

Protecting, promoting and enhancing the economic, cultural, social and environmental well-being of the residents of North Canberra

The North Canberra Community Council receives funding and support from the ACT Government



Minutes: General Meeting 7pm 17 May 2023

Attendance: Bruce Smith, Leon Arundell, Joachim Zeal, Ernestine Kirsch, Marcus Hipkins, Marianne Albury-Colless, Jane Goffman, Margaret Dudley, Chris Finnigan, Ian Hubbard

Observers: Laura (Turner)

GENERAL BUSINESS

Presentation: Kirsten Duncan, Climate & Sustainability Campaigner, Conservation Council ACT Region

The Conservation Council has received an ACT Government zero-emissions grant to educate Canberrans about the health benefits, cost-savings, environmental/climate impacts of switching from gas to electric appliances. See <https://maketheswitch.org.au/>

The Conservation Council ACT Region's Key Energy policy platform for a safe climate (2020 ACT Election) include:

- Urgently set a timetable to phase out the use of gas in the ACT by 2030
- Stop all new gas connections immediately
- Establish minimum energy efficiency standard for properties by 2021
- Extend energy support to low income households
- Increase minimum energy ratings of new residential buildings to 8-star by 2022
- Establish a compliance unit to ensure building standards are met
- Phase out wood burning heaters

Kirsten outlined the imperative to tackle climate change by reducing greenhouse gases by half by 2030. The pace of climate change is accelerating and action to address this must accelerate. The Make the Shift website provides information and resources to support people replacing gas with electric appliances. It includes calculators to compare alternatives and appliance options. Gas contributes 22% of the ACT's greenhouse gas emissions. Transport 62%, industrial processes 11%, waste 4% and agriculture 1%.

The conservation Council (ACT) has a project 'Make the Move' to zero emission travel – how to choose transport options other than the car.

Discussion

EK: Are evoenergy and ACTEWAg1 conflicted in the transition from gas as they have significant interests in the gas industry?

LA: Consideration should be given to reducing Scope 3 emissions and electrifying public transport

JZ: The high energy use for heating and cooling in ACT homes because the energy efficiency of existing housing is completely inadequate. Suggests that with the make the switch policy there should also be a policy to improve the energy performance of houses.

Kirsten: There are programs being run by the ACT Government and community groups to improve the energy performance of houses. Policy on minimum insulation standards, particularly on rental housing. National construction code has been lifted to 7 stars on new builds.

Discussion on shifting commercial kitchens from gas to induction cooking because it's safer, cleaner, less heat, noise. Kirsten mentioned Global Cook safe campaign.

BS: How can community Councils help? Kirsten: Promote the Make the Shift Campaign and she is happy to present to council meetings, schools and other organisations.

MH: Is there a date on people making the shift? evoenergy has the data. About 130,000 households in the ACT are connected to gas. Around 30% have already made the shift. To achieve the 2045 target we need to convert 6000 houses per year. The Sustainable Housing program also has the stats – possibly 150 households have accessed the loans so far. Disconnections are outnumbering new connections. By the end of this year no new gas connections for new builds and infill.

Kirsten suggested 'My Efficient Electric Home' facebook site which is a community exchanging ideas on all things going electric. Key word search will deliver answers on things such as the benefits of underfloor heating. Check out the ACT Government Climate Choices website offers an online tool or free home energy efficiency assessments.

General discussion on how expensive it was for households to make the 'Switch'. Replacement of heating, cooling, hot water, cooking and making your house more energy efficient could easily cost more than \$50,000. It's not going to be simple or cheap for most households. Kirsten suggested that those who can afford to make the shift should, others could replace gas appliances as they come to the end of life and fail.

JZ: What is the ACT Government doing to upgrade the public and social housing stock? Kirsten commented that the Government is currently undertaking an audit assessing what gas appliance are in social housing and then will implement a program to address the transition.

