



Belconnen Community Council Inc.

Building a stronger community

PO Box 1131, Belconnen ACT 2617

Mr Andrew Barr MLA
Treasurer
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601

2015-16 ACT BUDGET CONSULTATION

Belconnen Community Council submission

Dear Minister

Thank you for the opportunity to provide views on the development of the ACT's revenue and expenditure priorities, including how the ACT's resources are allocated, what services could be enhanced, and where possible efficiencies could be made.

The Belconnen Community Council (BCC) submission attempts to address the five specific questions posed, with a distinct concentration on the capital infrastructure priorities the Government should consider implementing in the next four years.

While Council's submission has largely viewed the questions posed through a Belconnen community lens, a number of our suggestions apply across the ACT.

Sincerely

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BELCONNEN COMMUNITY COUNCIL SUBMISSION

1. What services do you believe are most important for the Territory?

The most important services for the Territory include but are not limited to:

- Quality and timely healthcare;
- Quality education;
- Timely, attractive, efficient and safe public transport which caters adequately for the current and future travel needs of the public;
- High-quality, well maintained roads (including footpaths and cycleways) which reflect current and future need;
- A safe and just community;
- Management of the natural environment to ensure its sustainability;
- Emergency management; and
- Ensuring a holistic approach to investment in, promotion and enhancement of all Territory districts.

2. What capital infrastructure priorities should the Government consider implementing in the next four years?

The ACT Government intends to invest in four key areas:

1. Making Canberra healthy and smart;
2. Growing the economy;
3. Enhancing liveability and opportunity; and
4. Investing in urban renewal

Council has identified the following priorities and where possible has identified which key areas they reflect. While Council has identified a large number of priorities, we have sought to include priorities which require short-term investment for long-term gain, as well as those which require more significant investment.

Increasing the attractiveness of the Belconnen Town Centre (BTC) from business and community perspectives (2, 3, 4)
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Ensuring ongoing and greater private investment and public service presence in Belconnen Town Centre – and beyond

The ACT Government's rationale for establishing a Government office block in Gungahlin was to provide greater opportunities for residents to work closer to where they live and further develop the growing centre.¹ Council requests that this approach is adopted in all Town Centres, not least Belconnen. This includes not only ensuring an ACT Government presence but encouraging a continuing, if not increased, Commonwealth Government presence so that the liveability and opportunity for residents and businesses alike is assured.

¹ http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/220306/infrastructureplan2011.pdf

In addition, Council suggests the ACT Government consider studying how to further attract private investment to the Town Centre (and broader region), particularly given the location of the University of Canberra and sporting amenities.

Appropriate consideration of land release timing

At present, Belconnen Town Centre has, or has a significant risk of, a housing oversupply—not including that there are at least three more apartment blocks already approved for the Town Centre and further land releases proposed. Oversupply of housing is detrimental socially and economically. Council strongly suggests that an ACT Government priority be to actively monitor housing supply in the Town Centre before approving any further release of land for development.

Replacing the current speed ‘cushions’ to raised ‘speed humps’ which extend across the entire road

Council receives continuing negative feedback about the BTC speed ‘cushions’ (for example, see letter from Council to TAMS, January 2014; BTC Survey Results, July 2014; and letter from Council to Director, Roads ACT, August 2014), including that they encourage erratic and dangerous driving behaviour, and are harsh on the suspension of smaller vehicles. Council requests that other measures be used to achieve the desired result of slowing traffic.

Completing the Belconnen Arts Centre

The Belconnen Arts Centre is an asset to the BTC. The expansion and completion of this important community and cultural facility will ensure it continues to have a positive transformational impact on the BTC and broader region, particularly in terms of urban renewal, and economic and social benefits. Council notes that the project is at a stage where it can commence as soon as the capital funding is made available.

Increasing amenity in Margaret Timpson Park and around Lake Ginninderra

Margaret Timpson Park is a key ‘green space’ in the middle of the Belconnen Town Centre. However, despite being surrounded by businesses/office buildings and residents, it remains underutilised. Increased chairs and tables with appropriate shade within Margaret Timpson Park would encourage better and more frequent use of this area.

In addition, more and improved seating around Lake Ginninderra—particularly along Emu Bank—would only enhance this asset.

Council has previously suggested that more drinking fountains, and increased/better signage alerting patrons to the existing and future fountains is desirable around Lake Ginninderra (see submission from Council to Time to Talk, May 2014).

