**Submission**

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| **To:** | Transport Canberra and City Services, Citizens Forum - *Playspaces forum* |
| **Date:** | September 2018 |
| **Subject:** | *Better Suburbs Statement; Playspaces forum - Torrens Place Playground requires upgrade* |

# Background

1. Torrens Place playground (the playground behind the shops at Torrens Place at Block 16, Section 22, Torrens) requires an upgrade and additional equipment, as the playground is outdated and limited. In early 2017, some of the equipment from this playground was removed. More generally, all of the playgrounds in Torrens are lagging behind, both in size and quality when compared to other suburbs in Woden and Canberra. Further, there is no public access to the local school playground due to the fence.
2. Of particular concern is that the playgrounds across Torrens (3 in total) are not in-line with the *ACT Design standards for Urban Infrastructure*. For example, the existing playgrounds

* contain dated equipment
* are not shaded
* contain damaged equipment and or/are affected by vandalism
* do not contain equipment for older children
* some do not contain a basic stainless steel slide or swings, both being elements recommended by the *local neighbourhood* standards.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* None of the playgrounds contain a minimum of seven activities, as recommended by the *local neighbourhood* standards[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. 19.7% of the population in Torrens is made up of children aged 0-14 years.[[3]](#footnote-3) Currently due to the substandard nature of the existing playgrounds, there is no inviting local community space for all of these children to meet outside and play.
2. Playgrounds should encourage physical activity, social interaction and creativity.[[4]](#footnote-4) In turn, the provision of open spaces and parks and the ‘design quality’ of the built environment has been found to positively influence physical activity levels and mental health outcomes.[[5]](#footnote-5) However, it is argued that playgrounds need to be highly accessible, contain pleasing aesthetics and cater to a range of different ages and demographics to promote useability.[[6]](#footnote-6) Unfortunately the playground at Torrens Place is not easily accessible, nor does it cater to multiple demographics due to the limited amount of activities (the playground contains one set of swings and one small plastic slide). In fact, none of the playgrounds across Torrens promote useability given their age and deteriorated condition.
3. In response to the issues outlined above, a petition was arranged calling on the ACT Government to upgrade the playground at Torrens shops. This playground, if upgraded, presents an opportunity to work with an existing play space surrounded by nature, alongside a thriving local shop. Improving this playground is an opportunity to bring the community together in one meeting place- to spend more time connected after having a coffee or buying a newspaper by having access to a inviting, safe, modern play and community space.
4. Within several weeks, over 700 community members signed the petition to upgrade the playground. The petition was tabled at the ACT Legislative Assembly in November 2017.
5. Following the petition process, a survey was distributed to start a preliminary conversation about what the community would like to see upgraded in the playground. The survey was distributed to Torrens residents through a letterbox drop, shared by local school P&C facebook pages, shared by the Woden Valley Community Council facebook page and left to collect with one of the local cafes. Almost 90 community members provided their response to the survey.
6. A consistent theme raised through the survey by community members is the neglect the playground has suffered for decades and the rejuvenation required. It is clear from the comments that there are simply no quality playgrounds within walking distance and that an upgrade would bring the community together at a local hub.
7. From the survey tally, the greatest priority for the playground (over 50% of responses) is for a variety of new play equipment to be added. Climbing frames and nets, and imaginative play equipment such a cubbies and pirate ships were the most requested types of play equipment. From the comments it was also evident that the community hopes for play equipment that would cater for a range of ages, including older children and teenagers.
8. After the provision of new play equipment, the second most common request (38% of responses) raised for the playground is for the provision of family and community amenities such as seating, picnic tables, and trees and plantings that provide shade.
9. Another theme raised frequently through the survey is improved visibility and connectivity towards the playground from the shops. Currently the playground is hidden from the shops by wattle bushes and a short brick wall. Community members have been asking for the wall and bushes to be removed so access is easier and safer and a line of sight can be made possible from both cafes at the shops.
10. In summary, a modern play and meeting space would provide an opportunity not just for younger children, but also for older children/teenagers and adults to meet, sit down at a picnic table, grab a bite from the local takeaway and spend some time in the beautiful surrounds of nature that Torrens provides.

# Recommendations

1. Equipment (both play and recreational), at the Torrens Place playground needs to be rejuvenated and increased. This will provide the local community with a playground/green space within walking distance that is up to speed with other suburbs in Woden and Canberra. The addition of more modern equipment will rejuvenate the park, bring more families into the local shopping village and increase community vibrancy. Improving equipment in this playground is in line with the ACT Government’s ‘*Active Living* ‘ principles of providing high quality open spaces, parks and places.[[7]](#footnote-7)

1. Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS), ‘Design Standards for Urban Infrastructure: 15 Playgrounds and Playground Equipment’, viewed on 17/10/2017, <https://www.tccs.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0012/396876/ds15_playgrounds.pdf>, p.7 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics, ‘2016 Census Quick Stats’, viewed on 17/10/2017, [http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC80122?opendoc ument](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC80122?opendoc%20ument) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Wood L. and Martin, K. 2010, ‘What makes a good play area for children?’ Centre for the Built Environment and Health, The University of Western Australia, viewed on 17/10/2017, <http://www.web.uwa.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1857467/What-makes-a-good-play-area-literature-summaryfeb2011.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, ‘Information Paper December 2016: Incorporating Active Living Principles into the Territory Plan: Draft Variation Number 348’, viewed on 17/10/2017, <https://www.yoursay.act.gov.au/application/files/3214/8123/2456/20161114-Incorporating-Active-Living-principles-WebAccessible.pdf>, p.18 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Wood L. and Martin, op. cit. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, ‘Information Paper December 2016: Incorporating Active Living Principles into the Territory Plan: Draft Variation Number 348’, viewed on 17/10/2017, <https://www.yoursay.act.gov.au/application/files/3214/8123/2456/20161114-Incorporating-Active-Living-principles-WebAccessible.pdf>, p.5 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)