IH: Acknowledging the Climate Emergency is the Government doing enough to incentivise this transition? Should the new planning framework require all new housing to be carbon neutral? Is the Conservation Council supportive of all new builds being carbon neutral? Kirsten: CC would like to see the suburb zero Saul Griffith project get up. Sarah Reid, CC President is a leader in the sub zero project. The project will see Federal Government funding to electrify a suburb or zone of Canberra to demonstrate the economics of electrifying

different kinds of housing. These projects will take several years to establish and need to be accelerated to have an impact on reducing emissions.

JG and BS recounted that their transitions had cost a bomb. Lack of technicians to support the transition. People with the funds are likely to make the move but most are unlikely to. Suggested that if the regulatory framework and transition were made cheaper through subsidisation the transition would be more successful.

Kirsten: CC will continue to work with the Government to improve supports. Expect supply chains to improve and more technicians to become available. Eager to see the timetable for transition to be released by the Government in the 2nd half of this year.

MA-C: Why doesn't the Government make the turn-off of gas free?

Kirsten: We're pushing for the de-commissioning cost to be covered by evoenergy or the Government. The steps to turn-off include replacing gas appliances, turn-off the yellow stop-cock, ask the gas provider to do a final meter reading to close account (\$20-30), for safety reasons get a plumber to cap the meter (\$150), get evoenergy to remove and decommissioning the infrastructure including the meter and piping back to the main (\$700). The Gas Transition Advisory Committee are looking at this.

1. Chair's Report

March 2023 minutes accepted.

Standing Committee on Heritage.

Bemused by Greater Canberra's contribution that hammers Reid and Ainslie residents using the heritage legislation to stop new housing considering only 1% of existing housing is impacted by heritage legislation. There is general confusion on how heritage legislation impacts developments or natural heritage and how it interacts with all the other layers of environmental legislation. Made the point that despite all this legislation it has been completely ineffective in protecting natural heritage. MA-C made significant comments with the Committee and these contributions will be made available to the NCCC when published.

Peter Cain, MLA Roundtable (18 May 2023)

JZ canvassed issues that should be raised at a roundtable organised by Peter Cain MLA. Discussion around the proposed topics for the roundtable which include:

- Lack of sincere consultation with stakeholders
- A whole-of-Canberra approach to the future of planning
- Planning for a Capital with a population of one million
- The best approach to delivering smarter urban infill and expanding the urban footprint

MH: Peter Cain has circulated a speech that he made in the ACT Assembly. It appears that he is listening and provides most reflection on the concerns of the community.

JZ: Read through the Jo Clay's press release. The Greens seem to be taking on-board the issues around consultation and the climate change crisis. They don't seem to be taking on-board the key question of the governance of planning – meaning the independence of advice. Granting huge power to the Chief Planner, no political responsibility for what's coming. Unsure what the whole-of-Canberra approach will be.

MH: The Territory Plan is meant to be a plan for the whole of the Territory – prescribing what land is meant to be used for. A key concern is accepting the pressure for infill development. To make sure it is done properly has to take into account issues such as traffic, infrastructure, and impact on neighbours. Questioning all the negative impacts of infill and the benefits of not having massive urban sprawl. This is a big challenge and I haven't seen anything that addresses these concerns.

MA-C: There is significant research and academic studies outlining the pluses and minuses of infill. We need to also look carefully at what we are going to lose – connectivity, biodiversity because there's more bitumen, cement and glass. Need to look at the carrying capacity of Australia. Commonwealth doesn't have a population policy. We have to plan for what is coming at us. The Greens might say they're looking at climate change, but they're not planning for it. We really have to change things radically. We are losing the benefits we already have in Canberra – wide tree canopies, porous surfaces that can manage water. These things are not in the Planning Bill. This looks like a development planning bill. Planning has to be done through the lens of climate change and that's not happening.

LA: The ACT Governments Nature Conservation Strategy addresses the 55 species that are currently endangered and is not doing enough when it is expected that 8% or 500 local species will be threatened with extinction as a result of climate change.

The ACT has close to a 30 tonnes per capita carbon footprint which is 4 times the world average and where only 4 other countries have higher footprints. The government is not addressing our Scope 3 emissions. We need to plan for higher temperatures. We do need urban infill to reduce travel distances. To bring more destinations within cycling distances so we don't have to use our polluting cars and highly polluting public transport.