Beautification of Benjamin Way

Benjamin Way is essentially the main entrance to the Belconnen Town Centre, yet this is not obvious. The results of the recent BCC survey on the Town Centre revealed that respondents found the Town Centre was disconnected, with some noting that there are distinct areas of activity—most notably at either end of Benjamin Way. Investment in the beautification of

Benjamin Way will help further community identity and pride in the area, as well as better connect it. Suggestions include increased lighting, public artwork where/if appropriate and landscaping of the median strip from Chan Street to Lake Ginninderra.

Dog waste bag dispenser at Lake Ginninderra

Left undisposed, dog waste presents health and environmental risks. While many owners carry dog waste disposal bags on them and take the necessary responsibility for their dog's waste, a bag dispenser greatly assists if an owner has forgotten or run out—while also ensuring there is no excuse for failing to pick up the waste. Dog waste disposal bag dispensers have been successfully implemented throughout Australia. (See Council's letter to Director, City Services, 28 August 2014.)

Council suggests that a dog waste disposal bag dispenser be implemented at Lake Ginninderra dog park, and:

- be of quality and sturdiness to protect the bags from the weather elements;
- be stocked with biodegradable bags; and
- have a locking mechanism to ensure bags cannot be pulled continuously.

Removal of ivy at the Lake Ginninderra peninsula (near Diddams Close Park)

Over recent years the ivy on the peninsula has grown from one small spot to now being in three growing areas. At the moment it is largely spreading along the ground, although some spreading by birds must have occurred for the ivy to extend from one spot to three spots. The danger is that once it climbs trees it will flower and then seeds can be spread by birds over a very wide area. At the current time it has not killed trees, with the possible exception of one eucalypt, but there is the potential for severe damage. Such damage has been observed by Landcare groups in Victoria.

Before it becomes a very substantial and expensive task, action is needed. A relatively small expenditure now will avoid the need for substantial expenditure in the future.

Improved public and private waste disposal (1, 3)
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Appropriate public waste receptacles throughout Belconnen

The environmental effects of litter are obvious—namely the threat that discarded litter poses to waterways, flora and fauna. So, too, are the social effects. It seems unsurprising that people may be less likely to carry litter if a receptacle is not placed in convenient, obvious and easily accessible locations. Further, discarded litter is unattractive and creates negative impressions of an area. Council has previously requested (see letter to Director-General, TAMS, dated August 2014) that consideration be given to increasing the number of convenient, obvious and easily accessible public waste receptacles (general and recyclable) in areas of high use in the Belconnen district, including:

- Belconnen Town Centre (urban area);
- around Lake Ginninderra, Belconnen (particularly near the foreshore where there are fast food restaurants); and

- near dog parks or other dog exercise areas, and Canberra Nature Parks, including but not limited to:
 - Lake Ginninderra enclosed dog park
 - Mt Rogers
 - Mt Painter
 - The Pinnacle
 - Aranda Bushland

Facilitating appropriate access to hard rubbish disposal

The inappropriate and illegal dumping of rubbish throughout the Territory is a problem, particularly at charity bins. Council suggests that the ACT Government institute a ‘kerbside/hard rubbish pick-up’ twice a year, at least initially as a trial, reflecting the actions of other Australian cities or local government areas where householders leave large or difficult to dispose items of rubbish on their kerbside on a nominated date which the local government removes.

Appropriate roads and road maintenance (2, 3, 4)

Barton Highway roundabout

Council understands that the Barton Highway roundabout will be upgraded so that it functions as a signalised roundabout in the near future. Council notes that the Barton Highway roundabout is a significant concern with its high number of casualty crashes, let alone near-misses. A signalised roundabout appears to be a short-term solution which may have unintended consequences. While a flyover will be more expensive, such a significant problem requires significant investment for the long-term. Council strongly suggests the ACT Government appropriately prioritise investment in the solution to this dangerous roundabout by working towards implementing a flyover as soon as possible.

Maintained and vibrant local centres and suburbs (2, 3, 4)

Footpaths and cycleway

The existing footpath and cycleway network in Belconnen suburbs and around Lake Ginninderra is ageing and in need of urgent attention. Footpaths are essential to connect the community and encourage outdoor activity; their disrepair is increasingly dangerous, particularly with an ageing population. Many footpaths and cycleways could benefit from widening, particularly in areas of high activity like around Lake Ginninderra.

