

3 March 2023

The Officer Tasked  
ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project  
Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate  
Dame Pattie Menzies Building  
DICKSON ACT 2602  
Via online lodgement portal

Dear Officer,

## Response to submission of representation and feedback on the draft new Territory Plan and draft district strategies: ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project: Block 23 Section 2 Page

We are writing on behalf of the lessees of Block 23 Section 2 Page (Villaggio Sant' Antonio (VSA) Retirement Village) in response to the ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project and specifically your request for feedback on the Draft new Territory Plan and draft District Strategies. The subject site is located in the Division of Page, District Belconnen and located adjacent and to the south of Southern Cross Drive – see Figure 1 below.

### The Site

Block 23 is leased to the VSA primarily for Residential Aged Care and self-care independent living unit uses. The lease further provides for respite care and accommodation and ancillary facilities of chapel, medical and meeting rooms. The uses are restricted by both bed and dwelling count limitation as well as Gross Floor Area limits.



Figure 1 – Aerial map of Block 23 Section 2 Page (Source ACTMAPi, February 2023)



The block is bounded by Southern Cross Drive to the North, Burkitt Street to the south and similar retirement village scheme like uses to the east and west. Land further to the North and south are zoned predominantly lower density residential use and characterised by single title houses. Southern Cross Drive connects the site to the Belconnen Town Centre precinct located circa 500m to the east. The Page oval zoned PRZ1 – Open Space is located in close proximity to the site and is approximately 70m west of the site on Burkitt Street.

### **The Lessee**

Villaggio Sant’ Antonio is a multi-cultural aged care facility catering for Residents with a variety of needs and operates on a not-for-profit basis with the facility being run by paid personnel in conjunction with community support under the direction of the Board of Villaggio Italiano Limited.

VSA commenced from the vision of members from the Italian community of Canberra with the desire to establish a retirement village for aged members of their community. The facility was built and completed with the donations and efforts of the Italian community and other benefactors from Canberra, Goulburn, Queanbeyan, Cooma, Batlow and the Federal Government and opened in 1992. From this beginning the facility has since grown to accommodate residents of many diverse cultures and social backgrounds, making Villaggio Sant’ Antonio a truly multi-cultural community.

VSA strives to make a positive difference in the lives of all older people in its care through the provision of care that enables each individual and their carer to maintain independence and control over decisions that affect them and ensuring the best possible quality of life. The nurturing environment provided enable older people using the provided services to remain well, active and independent for as long as possible.

### **Current statutory and strategic planning context**

The subject site is zoned ‘RZ2- Suburban Core’ under the Territory Plan and is developed for low density, low rise semi-detached ILU dwellings, a residential care facility, respite care centre, chapel and other associated amenities. The Crown Lease is a part concessional and part market value – a historical artefact sprouting from the initial lease that was extended by purchase and amalgamation of a portion of land with additional use rights purchased to expand the village to its current form. In 2017 the proponent applied to have the Lease varied as part of a project progressed to in part modernising of the Residential Care facility.

Based on the current Crown Lease provisions in place it is our opinion that the current development on the site represents the maximum allowable development permitted and represent a highest and best use outcome under the existing planning policies for the site.

In 2017 VSA commenced a significant program of design and refurbishment works including a new wing to the RACF to better service the needs of their residents and improve operational efficiencies / service provision. This also created space on the site for a staged redevelopment associated with a future Territory Plan amendment. The current Territory Plan reforms and Draft District Strategies represent an opportunity to enact this idea and that EPSDD strongly consider a change in zoning for this site and the Page Retirement Living and Care precinct from the current RZ2 zoning to the better positioned and contextual CFZ-Community Facility zoning as part of the ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project.

The development predates the creation of the Territory Plan in 1993 and the more recent RZ2 zoning that was put in place with the re-writing of the Territory Plan in 2008. In essence the zoning appears to be



consistent with the form of development that existed on-site when the Plan was created and the form and scale of retirement village complexes that was built in Canberra in the early 1990's.

