing the reporting for the third year on the housing strategy. The housing strategy came out in 2018 and we have done two rounds of annual reporting on those.

As Mr Ponton said, there are 74 actions around five goals in the planning strategy, and a number of those actions fall across different agencies. Quite a number of them do fall to ACT Housing and the CSD. Of those, you can look at the goals, and one of them falls largely to us around building and planning, and the others are probably a bit more for CSD and ACT Housing. Over the last few years, we have progressed quite a few of the actions within the strategy. We have categorised the actions as short-term, which is zero to three years; medium term, which, I think, is four to seven; and then longer-term. So, some of them are ongoing and some of them have been completed.

So I get the numbers right, I will refer to my notes. Against the 67 short-term, medium-term and ongoing actions, 14 are completed, four are in development, 33 are progressing and 16 are continuing. There are now 14 further completed actions—five completed in 2018-19 and nine completed in 2019-20. The third-year report card, when it is considered by government, will show our progress on the short term, and then we will be moving more into the medium term. But a lot of those are, over time, progressing collaboration across different directorates. Some of the actions within that relate to better engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and looking at different ways of funding for those. That one falls a bit more to community services and JACS.

Some of the ones that we have look at some of the funding that the government has provided in recent years around the Innovation Fund and looking at ways that we can try to assist with rental properties—getting reduced rates of rent and working with community housing providers in those sorts of things. There are number of quite positive actions that we have progressed in that regard. Ms Sendaba might be able to talk to more of those, if you would like to hear about more of the actions that we have progressed.

THE CHAIR: That might have given a bit of an overview for the committee so that we can direct our questions. What do you think, committee colleagues?

MS ORR: Yes; I think I have a supplementary question to that. I believe one of the items in the strategy is the land and property report. Can you provide an update to the committee on the release of that report?

Dr Brady: I might start and then Ms Sendaba might jump in. The land and property report is connected in part to the land release program. It looks at what the supply and demand are. We have been catching up in recent years to document what the supply and demand are across Canberra, but it gives a snapshot of the housing supply and demand of Canberra. I am not sure, Bethel, if you want to add a bit more to that.

Ms Sendaba: No; I think that sums it up pretty well. There are a number of reports covering different time periods that have been published. The most recent report for the January to June 2021 period is currently being drafted. We anticipate that that one will be published shortly as well.

MS ORR: Okay. Thanks, Chair.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, do you have a substantive?

MR CAIN: I do. Can I check whether it fits? It is regarding the affordable home purchase scheme.

Ms Berry: We did that in the last session, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: So the answer is no, it does not?

Ms Berry: Yes. Chair, this is not unusual, and nobody should feel as though they are getting this wrong, but this seems to happen with every one of our estimates hearings with regard to the strategy, Housing ACT and the inability to make them combine. There is always a lot of confusion. Mr Parton might recall this from previous years. I think we will have to put on notice for future estimates or hearings that we need to work out something better in this space, because it is obviously not working very well for any of us.

MR PARTON: Surely it would be a better option—maybe it is something for me to discuss with the chair for a possible recommendation—to roll the two in together and have all the officials available. This session says that it is about output class 6.3, housing strategy. When we get to that in the budget papers, it goes straight to

publishing the annual affordable community and public housing targets. Mr Cain has asked a question about that and has been told it is not in this session. I am at a loss.

Ms Berry: Sorry, Mr Parton, but Mr Cain's specific question was around the affordable housing program, which is delivered by the Suburban Land Agency. We covered that in the last session. The targets are definitely in this session.

MR PARTON: I do not think he finished his question, and I happen to know what I think his question was going to be because—

Ms Berry: Oh, really?

THE CHAIR: We will let Mr Cain finish his own question and then we will see where it lies. Let us try that.

MR CAIN: Okay, but I would like to go to a substantive if this one is out of scope. I certainly agree that the planning committee should be clear, and that is the minister's responsibility, in my view.

Ms Berry: It is not mine.

MR CAIN: Regarding the AHPS, budget statements E mention the ACT housing strategy year 2 report card. I understand that the Suburban Land Agency has 20 sites earmarked for public and community housing, but that none had been released as at January this year. Are we on topic?

Ms Berry: Partially, Mr Cain. But in regard to your comment about whose responsibility it is, that is the committee office's responsibility in setting these sessions up. The ministers just turn up as witnesses and respond to the questions that are asked.

I will probably have to take that one notice, because it really is an SLA question. I will take it on notice.

MR CAIN: Am I able to proceed to another substantive, Chair?

THE CHAIR: I think you might have done your dash on that one, but I am sure Mr Parton will cover off whatever topic you were after.

Minister, I confess that I primarily wanted to chat about community housing partnerships and the release of sites in Canberra, noting that only around half a per cent of residences have currently been released for community partnership housing. Is that a question you want to take on notice for the SLA?

