



Some of the main issues for 2023

1. The New Territory Planning Framework

The new ACT Planning Act is likely to be debated in the House of Assembly in June. Unless it is significantly modified it will not provide any benefits for most residents in Griffith/Narrabundah and is likely to be detrimental. We will still have no say in what can be built next door, and for large projects, pre-DA consultation has been abandoned for no reason and infill of up to four storeys in height is planned for much of our area.

The GNCA made a submission during the public consultation process that led to over 400 submissions. There was no listening report summarising those submissions for a long time so the GNCA produced its own. The government's listening report was finally released in late May. The ACT Government has been working on the new planning system over the last four years. It is supposed to be easy to use, provide trust, transparency, certainty and be outcomes-focused. However, this term is not defined in the new Planning Act. The 2007 Act was clear and sensible, focusing on social, environmental and economic aspirations. The new one has two pages of waffle as its Object.

Usually, governments explain why they are embarking on major projects. All we were told, was that the current system was not working. We provided some examples, but these were ignored. The proposed new system effectively abandons codes, with their rules and criteria, and relies almost entirely on 'outcomes-focused' statements that originate from the views of the planning authority (ACTPLA) at the time of assessment. In other words, an unelected oligarchy (the chief planner and his colleagues) could work behind closed doors and decide, whether the "outcomes" are appropriate.

The present system suffers from poor governance. If this were fixed, we would be on the way to having an excellent system. There are three key issues:

1. The planning authority keeps approving development applications that are non-compliant with the planning rules, and consequently produces poor outcomes.
2. The checks on compliance are almost non-existent and developers can build whatever they want.
3. The rules are overly complex and should be simplified.

Consequently, if the rules are not in place, compliance will be impossible, and the developers should be happy! We live in a world governed by rules. We have rules for using roads paying taxes, keeping a dog, etc. etc.

The benefits of rules are:

- 1.They are the same for everyone
- 2.They provide trust and certainty
- 3.They provide transparency
- 4.The rules can be changed easily if required.

It seems, the new system will be operated by ACTPLA behind closed doors. The government must improve trust between three main planning stakeholders: the community, the developers, and the government. The government should comply with its own rules.

The planning system must ensure that the Garden City landscape and architectural principles of Canberra are maintained in all developments, particularly with respect to sustainability, and climate change.

2. Other developments related to the new planning framework

The new planning framework introduces an “outcomes focussed” focus and discretionary decision making so the GNCA is also paying close attention to other developments that may help mitigate against the effects of this new regime. They are:

- a) **Developer regulation** The government issued a discussion paper on developer regulation and the GNCA made a submission at the end of February. We are awaiting the report.
 - b) **Integrity** The government has appointed Mr Ian Govey to review the Integrity Commission Act and the GNCA is making a submission to that review.
 - c) **Heritage** The Legislative Assembly instituted an inquiry into the heritage arrangements in the ACT and the GNCA made a submission to that inquiry and appeared before the Committee. We are awaiting the report. Meanwhile the Minister for Heritage has appointed a reviewer and the Stenning review will no doubt consider the Committee’s work. The GNCA welcomes these reviews because it considers the treatment of heritage in the new planning framework is inadequate.
3. **East Lake** The East Lake Place Plan has been out for consultation and the GNCA made a submission. We are now awaiting a report on those consultations.
 4. **Urban Open Spaces Management Plan** The government has released for consultation an Urban Open Spaces Management Plan. This affects the parks in Griffith and Narrabundah and the GNCA will be making a submission. The GNCA provides support to The Friends of Blaxland Park, The Griffith Woodland Group (La Perouse Park), Griffith Park/ Wells Gardens, and Bass Gardens. It is important for local communities to take an interest in the wellbeing of our unique urban open spaces. They provide the wonderful garden city environment that means so much and they could be threatened by development pressures.
 5. **ACAT reviews** In five cases during 2022 to early 2023 the GNCA sought review of ACTPLA decisions and in all five cases the proposed DAs did not proceed. The GNCA is monitoring developments on the blocks in Griffith and Narrabundah that were the subject of those DAs.
 6. **The Future of Manuka (and Manuka to the Lake)** There remains a need for some holistic planning for Manuka, given pressures created by population growth and intensification and the *ad hoc* way major developments are being approved. We need to revitalise Manuka – and ensure that it is not suffocated by increased traffic. The new Urban Open Spaces Plan gives increased impetus to this need.
 7. **Trees and verges** Trees and verges are suffering because of illegally parked vehicles, poor pruning of street trees by Evoenergy and inadequate protection during building developments. We will continue to liaise with Access Canberra and Evoenergy.