This is quite at odds with the current accepted practice to zone land released for Retirement living and Residential Care as CFZ- Community facilities land. By inspection of the Zone objective in the Territory Plan the use of Retirement Village Use and Residential Care Accommodation appears to better fit within the aspirations for the CFZ-Community Facilities zoning. In recent times Canberra has seen a number of contemporary Retirement Village Complex developments progressed on land specifically zoned and leased for this use – and specifically the applicable zoning choose in all instances was CFZ zoning to underpin the development of modern Retirement Village and Residential care use.

#### **The Draft ACT Planning Reform project Draft Territory Plan and Draft Belconnen District Strategy.**

Canberra Town Planning and AMC Architecture have been working with VSA since early 2017 on an extended project to investigating opportunities to progress and further the vision and mission of the organisation. With specific reference to exploring opportunities to renew aging assets in the 1<sup>st</sup> instance, but also how the organisation can and should respond to the desperate need for retirement living options and care needs of the community that is growing exponentially as the community continue to age.

In looking at the facility in Page (Block 23) the proponent is exploring opportunities to renew these aging assets in a manner that allows the organisation to respond to the growing need for retirement living choices and residential care needs of the aging Canberra community.

Propriety information from One Fell Swoop (Included in attachment 1) is in full agreeance with the ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project investigations into the demographic and housing need and services shortfall for the retirement living and residential care sectors of the ACT housing and social services delivery market. The document presented from One Fell Swoop elaborates the current needs and trends for Aged Care and Retirement living in the ACT.

The release of the ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project underscored the investigations we undertook over the years and matches in apart the needs identified for these uses into the future.

With our assistance the Lessee reviewed the documents released in late 2022 with specific attention to those documents that relate to the subject site, including:

- Draft Territory Plan: Belconnen District Policy,
- Draft Territory Plan: Residential Zones Policy, and
- Draft Belconnen District Strategy.

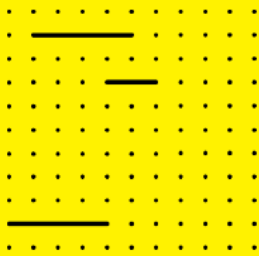
We summarise some of our findings and observations below.

#### **Draft New Territory Plan: District and Zone Policies**

The subject site is, to the best of our understanding, shown in the draft documents to remain subject to the Residential Zones Policy and specifically retain the RZ2 zoning. Residential Care Accommodation, Retirement Village and ancillary uses remain permissible uses under this draft zoning.

The RZ2 Policy outcomes are seeks the development and re-development of residential development in close proximity to local services in low/medium density housing including:





- Provision of a range of housing choices where the housing is low rise and contains a mix of single dwelling and multi-unit development.
- Provision of opportunities for redevelopment by enabling a limited extent of change in density.

The assessment requirements stated for the RZ2 zoning are modest in character including, 45% site coverage, low dwelling density controls and low-rise height limitations (2 storeys maximum). Assessment outcomes focusses on precinct scale, urban structure and development following the housing design guideline (still to be released).

In short, the opportunity for further development of the site to drive a renewal program, and/or cater for the aging population is very limited when considering the draft (future) RZ2 provisions.