Council also suggests there should be greater publicity to inform the public that parking on footpaths is illegal, and that penalties should be enforced. Parking on footpaths blocks foot traffic and cracks pavements, resulting in increased maintenance which may otherwise be unnecessary.

Kaleen Scout Hall

The Kaleen Scout Hall was burned down in 2010; rebuilding is expected to cost up to \$250,000, the funding of which is a significant undertaking for any community group. Given

asbestos disposal accounted for much of the insurance money, Council recommends the ACT Government explore ways in which it may support the rebuilding, particularly through a contribution to the cost.

Improved drop-off and pick-up facilities at schools and preschools

Council notes there has been some work in the Belconnen region to address this, and suggests ongoing monitoring of facilities and adoption of any new strategies to minimise risks to safety continues to be prioritised.

Improved amenity and events at local shopping centres

Council is aware that some local centres within the Belconnen region are struggling, but many are vibrant hubs of community activity. The success of the ‘Parties at the Shops’ events in 2013 and 2014 demonstrate that these areas—struggling or not—are seen as community hubs, and should have the appropriate amenity to reflect this, including lighting and access. In addition, Council suggests that the ACT Government explore ways to encourage ‘pop-up’ or ‘exhibition’ spaces in local centres which are ailing (and thus have significant free space).

Parking

For some time, Council has been requesting a holistic solution to parking. While parking is plentiful in some areas, it is entirely inadequate in others (such as the Town Centre). Council requests a holistic study is undertaken which reflects the parking needs of businesses, residents and visitors to areas within Belconnen and appropriate action taken to address this—including commitment of a multi-story parking site—before any more surface parking is sold. In addition, more parking is required for those with disability permits, both throughout the Town Centre and local centres.

Finally, the temporary parking at Calvary Hospital during the construction of the parking station is inadequate, particularly for staff. Council recommends a more satisfactory provision of temporary parking be explored.

Improved public transport (2, 3, 4)
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Services reflecting current and future need

While it is commendable that the ACT Government has used past MyWay data to assist its decisions regarding appropriate services and routes for Network 14, Council considers this process may be flawed. There is ongoing development throughout the ACT, including the ACT Government’s targeted intention to remove or sell surface car parks. While past behaviour may, in some cases, be a useful predictor for future behaviour, Council suggests that, in a city with a high amount of development and significant change, relying on past MyWay data alone is inappropriate and may lead to the wrong conclusions regarding need. For example, the introduction of Network 14 saw a major express service from Belconnen to Barton removed, when only a few weeks later pay parking was introduced in Barton.

Council strongly suggests before decisions are taken on any future changes to services that an appropriate portion of the budget be set aside to not only analyse past behaviour but also

assess needs that are currently unmet with a view to meeting potential future behaviour to ensure the services remain attractive, sustainable and useful.

In addition, Council recommends the ACT Government consider reviewing and expanding its Sunday and public holiday timetabling. Having limited services on these days of public recreation may encourage the community to use private vehicles.

Park & Ride

Council notes that Park & Ride could be an increasingly popular option and further facilities should be explored, so long as they are in areas with high patronage and do not encroach on existing parking.

3. How can the Government deliver current services more efficiently and productively?

What underpins efficient and productive services is appropriate consultation: both before services are delivered and during their delivery. The Time to Talk website is an innovative and popular way of collecting feedback but it should not be the only way. While the ACT Government makes some attempt to consult face to face, in some cases this is insufficient. Many public consultations are more akin to presentations and rarely is the feedback reflected in the Government decisions implemented.

Once a major decision is made or change is rolled out, further community consultation should occur where it is possible. A service or a program should not simply be implemented; ongoing consultation and responses to that feedback is necessary. For example, seeking feedback on Network 14 in two or three months' time—after many people have had an opportunity to experience it and reflect on their requirements—and responding to this will ensure it is an even better service which more adequately meets the community's needs.

4. Are there any new ways to generate revenue and/or services you consider that the community should make a direct contribution to (a fee for service)?

Council suggests that where there is—or could be more—pay parking, the ACT Government could explore whether the community would be satisfied if the revenue generated was directly invested in that area; the community—and businesses—may be more likely to accept pay parking fees if they know that their money is being directly invested in the area they are frequenting.

5. Could the Government stop providing particular services?

As noted elsewhere in this submission, the ACT Government should continue its 'pause' on land release in the Belconnen Town Centre until the existing surplus in new accommodation has been taken up.