Ms Berry: Yes, I will, thanks.

THE CHAIR: I might put in a detailed question on notice for that one. I will hand straight over to Mr Parton.

Ms Berry: I should say, just to clarify, that these were combined last year and the

committee hearing last year did work much better. This year, the separation has meant that we have not got everybody here or do not have the right teams available to respond to all the questions that the committee is asking. I acknowledge that there is some confusion with this.

MR PARTON: As stated in the guidelines, we are on budget statements E, output 6.3. Minister, in regard to your housing strategy generally, you have something like a \$660 million program on the go, if I have counted all the bits of the jigsaw. How do you go about developing your assessment for public and social housing needs across different budget cycles?

Ms Berry: That is a housing question for Friday, I think.

MR PARTON: I am not sure that we are going to have much joy here, because we have just gone to the section of the budget papers indicated in the running sheet. That is what we have developed for this session.

THE CHAIR: Mark, can you make sure that the questions you want to ask will be covered in the Friday session?

MR PARTON: Which I think is a mammoth 30-minute session, is it not?

Ms Berry: Yes, I think so.

MR PARTON: It should be chock-a-block.

MS ORR: I think as part of the strategy there is a public housing allocation of 15 per cent. Can I ask how the government is performing against that aspect of the strategy?

Ms Berry: So—

MS ORR: That is a housing one? It is Friday?

Ms Berry: No. We can talk to it, but we did respond to this a bit in the last session, with the Suburban Land Agency—that we have been meeting or exceeding those targets since they were developed. I think Ms Sendaba can add some more detail.

Ms Sendaba: When I spoke earlier, I should have said that I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

In the housing strategy there is an ongoing commitment each year through the indicative land release program to assign 15 per cent of eligible residential housing releases for community, public and affordable housing, across the three different categories. Community housing is sites designated for release for community housing providers. Public housing is dedicated releases for public housing. Affordable purchase housing makes up the remainder of the target. They are the dwellings that are released through the affordable home purchase program which the SLA manage through the land release program.

Each year since that policy has come into effect, we have met the target in terms of

the signing, hitting that 15 per cent target. The targets are assigned and allocated to a particular site, so if, for whatever reason, a site is not released in that financial year, the target stays with that site; we have a rolling program to make sure that there is no loss ultimately in the dwellings that are released there. For this financial year and just through the most recent budget, I will just pull up the—

Dr Brady: I think we have 307 in the land release program this year.

Ms Sendaba: And the 307 this year can be broken down into 34 community, 155 public and 122 affordable.

MS ORR: That answers my question. I can have a stab at another substantive, Chair, whenever you are ready.

MR CAIN: Regarding the achievement of 400 more dwellings to the public housing stock—

Ms Sendaba: I believe the additional 400, including those previously allocated for public housing, would be a matter for CSD. I believe they are taking lead of that one through their housing portfolio. Certainly, where the work that we do may support that is through an allocation of particular sites. That may assist Housing ACT in having available land for that target of affordable housing. They will be able to advise on the range of different ways in which they are working towards achieving that target.

MR CAIN: I will put that question on notice.

THE CHAIR: You will lodge a question on notice separately?

MR CAIN: Yes.

MS ORR: In relation to the housing strategy, I think Dr Brady said earlier—if I understood correctly—that the next round of reporting is coming up and you will be looking at how the targets are being met and how the different parts of the strategy are progressing. I just wanted to get an idea of how often you are looking at the strategy—because it is quite a longer period document—and how you position the strategy through its life course to make sure that it is responding to a lot of the issues that we see come up.

Dr Brady: From our perspective, the approach we take with a lot of strategies is to set a five-year time frame; we think that is a reasonable time to look at it. We are looking at this all the time because we do the annual reporting. I think that will inform us. We are coming up to our third year, and this is usually about the time that we think about contextual factors and whether there some things we need to change: what do we need to look at or are we tracking okay? Some of the broader market changes that have happened are something that we monitor, and we monitor those with others across different directorates as well. Ms Sendaba may have more to add to that.

Ms Sendaba: I would agree and would just add that the strategy is made up of—I think this was mentioned in response to a previous question—a series of actions, some of which are ongoing. There are some things that we have just committed to do every

year, like setting the housing targets. Some things are short term—they have a two- to three-year time frame—and other things are longer term. There is also some policy investigation work.

As we move into the next phase, getting to the end of three years, there is certainly scope in the way some of the actions are stated to take into account current settings. From that, new ideas might come forward and policy proposals for how we might address emerging issues. There are actions in there, for example, for ongoing and continued engagement with the community housing providers. We speak to them fairly regularly and are certainly getting feedback on the actions in the strategy.

MS ORR: Of the 14 actions that you said are being completed, can you just run me through what they are?