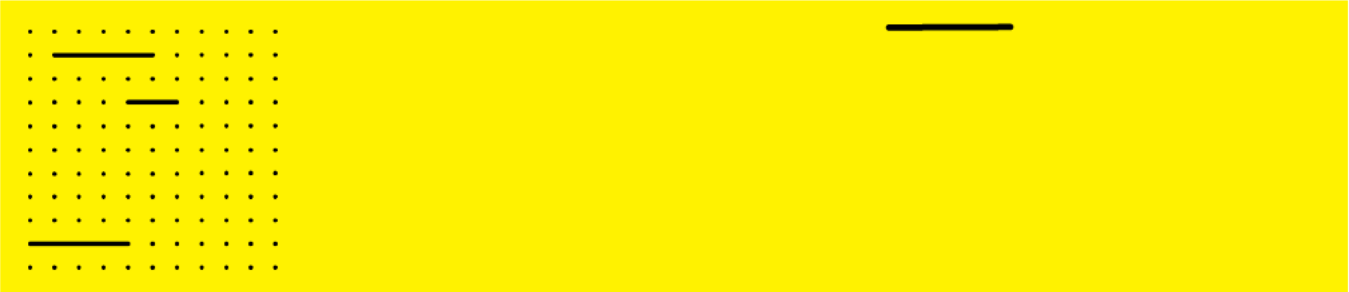
The draft Belconnen District Policy appears to provide no further use of development opportunity to the subject site. Overall, the District policy in its Policy outcomes calls for development outcomes that will build a strong and egalitarian community that is increasingly diverse and multi-generational. This includes a range of housing choices, retention and strengthening sense of community, development of the town centre and surrounding suburbs as mixed-use area. There appear to be no further assessment requirements or outcomes for the Division of Page.

In short it appears that the Territory Plan considers no change to the current development policy context for the Subject site.

### **The Belconnen District Strategy**

The draft Belconnen District Strategy on the other hand, paints a very different picture as to the context and need for Residential Care and Retirement Village options in Belconnen. The Strategy's demographic and needs consideration indicate that:

- Belconnen in 2021 had the largest ACT population (over 105,000 people) - more than circa 20,000 persons larger than the next biggest district, Tuggeranong that has a population of ~89,500 people (p28 and p29),
- More than 35% of persons are about or over 50 years of age and 65+ seniors are reported to make up 15% of the Belconnen population. This is almost 16,000 people and is well higher than the ACT aged population averages. Belconnen houses the 2<sup>nd</sup> biggest population of older people in any district in the ACT (p29);
- Housing choices in Belconnen sees separate (Stand-alone) houses being 69% of the housing stock and semi-detached and apartment living are only 30% of the housing stock available. Only 30% of households are renting their place of residence (p29).
- The Strategy as presented suggests that the ACT population is set to increase by over 135,000 people by 2046, need around 58,000 new dwellings and this trend to an aging population with continue.
- Belconnen will need an increase in housing stock of by 2046 of 11,400 dwellings by 2046 and a further circa 21,000 by 2063. Recent reports suggest that the population forecast numbers are under review and reported at a lower rate as when compared to actual trends. The 2046 population is expected to be larger than forecast, require more houses than predicted and have an increasing cohort of older members. (p32).
- The projected population forecasts a growth in aged population/retirees across the ACT is substantial (page 32).



The Strategy acknowledges that increased population and specifically a larger aging population will push the demand for services and housing opportunities in the Retirement Living and Residential Age Care sector. As the need increases opportunities for expanding and increasing these services and facilities must be investigated and the Strategy suggests the following:

- That the demand for services in the Retirement Living and Residential Age Care sector and the expansion of facilities are important considerations that must be further investigated (page 113);
- Areas for Aged Care near activity nodes and medical facilities should be identified as part of a *Sustainable and Resilient Territory* (Table 9),
- Areas near Activity and services centres are considered as high opportunity localities (Page 113), with the site specifically identified on the District Strategy Map as an existing community asset of this type.
- The housing and services demand are to be met by 70% infill development within the confines of the City.

Demand for these services is expected to continue growth as the cohort of older Australians grow and as more people seeking to access these services and the current and forecasted number of places will continue to be outstripped by demand. Expanding the existing facilities will build on the knowledge, history and service already provided and best support the growing community needs in this sector.

### **Need for an expanded facility**

The Lessee, with Canberra Town Planning and AMC Architecture, explored the proposition of a redevelopment of the current land holding with a focus on understanding how an expanded facility, build to current and future requirements, regulatory standards and client expectations can integrate with the local community and locality.

