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MANUKA: REVERSING THE DECLINE

The Griffith Narrabundah Community Association GNCA welcomes the 6 June 2019 proposal by the Chief Minister to establish a community panel to discuss the Manuka Precinct in the context of the review of the Territory Plan.

Recognising that this approach could take several years to implement concrete changes, this letter draws together a number of proposals that would go a long way towards arresting the loss of dining venues, retail outlets, coffee shops, and possibly even the much-loved cinema. Their cost is not excessive, and they would make a significant contribution to resurrecting a once-thriving community asset.

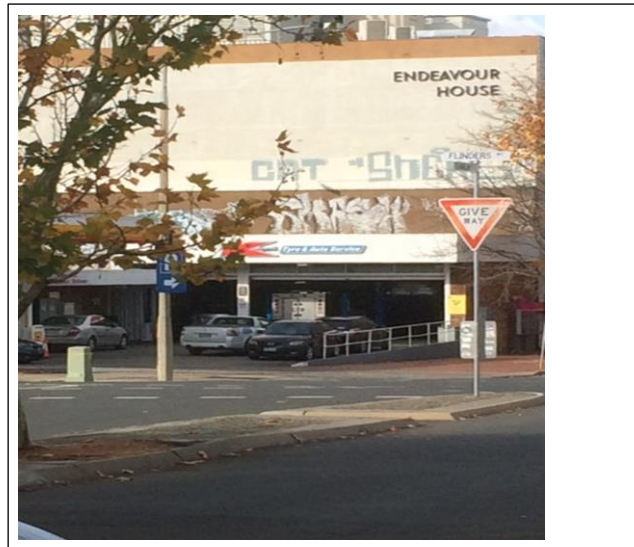
Once one of Canberra's foremost shopping and entertainment venues, Manuka is now in a state of depressing decline. Local traders and residents alike have made representations about the issue to the GNCA. At the end of May 2019, for example, there were at least 17 vacant retail units at ground floor level alone.

The general streetscape

Symptoms of neglect include cracked and shabby paved areas, pedestrian unfriendly streets, unhealthy trees, fenced off areas awaiting development and other eyesores. Significant improvements could be achieved with a number of simple cosmetic measures, including:

- Repair of some older pavements that are cracked.

- Remedial action or replanting of some apparently distressed street trees, including the poplars along Captain Cook Crescent in Captain Cook Park.
- Replacement of older metal benches in Captain Cook Park.
- Removal of graffiti, particularly on Endeavour House, above the Shell station, near the cinema on Canberra Avenue, the electrical sub-station next to MOCCA, and some smaller items of street furniture.
- Consideration could be given to commissioning congenial street art as a means of discouraging further unsolicited graffiti.
- Remediation of drains on the pathway close to MOCCA on Flinders Way to reduce or eliminate blockages that cause local flooding after heavy rain.



Franklin Street

Consideration could be given to conversion of Franklin Street between Furneaux Street and Flinders Way to shared traffic zones on the lines of Bunda Street or a similar format, designed to enhance pedestrian access and safety. This could allow for occasional events such as festivals or markets to be held on Franklin Street.

You will be aware of the vexed issue of the protected Franklin Street plane tree. In the spirit of a collegiate approach, we wrote to Mrs Sotiria Liangis on 14 June, asking if she would be willing to meet with us to discuss possible solutions that would allow her development plans to proceed.

One possible compromise solution would be to engage an architect to design a building that wraps around the tree on the Canberra Avenue side, creating an enclave with seating that is shaded by the tree. A coffee shop or similar could make it a popular meeting place. Developers in various areas are increasingly incorporating mature trees into their designs, as evidenced, for example, at the Aubergine restaurant on Barker Street, Griffith shops, where a mature tree has been retained within a metre of the building.

Should Mrs Liangis agree to consider a development proposal that retains the tree, it would be fitting to recognise her generosity by giving official support to naming the enclave Liangis Place or similar. Your support for such a solution would be very much appreciated.

Litter and Garbage

Last year, the Griffith Narrabundah Community Association approached the McDonald's company, requesting consideration of possible measures (e.g. a free coffee for people who help clean up in the vicinity of the Manuka outlet, and in Griffith and Captain Cook parks) to reduce litter. Unfortunately, a positive response was not received. It remains to one of our more active members to pick up litter on his way home from the shops.

However, there may be scope for the ACT Government to make a similar approach to the management of the McDonald's store in Manuka.

An alternative strategy would be to place garbage bins on Flinders Way outside McDonald's, and near the bus stop on the eastern side of Captain Cook Crescent. Bins could also be placed near the tennis courts on Flinders Way, which appear to be located at a distance from McDonald's that matches the pace of eating a take-away meal.

The garbage bin in Griffith Park is often overflowing. An additional bin or a more frequent collection schedule would be very welcome.

Laneways

Three of the laneways would benefit enormously from makeovers. Palmerston Lane could be given new life through Melbourne style "laneway" development, particularly if unsightly garbage facilities were tidied up.

The laneway between Bougainville St and Murray Crescent could be made more attractive, especially at the Bougainville St end. Some European cities brighten up such laneways with "fairy lights" that incorporate highly innovative designs.