Dr Brady: Ms Sendaba might be more across those.

Ms Sendaba: I am just going to pull up the year 2 report card. The report card is available. I am happy to provide that to committee members so that you can see the detailed reporting that has been provided on the actions within the strategy.

MS ORR: I did not really mean for you to list all 14. I just wanted to get an idea of what they were. You can take a bit of a higher-level approach to that. I was keen to hear about the sorts of things that are progressing, like the land tax exemption scheme for the community housing providers. I just wanted to get a bit more of an update on the things that have progressed under the strategy and the impacts that we are starting to see as a result of those.

Ms Berry: These are the kinds of policy areas that we were referring to as part of the housing strategy and what this session actually deals with. One of the actions that came out of the housing strategy through previous budgets was the innovation fund. You might recall that there were a number of opportunities as part of that fund to investigate work and other opportunities within our community, particularly around working with organisations like CatholicCare, to change the zoning on church land in order to build. I think this goes to your first question, Ms Clay, which was around provision of land supply for organisations like churches.

In this circumstance, we are working with CatholicCare to investigate the use of church land for the development of affordable housing models. They were provided with some funding in that space. Of course, there are land tax exemptions for people in the ACT who have investment properties and want to be good social landlords and rent out their properties at a lower rate—75 per cent of the market. They get a land tax exemption from the government to be able to deliver that. I do not have the number, but I think it is only around 75 houses, which is a bit disappointing. I make the call for anybody who has any properties that they are renting now to consider renting those out at an affordable rate and get that land tax exemption. Hopefully, that will provide more affordable rentals to the market as well.

The other work that is being investigated under the strategy includes the build-to-rent model around affordable rentals as part of the innovation scheme, as well as the YWCA YHomes to deliver supportive housing for older women in Canberra. I note

the YWCA's challenges at the moment to deliver their housing project in Ainslie because of some significant opposition within the community to that project, which is a shame because it will provide some really good, stable housing for older women who need that support.

Is there more, Ms Sendaba, that you could add to that, or have I covered it?

Ms Sendaba: You have covered it largely, Minister. I might just mention some of the other projects that received an innovation grant and some of the outcomes from that work. The innovations grant program was run over two rounds. Some of the other outcomes—in addition to the work that the YWCA and CatholicCare have progressed—include Community Housing Canberra establishing an affordable rental real estate management model, known as Homeground Canberra. We have had an organisation called the Environmental Collective Housing Organisation develop plans for a co-housing project on two blocks of land. That was supported by the innovation grant. We also had Summer Foundation Ltd set up a specialist disability housing support program. They have assisted more than 20 individuals in finding accommodation. We have also had Rights and Inclusion Australia create a platform to assist people with disabilities in the ACT by identifying a range of suitable housing options available to them. Those are some of the several projects that were completed under the innovation grants.

Ms Berry: Somebody asked how often we look at the housing strategy to make sure that we are meeting the requirements under the strategy. It was never meant to be a document that just sits there and gathers dust. It was always going to change and be innovative and adjust depending on the circumstances around us. Of course, over the last two years we have seen significant change in the circumstances around us and around affordable rentals, not just here in the ACT but definitely across the country.

We are making sure that we work with groups like the community housing organisations and affordable housing providers, ACT Shelter and organisations like that to come up with different ways to build to rent or rent to buy and how those different kinds of models would work in the ACT with our supply of affordable rentals and housing in a range of different ways.

The housing strategy really is about opening up some doors and looking at how barriers that might have existed in the past can be removed and updated and delivered in a different kind of way. That might not always be a strategy that is a priority of the government at a particular point in time, but it could be something that might be considered in future. That is what the housing strategy is about—a bit more innovation rather than just doing the same old.

THE CHAIR: Minister, can I ask a question on that report card. Is it two ways from the directorate? It is a very impressive document because everything is in developmental process or continuing and there are no red flags. Usually we have a traffic light system where there are a few problems with some things, there are a few things that might fail. Everything seems to be progressing smoothly. How does the directorate feed back into the housing strategy, when there is a problem, to make sure that those problems get dealt with in a sensible policy way?

Mr Ponton: I might ask Ms Sendaba to answer that.

Ms Sendaba: Thank you for the question. As we advised just previously, it is a living document and there will certainly be plenty of consideration given to any changes or new policy initiatives that we would consider through that process. The strategy and the actions under the strategy are split across Housing ACT, CSD and the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate.

Within EPSDD there are several different areas that have a role to play, including, as mentioned, several planning actions. We speak closely with our colleagues across the other directorates, certainly even in the development of the report card. That is certainly a key point in the calendar each year where we get to assess how we are going against those actions.