Our work resulted in an exploratory Master Plan, which we include as an attachment to this submission, that seeks to demonstrate how an approach for renewal and intensification of the site may be considered. The Master Plan study considers the locality near the Town Centre on a main arterial road with good public transport options now and into the future, the context with other similar uses located to the east and the west creating a historical and current hub of retirement living and residential care services that is successfully operating in this locality, the ability to balance density, amenity and development of a community asset that is in line with current aspirations and expectations in the community for these uses while protecting the amenity of and integrating an expanded facility with the low density residential developments to the North and South.

The land-take for a facility of this nature is substantial and the re-use of existing land that is being used for this purpose, albeit in the form, density and design accepted and desired by both the industry and clients, supports themes of sustainable communities, responsible environmental impact management, critical service delivery to the community and innovation towards meeting growing community needs.

There appears to be major disconnect in the problem defined by the District Strategy and the Territory Plan keeping lands such as the subject site locked to the R22 zoning and development policies. We do however acknowledge that the Strategy calls for further investigation as to how the future demand could be met in part by expansion of existing facilities. We believe that the work presented in this submission demonstrate that this is a realistic aspiration and urge the Territory to update the Strategy further to make this opportunity abundantly clear for the subject site and the retirement hub in Page. Specifically acknowledging



and expressing this clearly will support future investigations and considerations for Territory Plan variations if this cannot be effected as part of the current review.

We request that the Belconnen District Strategy be updated to specifically acknowledge the subject site and Page retirement/Residential Care precinct as a redevelopment opportunity for expansion of these facilities and services to meet the growing need and expected demand anticipated as a product of population growth and the increase in the aging population as well as an opportunity to build on housing choices and urban infill in Belconnen, two key ACT Government development policies for Canberra.

#### **A new zoning for a modern Retirement and Residential Care Facility.**

The concept Master Plan presented investigates a build form that sees development of the site ranging between 3 storeys to the south where the development interfaces with the low scale and density residential streetscape and intensifies over the site to 6-storeys along the arterial road.

Buildings are sited in a manner that protects the amenity of future residents, development surrounding these to the east, west and south, contain urban impacts such as overshadowing, overlooking and privacy and excessive scale but utilise the site to the full in delivering housing choices and care services desperately needed by the community. Parking can be provided in subterranean structures that limits impact on deep rooted planting opportunity and the ability to grow large canopy trees - key considerations in combatting climate change in higher density developments.

The concept Master Plan presented demonstrates that infill development and intensification of existing infrastructure can deliver the following:

- Sustainable use of valuable land assets that has been used historically for retirement and aged care service delivery.
- Supporting key Government policies relating to housing choice, infill development and sustainable and resilient neighbourhood development.
- Increasing service delivery and housing options for the aging cohort in response to the increased need and demand expressed in the District Strategy.
- Facilitate an opportunity to renew and deliver an appropriate facility in line with the requirements of a changing sector and user demands for contemporary retirement living opportunities observed across Canberra and Australia as a whole.
- Facilitate the renewal of an aging asset and housing stock in a manner that is sympathetic to the local context and environmental values of the site and surround. The opportunity to support the continuous delivery of services to residents and the community while improving and increasing the offering to the aging population in this key location is important in the successful expansion of a facility such as this.
- Makes good use of the site characteristics and opportunities on-site.
- Allow for re-positioning of the residential care facility to a location that supports the changing regulatory network and needs for the facility for services provision within the centre, on and off site to internal; and external clients. This responds to the change in consideration for services delivery off-site to support aging in place that is a strong Federal Government initiative that is being implemented across the sector.



- All of the proposed retirement living units are to be designed to meet AS2124 and to be Adaptable Class C compliant.

Our investigations to date show that the Master Plan presented offers a superior and more appropriate facility that will support the need and expectations of the current and future aging community in Belconnen and Canberra. Albeit the provisions of the 'RZ2- Urban Core' zoning that permits the use for retirement village, the limited scale afforded under this zone prohibits the ability to deliver the vision, aspiration and need and expectations for the type and form of retirement village complex development expressed in the District Plan and demanded by the community of Canberra.

