



Inner South Canberra Community Council

ISCCC Chair's Report 2022-2023

Annual General Meeting

14 November 2023

Introduction

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, and their elders past, present and emerging. As we know, the ACT was the only jurisdiction to vote “Yes” in the Referendum one month ago, on 14 October, for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in the Constitution. The “Yes” vote at polling booths in the Inner South ranged from 62% to 77%, with an average of about 70%. This signifies that there is, in the inner south, strong support for reconciliation.

In this Chair's report, I will focus on the ISCCC's work in the past financial year and up until this AGM, drawing on the ISCCC's strategic priorities. I will reflect also on some of the ISCCC's longer term achievements, given some recent media articles on the role of Community Councils.

1. A key ISCCC priority is to advocate for the ACT's planning system to deliver a liveable, sustainable, resilient inner south Canberra where heritage values are respected

In the past year, the ISCCC's key focus has been on the ACT Government's review of the Planning System. This has consumed huge time and effort by the ISCCC Committee and member groups. At the Review's commencement in 2019, the ISCCC surveyed inner south residents to better understand what they value about where they live. The survey findings guided our focus in responding to the Planning Review.

During the Review, the ISCCC has:

- Participated in numerous meetings with officials and other stakeholders.
- Held many public forums focusing on Planning Review issues: in Sept and Nov 2022; and Feb, April, June, Aug, and Oct 2023. In addition, ISCCC member groups, the Deakin and Yarralumla Residents Associations, addressed urban intensification issues at a public forum in Feb 23.
- Lodged several submissions - including to the Assembly Inquiry on the Planning Bill; to the ACT Government on the Draft Territory Plan/District Strategies and related Assembly Inquiry.
- Participated in public hearings of the Assembly Inquiry into the Planning Bill, in Dec 22.
- Engaged with media through multiple print media and radio interviews/articles.¹

2. The ISCCC has advocated strongly for living infrastructure, solar access and protection of private open space from overshadowing/overlooking

The ISCCC has been successful in securing a greater focus in the new planning system on the importance of living infrastructure, complemented by the new Urban Forest Act. Living infrastructure is critical to avoid the heat island effect in our suburbs and the resulting health impacts, and make our suburbs more resilient in the face of climate change.

On the downside, we have major concerns that protection of living infrastructure may not occur in practice due to the shift away from a rules-based to a more discretionary planning system. Provisions relating to living infrastructure, solar access and protection of private open space are included in the new Design

¹ Eg. <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8222332/not-enough-notice-of-planning-bill-amendments-community-council/>, <https://the-riotact.com/governments-disappointing-response-shows-it-is-not-for-turning-on-planning-bill-says-community-council-chair/656285>, <https://the-riotact.com/planning-review-consultation-listening-report-didnt-listen-says-community-council/664640>

Guides and Planning Technical Requirements but are not mandatory, with the exception of exempt development like knockdown rebuilds (see section below).

We welcome the ACT Government's announcement of more resources for Access Canberra, the Conservator of Flora and Fauna, and the Environment Protection Authority to enable them to better monitor and ensure compliance with the new planning requirements. However, without changes in the governance framework to provide necessary checks and balances, and without a clear monitoring and evaluation framework, we are not confident that new developments will actually deliver on the desired outcomes. To give the latest example, the ACT Government has engaged a consultant to review governance of the planning system, but only seems to require consultation with Government stakeholders and some statutory office-holders in the review.

Recently, the ISCCC lodged a submission in response to the ACT Government's proposed new Urban Open Space Land Management Plan, which will govern the management of public land like parks and ovals.

The ISCCC will keep an eye on how the new Urban Forest Act, which comes into effect on 1 January, works to protect the urban forest and green spaces in the suburbs.

3. The ISCCC has advocated for neighbours to have a say on knockdown rebuilds

The ISCCC knows from our survey of inner south residents that they want a say about knockdown rebuilds occurring next door or nearby. The new planning system does not give residents a say about knockdown rebuilds that are assessed by independent certifiers as meeting planning rules and hence are exempt from Development Applications. However, we are pleased that there are mandatory requirements in the new Exempt Development Regulation in relation to the amount of planting area, solar access, and protection of private open space. Nevertheless, all developments, both those deemed to be exempt and non-exempt from Development Applications, should be subjected to compliance checks at critical points of construction. Furthermore, developments in Heritage Precincts should not be exempt from development applications.

