

Canberra's Planning Bill and codes must effectively plan Canberra as a garden city in an urban forest. The new Planning Bill fails to adequately consider other ACT goals and draft Bills eg the Urban Tree Canopy and the Urban Forest Bill (2022) (the UFB). Furthermore, the Draft Action Plan for the Loss of Mature Native Trees as a Key Threatening Process is a requirement of the Nature Conservation Act. Despite this the Planning Bill, like the UFB, does not mention the Draft Action Plan or specifically protect remnant trees or effectively guarantee spaces for existing trees and their replacements. Particular species of concern are the Blakely's red gum and yellow box, both in decline around much of their previous range, with the ACT representing a nationally significant reserve of these threatened woodlands. This Planning Bill needs to specifically support and meet the needs for connectivity and habitat to satisfy scientific criteria for ecology, population genetic diversity and biodiversity.

The following view looking south-west from Oakey Hill illustrates one of Canberra's wonderful landscape features. The urban forest of the Weston Creek suburbs, and itself home to many native birds and animals, is visible across the middle of the photo. This emphasises the need for Development Codes to include Design Criteria safeguarding the landscape, treescape and streetscapes of each suburb. Such amenity and heritage safeguards cannot be recognised only for a limited number of older suburbs; Canberrans in all suburbs have the same rights to a protected landscape and suburban amenity recognising their planning achievements and natural heritage and providing the level of canopy cover required to avoid becoming heat islands in a changing climate. And after all, the streets of Weston itself are named after artists who cherished and celebrated the Australian landscape!



Canberra needs a canopy of trees, and trees need garden space around houses. Canberra represents a nationally recognised successful model for urban development with good environmental and biodiversity protection and should be enhanced not weakened so it remains a valuable model for Australian suburbia. Providing affordable housing is of course a critical need, and requires imaginative thinking so we don't sacrifice what makes Canberra special. Perhaps another Canberra, a short fast-rail trip away, achieved through creative negotiation with NSW?

It is critical that current restrictions on unit-titling and subdivision of existing blocks are not weakened, to prevent inappropriate and opportunistic development with poor environmental, planning and amenity outcomes for their neighbourhoods. As with existing family-flat approvals, strict regulation and consultation requirements are needed for any additional family residences in appropriate settings, and these should only be allowed on larger blocks to ensure that garden and canopy cover are maintained. It is desirable that each dwelling retain a non-paved garden of size comparable to the average in its area as a minimum planning goal.

The Planning Bill critically needs precise, clear and well-defined goals and design principles, and transparent and effective public consultation, criteria and rules, including in relation to decision-making, accountability and appeal rights, in order to deliver good outcomes for the community. These are lacking in the draft Bill. Other submissions from community groups and councils detail these and many other such issues with this bill, including vague drafting, inadequate assessment processes, deregulation of planning, decision-making and accountability and weakening of appeal rights; we also support their requests that these be addressed and rectified in a new draft.

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