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Government

**CITY
RENEWAL
AUTHORITY**

What we've heard: Garema Place

Summary of feedback 2019-2022

Community consultation activities have occurred over 2019-2022 to support the design of an upgraded Garema Place. Consultation has engaged property owners, local businesses, interest groups, and the broader community. This document provides a summary of what we've heard during this time.

All consultations have aimed to ensure the City Renewal Authority's planning is aligned to the values and aspirations of the area's residents, businesses, workers and visitors.



Renewing Garema Place

The ACT Government has an urban renewal program, delivered by the City Renewal Authority, dedicated to increasing social interaction, economic growth and enabling a diverse range of activities in the City Centre. To do this, the Authority is taking a people-focused, design-led approach to revitalise and reinforce the area as Canberra's main shopping and entertainment precinct.

To achieve the objective of the renewal program, it is essential to address the issues that will meet community expectations. Building on the success of upgrades to City Walk, the Authority is planning upgrades to bring life back to this area for all Canberrans, positioning the public spaces of Civic as the heart of a vital, inclusive and prosperous city centre.



What you've told us

Place sentiment

People are positive about opportunities to improve Garema Place, and particularly value:

- a focus on governance, business incentives and placemaking
- keeping things that are working well
- actions that will increase inclusion for groups such as children, older people, and people with disability.

People are concerned about:

- how external factors, like local retail market conditions, could limit success
- the need for more consultation at some point on actions with high potential community impact, including vehicle movements, public art and trees.

A small number of people saw no need for major changes. They said modest improvements could suffice as the residential population of the City Centre increases.

Upgrading Garema Place, our civic plaza

Garema Place was proposed to be a “civic plaza” with the flexibility to cater for everyday use and special events. Most people thought this was a positive concept, especially if it would:

- maintain and enhance green landscape, and potentially add more trees
- make sure any changes allow for people to sit and use the edges, to help keep its everyday role as a place to meet friends
- include sightlines for passive surveillance to increase public safety
- provide shelter for all kinds of weather
- increase availability of public toilets.

“Garema and City Walk’s greatest strength is the fact it is almost 100% pedestrian only”

“Garema Place is like a school dance floor: everyone stands around the outside and no one dances in the middle”

“I think celebrating the First Australians is important”

“How to bring people into Civic will be the greatest challenge to resolve”





Community organisations

Community organisations were consulted to support understanding of priorities within their interest area.

Key points from interviews with key community groups were:

- public spaces must be fully accessible
- shared zones can support accessibility
- taxis provide an important transport service, particularly at night
- there must be ongoing access to a safe, non-stigmatised space in the city centre for people who are without a home
- there should be more access to public toilets
- creative arts can play an important role in activating place and supporting business
- a mechanism to broker relationships between artists and business would be mutually beneficial
- it is crucial to make sure people retain a sense of agency
- spaces need to retain a connection with the “story” of Canberra
- all of the ACT is Ngannawal land, so no one place in the city centre is a “heart” from this perspective, as connection to land is broader than any one place
- involving the view of Aboriginal artists, businesses, organisations and individuals can help position a cultural perspective within the place
- there is an opportunity for a central, staffed community information hub
- each space needs a clear identity to improve wayfinding
- continue to focus on low-cost or free events that everyone can get involved in.

Property owners

To inform future improvements to Garema Place, the Authority sought feedback from owners of properties that border Garema Place. The purpose of engagement with owners was to hear from owners about future and current intentions for those properties so this can be considered as further planning of the upgrade takes place.

Consultation themes included:

- Support for an upgrade and/or improvements of Garema Place.
- Desire for improved safety and reduced incidence of antisocial behaviour in Garema Place as a priority.
- Many property owners who participated had either short, medium or long-term plans to undertake renovations to their buildings.





Community

Community consultation was framed around five place propositions. Place propositions are high-level ideas about possible change across the whole project area.