4. The ISCCC and member groups advocate for better social housing

We have advocated for public housing that meets national standards for accessibility and that is aligned to the needs of the population. ISCCC's public forum on social housing in July 2022, and on the Planning Review in Feb 23 helped to highlight social housing issues and connect with stakeholders eg ACTCOSS, Housing ACT, and representatives of public housing tenants. Residents' groups have been successful in ACAT in making government agencies accountable for ensuring new public housing meets national standards for supportive housing for people with disabilities.

5. The ISCCC and member groups advocate for quality precinct-scale urban renewal

We have advocated, including in our own Inner South Canberra District Planning Strategy (2021), for properly planned precinct-scale development, in close consultation with local communities. There are many precinct scale developments under way at present in the inner south.

The ISCCC and member groups have participated actively in community panels on the Canberra Brickworks and Kingston Arts Precincts. Precinct scale developments take a long time, but we hope will lead to better outcomes, both in terms of the supply of diverse housing types and the provision of liveable environments. Right now, the Estate Development Plan for the Brickworks Precinct is out for community comment, and the deadline has just been extended to 18 December. The Kingston Arts Precinct has been delayed due to the termination of the contract with Geocon, but it appears to be progressing now on a more positive pathway.

The proposed amendment to the National Capital Plan for the CSIRO Forestry site in Yarralumla is also out for community comment until 22 December.

The ISCCC and member groups have been cooperating actively with Government and liaising with representatives of public housing tenants in relation to major redevelopment of the East Lake precinct next

to Kingston Foreshore, and with developers Molonglo Group in relation to the Dairy Road precinct development in Fyshwick.

The major precinct developments at former public housing sites in Narrabundah, Griffith and Red Hill have either been completed or are close to completion.

Residents' groups take the lead on urban renewal precincts and related heritage issues in their local area eg the Kingston Barton Residents Group (KBRG) for the Kingston Arts Precinct; KBRG/Griffith Narrabundah Community Association/Old Narrabundah Community Council for the Eastlake and Dairy Road developments; Yarralumla Residents Association (YRA) for the Canberra Brickworks and Forestry Precinct redevelopments in Yarralumla, and Red Hill Residents Group for The Parks Development in Red Hill, etc.

6. The ISCCC and member groups advocate for respect of heritage values

We continue to advocate for the inner south's heritage values to be respected as the district changes and densifies. ISCCC public forums in February and October 2023 have addressed heritage issues. In addition, the ISCCC lodged a submission to, and appeared at public hearings on the Inquiry into ACT Heritage Arrangements, and also lodged a Submission to the ACT Heritage Jurisdictional Review.

In the context of Canberra's role as the national capital, the ISCCC and YRA lodged submissions to, and appeared at public hearings for, the federal Parliament's Joint Standing Committee Inquiry into ways to foster and promote the significance of Australia's National Capital.

7. The ISCCC advocates for an integrated and effective transport system

In the past year, the ISCCC has lodged submissions on the ACT Government Active Travel Plan, and on the ACT Design Guide: Best practices for urban intersections and other active travel infrastructure. Much more needs to be done to ensure better public transport access for inner south residents, especially for the disadvantaged community of Oaks Estate, which still doesn't have a direct public transport link to Canberra.

The ISCCC's public forum in September 2022 addressed light rail issues, and a joint public forum by the Deakin and Yarralumla Residents Associations in May 2023 considered public transport futures for Canberra.