MA-C: And that we don't sacrifice areas that are showing they are cool suburbs. Have a look at the CSIRO heat mapping report, it really tells the story and graphically. Put infill in areas where there are not large trees and gardens. Its madness to do anything else.

LA: We have to balance the effect of urban infill with the effect of urban sprawl which could be worse considering the amount of environmental damage it does.

MA_C: We need to look at planning in an integrated way. That's what's not happening. That's why we need some independent input from the outside. Planners are forgetting about the environment. ...in an integrated way not just stacking a whole lot of people on top of Canberra as it is now. Example the failure of the DOMA group development

Letter to the Greens

MD: Have you had a response to the Combined Council's letter to the Greens?

JZ: No. Jo Clay's press release talks about consultation, climate change and environment but not the most important issues in the planning bill – governance and compliance.

MD: They shouldn't be able to walk away from the planning process. They should take responsibility for planning. They are our local members and their position should be in line with the people who voted for them. They shouldn't be able to put their hands in the air and say they don't want to participate.

JZ: What should we do? The Combined Council's letter listed all the issues.

Action: JZ to follow up response to letter.

Infill

BS: Infill is already happening, but it's in a haphazard way. Granny flat builder's signs are everywhere and obviously there's a lot of grannies in Hackett. Maybe a better approach is a more coordinated approach to infill.

JZ: The other problem is MacMansions. Greater Canberra want separate titling?

MA-C: The other problem is the loss of social and affordable housing close to the city. The demolition of the ABC Flats etc.

JZ: The City Renewal Authority has asked for a view on the development of Block 1 Section 21 in the City. A perfect place for social housing.

IH: A big issue with the new planning regime is the deregulation of planning and the reliance on the market to provide particularly infill housing. The drive for separate titling is to enable developers to divide an existing block and sell the new development on separate blocks. You can currently do dual occupancy on an RZ1 block over 800sqm but you can't separate title them. Families can do a dual occupancy for family members or even rent them out separately.

At your round table meeting tomorrow can ask whether the 70% infill/30% greenfield land release policy has provided enough housing to meet demand. Clearly it hasn't and this means more expensive housing for everyone.

Urban sprawl is a design issue. Why isn't there land release with really good design that satisfies the issues the MA-C was raising. Carbon neutral housing, biodiversity corridors, solar passive aspects in estate design. Then the negative impacts of urban sprawl become a positive.

JZ: The Government will argue that this is what an outcomes-based planning framework will produce.

IH: If you rely on the market they're not interested in producing those outcomes. They're interested in yield and how much they can make from each block whether its inner city or greenfields. They are not motivated to deliver community aspirations or connectivity. When have they ever given a stuff about biodiversity, community facilities, hospitals or whatever? If the result of the planning changes is deregulation and no quality/design controls we will get what the market has been producing. Like the rezoned part of Dickson bordered by Wakefield, Majura, Northbourne and the Dickson shops. All the houses are being knocked down and replaced by apartments or townhouses. And they're not affordable. It's covering the whole block in concrete and creating heat sinks. The new planning bill as MA-C says is not addressing anything that's coming at us.

MD: I remember going to the housing choices discussions all those years ago when dual occupancies were still allowed in the inner suburbs. Overhead slides showed that the blocks with dual occupancies were hard to see because of the canopy cover. They had allowed enough land around the dwellings for mature trees and gardens. Whereas in Gungahlin where the eaves were virtually touching there was nowhere for any greenspace. Infill can be done properly and it is a design issue.

An ACT Population of 1 million people

Discussion of the impacts on the ACT with a population of 1 million.

Close of Meeting

Meeting was adjourned at 9pm with a proposal that things be moved to the next meeting such the discussion around wood heater smoke; the Northside Hospital (a model of what could happen at Thoroughbred Park); Affordable Housing Working Group; and Peddle Power seeking NCCC to support for their infrastructure campaign.

Minute taker for the meeting: Ian Hubbard