The below table summarises what consultation participants viewed to be the merits of these place propositions.

Place proposition	Merits
Flow through the public realm	<p>People were interested in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• making it easier for pedestrians to move around the project area• enabling all the different forms of transport (pedestrian, bicycle, bus, car and service vehicles) to share the spaces better• being able to create more opportunities for vehicle movement. <p>They gave a range of reasons why the area needs better flow, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• safety and visibility• financial viability of retail• meeting the needs of older people and people with disability.
Encourage public life	<p>There was strong support for bringing unique shops and services into the project area. Participants said that people need more reasons to visit the area and that activities there should complement, rather than compete with, the Canberra Centre.</p> <p>People commented that the area will need to better meet the day-to-day needs of a growing population of city centre residents — adding playgrounds and fresh food shops, for example.</p> <p>Many people suggested ways to make the design of buildings in the area more diverse. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• making the planning system more flexible to allow and encourage non-traditional tenancies• emphasising quality in building standards, not only in structural integrity but also in visual appearance and how they connect with public spaces.
Texture of the public domain	<p>The feedback emphasised how important it is to explore these ideas so that we can raise the quality of Garema Place to meet contemporary community expectations.</p>





Place proposition	Merits
	<p>There was enthusiastic support for a general “clean-up” of the physical space, particularly to make paved areas level and provide clearer signs for wayfinding.</p> <p>People were particularly interested in having:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a highly “green” landscape that meets high environmental sustainability standards• spaces that are comfortable for people in all seasons and weather• a wide variety of interactive elements, such as seating, play and free Wi-Fi.
Meaning of place	<p>We heard that this proposition is fundamental to making the project area an authentic space that reflects its role as a modern city centre without losing the sense of its historical value.</p> <p>People shared their cherished memories of the project area. Many reflected on the way the spaces had developed and operated before the outer suburbs of Canberra had their own retail centres.</p> <p>Many accepted the suggestion that turning most of the project area into a pedestrian mall may have unintentionally contributed to retail decline.</p> <p>Most people wanted to keep meaningful parts of the spaces while introducing new points of joy and fun. For example, everyone thought the area should continue to be a venue for large events and gatherings.</p> <p>Many people supported the idea of introducing “playability” so that spaces are more child-friendly and welcoming for families.</p>
Public and private partnerships	<p>In general, the feedback told us that this proposition was worth exploring.</p> <p>Participants agreed there should be more flexibility in the current planning system. Most supported the role of the ACT Government in making change happen, including by providing incentives for good development.</p> <p>Most were positive about the role of the City Renewal Authority in bridging the gap between the public and private sector. Everyone wanted to see the ACT Government show leadership and commitment in seeing through actions over the short, medium and longer term.</p> <p>Most supported the principle of creating an area that is more “city-like” than it currently is. Participants made a range of suggestions about the best approach to diversifying the mix of tenancies and integrating higher-density residential use.</p>





Events and attractions

We've spoken with visitors to events about how they travelled to the city, what brought them to the city, as well as questions relating to the Floriade Walking Trail and City Walk in 2022.

Respondents were asked what would make the area of the city more appealing to visit even when Floriade is not on, to gather feedback about City Walk more broadly.

Responses relevant to Garema Place and City Walk included:

- more things to do and see along the walk - e.g. entertainment
- more alfresco / outdoor dining opportunities
- better wayfinding signage
- better quality footpaths and walkways
- more rest opportunities with more seating
- bike paths
- artwork
- more shade
- better lighting.

Respondents were also asked if there are any parts of City Walk and Allara Street that stand out. Responses included:

- maintenance is required - paths are uneven, some parts of the walk are muddy and litter is present
- a 'makeover' is required - some said that the area is looking tired or 'daggy' with buildings that are run-down
- one suggestion was made to include more colour and less concrete
- the area is spacious and open
- the area is not bike or scooter friendly - there should be a designated path for cyclists.