8. The ISCCC holds regular meetings and public forums

In the past year or so, the ISCCC has held a mix of in-person, online and hybrid ISCCC Public forums in July, Sept, Nov 2022; and in Feb, April, June, Aug, and Oct 2023, and this AGM tonight. Issues our public forums focused on include:

- The ACT Government's Planning System Review and Reform
- Active Travel
- ACT Heritage Arrangements
- Development of East Lake Precinct
- Transport including development of light rail
- Social and Community Housing
- Urban intensification
- Health walk-in centre
- Suburban infrastructure upgrades
- Updates from Residents Groups and Associations

ISCCC Committee members participated also in meetings of the Combined Community Councils, the ACT Environment and Planning Forum, Brickworks Community Panel and the Kingston Arts Precinct Community Panel. The ISCCC helps promote public events organised by member residents groups, for example:

14 February 2023: Public Information Session organised by Yarralumla and Deakin Residents' Associations on impacts on Yarralumla and Deakin of the proposed new ACT planning framework. See <https://www.yarralumlaresidents.org.au/latest-news/show/78>

8 May 2023: Seminar on Transport Futures for Canberra organised by the Deakin and Yarralumla Residents Associations, assisted by Anthony Senti. See <https://deakinresidents.asn.au/transport-futures-for-canberra/>

9. The ISCCC lodges submissions on issues of interest and concern

The ISCCC lodged submissions on the following issues in the past year:

- Assembly inquiry into Territory Plan and supporting documents (October 2023)
- Urban Open Space Land Management Plan (August 2023)
- Review of Integrity Commission legislation (June 23)
- ACT Design Guide: Best practices for urban intersections and other active travel infrastructure (June 23)
- Proposed Crematorium, Symonston (May 23)
- East Lake Place Plan (May 23)
- Inquiry into ways to foster and promote the significance of Australia's National Capital (May 23)
- Inquiry into ACT's heritage arrangements (Apr 23)
- Draft Territory Plan and District Strategy (Mar 23)
- Regulation of Developers (Mar 23)
- Legislative Assembly Planning, Transport and City Services Standing Committee Inquiry on Planning Bill (Nov 22)
- ACT Active Travel Plan (Aug 22)

I thank the ISCCC's member residents' groups for their input to many of these submissions.

10. Other communication and community engagement

The ISCCC has maintained regular public forums, website, Facebook, Twitter and other communication channels. Regular newsletters have been distributed through the ISCCC email list and through member residents' groups email lists and in hardcopy. There have been regular posts to Facebook (1000 followers on the ISCCC Facebook page, 2200 on the KBRG Facebook group) and Twitter/X (over 1200 followers). The ISCCC is engaging a broader range of stakeholders in our public forums as guest speakers etc. For example, the ACTCOSS CEO was a guest speaker at ISCCC's July 22 public forum, and representatives of public housing residents and of the Fyshwick business association were speakers at the April 23 public forum.

Our member residents groups reach out to their communities. Several run tree and park care groups, and the Yarralumla, Deakin, Kingston/Barton and Oaks Estate residents groups all participated in the ACT Government's Floriade in the Suburbs initiative this year, which was a great way to engage residents. The Griffith/Narrabundah Community Association participated in the Narrabundah College "Bundah Bulbs" festival, and holds stalls at local and group centre shops. The Old Narrabundah Community Council holds an annual festival for the community and looks after a community garden, tennis courts and local wetlands, and the Yarralumla Residents Association holds end-of-year community events and initiated the annual Christmas Red Bow display on street trees.

We acknowledge the need to do more outreach to diverse groups in our community.

The ISCCC provides ongoing support, including funds from the ACT Government's community council grant and insurance cover, to member residents' groups for community engagement activities.

11. Building capacity and capability

There remain many challenges for volunteer run organisations such as the ISCCC. The significant expectations for outreach for an organisation with no paid staff can lead to burnout of volunteers, and it can be difficult to attract people with specific skillsets such as public relations, social media, and management of hybrid online/in-person meetings. The ISCCC is hopeful that some of these gaps will be filled shortly.

The ISCCC's structure as a peak body for residents groups facilitates cross fertilisation of knowledge and advocacy on relevant issues.

12. Future Activities

As a result of the experience gained in organising online Zoom meetings during periods of COVID restrictions, the ISCCC will seek to build capacity to hold more hybrid in-person/online meetings. Issues that are expected to attract attention and interest in 2023-24 include the implementation of the new Planning Bill and Territory Plan, the Inner South Canberra District Strategy, Light Rail stage 2, other public transport and active travel issues, Social housing, the East Lake precinct, Canberra Brickworks, Kingston Arts Precinct and Dairy Road Precinct.