Looking at the current approach to land release for Retirement and Residential Care Facility uses invariably the zoning change in recent times appears to be E4- Community Facility Zoning. The development forms achieved on this zoning under the current Territory Plan including recent developments such as Goodwin Farrer and Crace and the recent approval of a new 6 storey ILU building at RSL Lifecare Bullecourt (Kaleen) demonstrate that this zoning is both appropriate and well suited to deliver the modern facilities needed to meet the demand for these services.

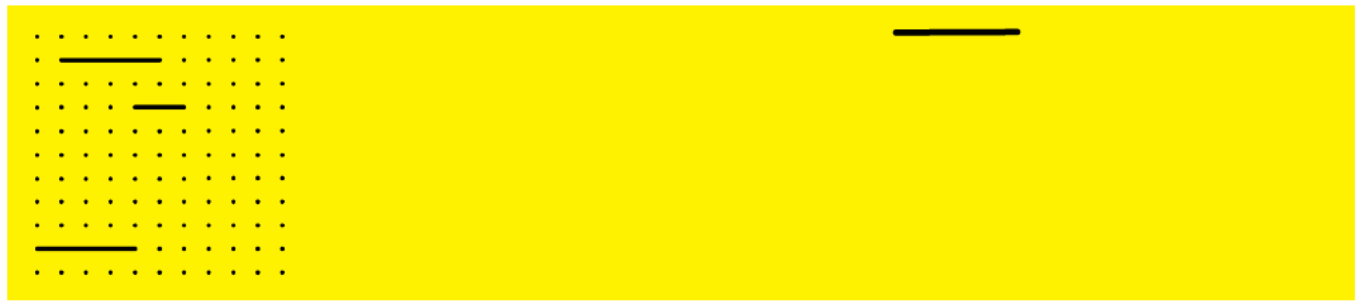
Considering the Draft Community Facility Zone policy it is immediately clear that the permissible uses for the zone not only include the target uses associated with Retirement and Residential Care Facility but also include a broad range of uses that natively support and are often associated with retirement and care uses.

The CFZ policy outcomes clearly expresses the requirements for development to focus on the characteristics and outcomes associated with these uses including:

- facilitate social sustainability and inclusion through providing accessible sites for key government and non government facilities and services for individuals, families and communities.
- Provide accessible sites for civic life and allow community organisations to meet the needs of the territory's various forms of community.
- Protect these social and community uses from competition from other uses.
- Enable the efficient use of land through facilitating the co-location and multi-use of community facilities, generally near public transport routes and convenience services appropriate to the use.
- Encourage adaptable and affordable housing for persons in need of residential support or care.
- Safeguard the amenity of surrounding residential areas against unacceptable adverse impacts including from traffic, parking, noise or loss of privacy.
- Promote active living and active travel.
- Provide safe pedestrian and cycling access to community facilities to promote active living.

Assessment Requirements for Retirement village dwelling the zone are limited to only require developments to comply with Class 'C' of Australian Standard AS4299 – Adaptable Housing – again a very sensible and important requirement for an aging population.

Assessment outcomes seems to focus on appropriate considerations around land use and scale, urban structure, build form, access and movement, sustainability and environment, visual privacy and amenity, design quality, site constraints and integration with surrounds, surveillance and overshadowing, WSUD, CPTED, environmental effect and the like. None of the items are specifically constraint to allow a designer to present a best suited development proposal that addressed all of the key onsite and integration matters and,



on merit, deliver the best, high quality development, streetscape and integration proposal for the proponent and the community.

We request that EPSDD strongly consider a change in zoning for this site and the Page Retirement Living and Care precinct from the current RZ2 zoning to the better positioned and contextual CFZ-Community Facility zoning.

We are available at any time to meet with you or the authority to discuss any matter relating to this submission as may be required. Should you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact

[Redacted contact information]

Kind Regards

[Redacted signature]

**Attachments:**

1. One Fell Swoop (2023) Proprietary Industry Information - The State Of Aged Care And Retirement Living In The Act
2. AMC Architecture Development Concept for the subject lands