The report card itself is a transparent way in which we can demonstrate progress against the actions and provide an update on where they are. Many of the actions are listed as progressing because the work is either to consider a policy or to consider policy changes. There is no sort of set end point to that work. That is why we have got a number of items that are listed as progressing. It is not just to say that they are in train and there are no issues. But we continue to report on those actions.

Dr Brady: If I can just add to that, we do have regular meetings with Housing ACT and CSD throughout, and then, as Ms Sendaba said, as issues arise we feed them back up through the relevant areas. There might be something that if we have encountered a problem and it is in the planning area, then we will feed it back through that way.

There is an overarching coordination group related to the housing strategy, largely across EPSDD, CSD and ACT Housing, that meets regularly. As Ms Sendaba referred to, those other people that participate also feed back to other areas where, if something is not going on track, it can possibly be addressed that way.

MR PARTON: Never before have we been so embracing of a classic Ms Orr estimates filibustering session but let me just move on to a broader question. Notwithstanding the broad market changes that officials and the minister have alluded to, based on the actual outcomes in the suburbs, how is it possible to consider that the housing strategy, given that it is only in its early rollout, is anything other than an abject failure when you consider the actual outcomes for the people that it is supposed to assist?

Ms Berry: I completely reject that assertion that the housing strategy is a failure, and I also want to comment on the significant contributions of Community Housing, Housing ACT and other support services to the development of the housing strategy leading up to 2018 when it was finalised. Their contributions are what brought the housing strategy to the place that it is.

It is an all-encompassing strategy, as far as it works across multiple directorates, including planning, Housing ACT, Community Services and a range of others, to deliver on the goals and objectives of providing housing, however that falls, for everybody in the ACT that needs it, regardless of their background, income or circumstances.

MR PARTON: But Minister, it is not working.

Ms Berry: Actually, it is and, despite your and the Canberra Liberals' objections to the housing strategy when we have tried to deliver housing in the suburbs, the actual strategy is working. We have delivered one Common Ground. We are delivering a second Common Ground based on that Common Ground model in Dickson. It also had significant opposition from various individuals and others in the community. But we keep going. We keep pushing through it because the ACT government is absolutely committed to delivering on this strategy in a range of different and innovative ways. You will be able to ask more questions of Housing ACT about the delivery of the growth and renewal program.

We have already talked about the different kinds of relationships that have formed over the last couple of years following the development of the strategy and looking at different ways to use community land in partnership with different organisations, like CatholicCare for example. Who knew last year that there would be an opportunity to work with CatholicCare to open up a nunnery for 48 women and six other women and their children during a time when the ACT was going through a particular health pandemic crisis?

That opportunity came about because of our relationships and partnership building through the development of the strategy to look at innovative ways that we could work together with partners that we may not have considered working with previously in a range of different ways. And we have been able to deliver on that.

We have talked a little today about some of the innovations that have been deliberated on through the Innovation Fund, and we are open to other ideas. That is what the housing strategy is about. It is not supposed to be a tick and flick, and you get an A+ when you deliver something. It is supposed to be something that is innovative and that we work with the community more broadly on in delivering a range of different options for everybody.

I absolutely reject your assertion that it has failed. It is a living document; it is continuing to be developed with passion by the ACT government and our partners within the housing and homelessness service sectors.

MS ORR: Just looking at the next, I guess, phase of the housing strategy, is there anything you anticipate that you will need to respond to as a result of the impacts of COVID and what we have seen over the last 18 months, two years of the health emergency? I guess I am looking for just a little bit of a teaser as to what could come next.

Ms Berry: This kind of goes into Friday but I have covered a little bit of it in my response to Mr Parton's questions about how we used some innovative ways to address some of the issues that people in our community are facing as a result of the health pandemic. Definitely things will need to change into the future about how we respond, particularly for older women who are experiencing homelessness and that being exacerbated. The effect of domestic and family violence that has remained hidden unfortunately will increase as the lockdown has ended.

These are probably questions that can be responded to more fully on Friday. There are strategies about identifying new opportunities as they arise but also understanding the things that work—but some significant policy changes with some of them. That is why we went to that church land and the kinds of uses that that church land could be used for in providing the kinds of housing and affordable rental responses that are what the housing strategy is about.

It is a complicated strategy because providing housing and affordable housing for people is complicated, because people have different needs in their lives and we need to deliver for everybody. That is where the strategy will deliver across a range of areas in every suburb of the city to provide houses and homes for people who need them, wherever they are in their life.

THE CHAIR: Minister and officials, thank you very much for your time today. We will certainly go and have a bit of a reflect about how we structure this session for our next estimates, I believe. You will be sent a copy of the transcript for review for accuracy. I think that there were a couple of questions taken on notice, which we will look forward to seeing the answers to. On that note, thank you very much for coming along. Good afternoon, all.

The committee adjourned at 3.47 pm.