The laneway between MOCCA and McDonalds is a potential health hazard. The stagnant water and mud emit an unpleasant odour, and the mud is constantly churned up by cars and trucks that park there. It is not clear if there is also a drainage problem in the area that might usefully be addressed.



Pedestrian and vehicular traffic

Traffic flows could easily be made more pedestrian friendly.

Over the last few years, the GNCA has advocated with Roads ACT for a 40km/hr speed limit on the north-bound lanes of Captain Cook Crescent between Murray Crescent and Canberra Avenue. We are aware of a number of near misses, ostensibly because drivers have their sights fixed firmly on the traffic lights at Canberra Avenue, rather than on the crossing itself.

We are therefore most grateful for the recent installation of the 40km/hr limit, as well as the speed bumps immediately before the crossing, although they may be a little too close to the crossing to alert drivers who are not familiar with the area.

A pedestrian crossing should also be installed at the busy eastern side of the Flinders Way/Murray Crescent roundabout, where pedestrians crossing in a southerly direction are at risk from cars turning left from Flinders Way into Murray Crescent.

The interaction between pedestrians at the McDonlads exit and in the pick-up zone near MOCCA should be assessed. At present there is a high risk of traffic accidents. One reason may be that the thick white line at the exit has been erased over time.

Drivers are often unaware of all the parking options at Manuka. There may be scope to explore the option of including information about vacancies underneath Coles, in a manner similar to the electronic signs indicating unoccupied parking spaces elsewhere in Manuka.

Community Facility land

The corner block (zoned as CFZ and reserved for community facilities) next to MOCCA is particularly unsightly, with drivers churning mud and compacting the soil.

It should be remediated to improve its appearance, possibly as a local park with table and benches as well as flora. Such a facility could coincidentally reduce littering further afield, if rubbish bins were made available there.

Lest it be considered that the GNCA merely seeks Government assistance for maintaining community facility land, we wish to draw attention to the fact that our residents are also active in this respect, and are sponsored in various ways by the GNCA:

- A group of volunteers has recently planted over 300 native grasses at the Griffith Woodland (between La Perouse Street and Jansz Crescent) as part of an effort to remediate a rare example of a remnant urban woodland. In collaboration with TTCS, cleaning up of the site has been going on for over a year now.
- The Friends of Blaxland Park group has been working closely with TTCS in planting and caring for trees and the general landscape.
- Residents of the Amaya complex in Austin Street have taken on responsibility for the elm grove which lines the Griffith heritage oval on the Western side. They have been mulching trees to complement commercial tree care.

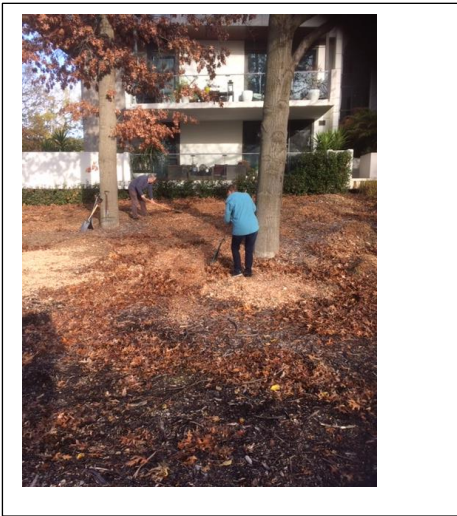


Blaxland Park



Griffith Woodland

Amaya, Austin Street



Supporting Business

The recent Legislative Assembly inquiry into commercial rates concluded that the current system is having an adverse effect on commercial activity in Manuka. The recommendations of the Manuka Business Association in its submission to the ACT Parliamentary inquiry on Commercial Rates, and the report of that inquiry, should be given early consideration.

There is currently no public transport link between Parliament House and Manuka. Consideration should be given by TCCS to a direct link, such as a shuttle minibus, between Manuka, Kingston and Parliament House, on sitting days.

Manuka Oval

The Oval is a much-loved heritage facility which suffers, in comparison to Bruce Stadium, from a location in a crowded residential neighbourhood. The Oval's future must be considered against the inevitable constraints arising from its situation.

- Manuka Oval should be regarded more as a community oval. At present the links between the oval and the community are almost non-existent.
- The Oval should be kept at its present size, with no further expansion.

- A more attractive solution should be found to the security requirements rather than the ugly bollards currently used.
- The surrounds of the Oval should be attractively landscaped.
- Means should be found to promote greater community use of the Media Centre on non-match days.

The future of the former Services Club site should be resolved in a way which is beneficial to the local community and harmonises with the local landscape. Until the proponents provide a plan of what they want to build, the Planning Minister should not de-concessionalise the lease.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We are really concerned about the future of Manuka. It would be a travesty of proper planning if, when the Stuart Flats site is re-developed with brand new dwellings, we are left with an adjacent decaying Group Centre.

Many of the points made above were presented at a public forum on Future Planning for Manuka to the Foreshore hosted by the ISCCC on 9 April 2019. They are not intended to pre-empt or constrain any subsequent development of a Master Plan from Manuka to the Lake.

We have raised several issues which cover a number of Directorates in your government. As a first step it would be appreciated if you would nominate an officer we could meet with to plan for the future.

Yours sincerely,



Leo Dobes
President
20 June 2019