13. Reflecting on some ISCCC Achievements over the past decade

There has been a bit of media recently about the contribution of community councils. The ACT Government continues to fund community councils, with a very slight increase from \$12,812 to \$13,000 per year, suggesting the Government considers the councils provide value for money. Nevertheless, there seem to be high expectations of what can be achieved by community councils with no paid staff.

Some of the ISCCC's achievements since its establishment in 2010 are:

- a. The **ISCCC supported the establishment of new suburban residents groups** (in Kingston/Barton, Forrest, Red Hill, Oaks Estate), and currently provides financial and other assistance for residents groups. To be full members of the ISCCC, residents groups must have Annual General Meetings and elections for their committees.
- b. Jointly with residents groups, the ISCCC advocated successfully against massive development proposals that would have impacted adversely on the Inner South's amenity:
 - **Fyshwick waste facilities** - we held public meetings attracting up to 200 participants and advocated in support of KBRG, GNCA and ONCC campaigns, especially in the lead-up to the 2020 ACT elections, resulting in legislative change to prohibit large-scale waste facilities in Fyshwick that would have had major air quality and other adverse impacts on local residents.
 - **An unsolicited GWS/Grocon proposal for a massive overdevelopment of the Manuka Oval precinct** - an ISCCC public forum on 28 April 2016 was attended by about 350 people and the ISCCC supported a strong KBRG and GNCA campaign. The ACT Government rejected the unsolicited proposal a few months before the 2016 election.
 - **The former Land Development Agency's proposed overdevelopment of the Canberra Brickworks** - the ISCCC supported a strong YRA campaign, including with public meetings attended by up to 200 people, which resulted in the ACT Government dropping the massive development proposal one year before the 2016 election. Subsequently, the ISCCC and YRA collaborated with other stakeholders in a new ACT Government approach of using a community panel to develop objectives for and contribute to a new precinct proposal that pays more respect to the heritage of the site while providing for a 30 percent increase in the number of dwellings in Yarralumla.

We could argue that the **strong ISCCC and member group campaigns in support of strong protections for living infrastructure, solar access and private open space** have influenced the new Planning Act and Territory Plan, but the proof will be in the pudding, given the shift away from a rules based to an outcomes based planning system providing much more discretion.

What the successful campaigns had in common was that the ISCCC supported very strong residents' group campaigns, especially in the year leading up to ACT elections.

c. Comprehensive ISCCC survey of inner south residents in late 2019-early 2020 (555 respondents) - we letterboxed all inner south households to seek their views on what they valued about where they lived, to inform the ISCCC's future strategy and response to the ACT Planning Review.

d. Inner South Canberra District Planning Strategy 2021, developed by the ISCCC and member groups, was informed by the above survey. While the ACT Government has developed its own Inner South District Strategy, the ISCCC Strategy still provides a framework and ideas for future ISCCC activities and advocacy.

e. Development of communication and engagement channels:

- Face-to-face, online and hybrid public forums, although challenges remain for hybrid meetings
- Social media - Facebook, Twitter/X
- Hardcopy and online newsletters
- Regular coverage in print, radio and TV media
- Contributing financially to residents groups' communications activities

f. ISCCC advocacy helped ensure Telopea Park remains subject to Special Requirements under the National Capital Plan, with the extra protections that provides.

g. ISCCC advocacy helped prevent watering down of solar access provisions for dwellings in established suburbs (DV346)

This is just a sample of ISCCC achievements in cooperation with our member residents groups.

14. Thanks

This will be my final report as ISCCC Chair, as I'm not nominating for the Chair position in elections tonight. The past 18 months have been my second incarnation as Chair, after a previous 3.5 year stint in 2017-2020.

I would like to thank my fellow committee members and member residents' groups for your support during my terms as Chair and during my time in the ISCCC Committee. The ISCCC really derives strength from our structure as a peak body and it provides a fabulous opportunity for us to exchange views on issues of common interest and to learn from each other, and enjoy each others' company.

I'd also like to thank the ACT Government for the annual grant of \$12,812, which is going up slightly to \$13,000 for this financial year. Also, our thanks to the Eastlake Football Club for providing us with complimentary use of its meeting rooms, and to Sue Ross for reviewing our annual financial statements. Of course, I thank all those in the inner south community who have supported us by coming to our public forums, by becoming members of our member groups and the Council, and by providing us with your views.

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