

## Submission 4.1

I am an architect. My name is Rosemarie Elizabeth Willett

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before this committee; My perspective is professional with a focus on design

Many years ago when I was an architectural student at Melbourne University I became interested in Griffin's plan; I have now been fortunate to devote the past 2 years to full time research on Griffin's ideas and his Plan.

Town planning can be approached by minds cluttered with the complexities of the planning issues – typified by the old saying that 'you can't see the forest for the trees'. The answer for this dilemma is provided in a very simple statement by Griffin: 'In Town Planning as in architecture there must be a vision. There must be a scheme which the mind can grasp, and it must be expressed in the simplest terms possible.'<sup>i</sup> In terms of this statement Griffin's plan reached perfection.

I came to Canberra in 1983 as an experienced architect to work for Mitchell Giurgola and Thorpe on **this** building and will take a minute to use it to illustrate two principles from a design perspective – design integrity and a unitary source for design control. After the Parliament was opened, the Parliament House Construction Authority was looking for someone to write guidelines for this building. Australian Construction Services put me forward and I wrote the guidelines document which I called 'Design Integrity and Management of Change'. A building intended to last for 200 years has to manage change.

Design integrity is to do with fitness for purpose and the expression in form and detail of the design ideas. Proposals for change needed to observe the design principles already established in this building or its design integrity would be destroyed. If this happened the Parliament House would lose its impact and dignity.

The second principle can be explained in this way: This building was created by many acts of collaboration in many fields covering politics, technologies and the arts. But I think no one would argue that the controlling architect of the vision, the design ideas, was Romaldo Giurgola. This illustrates the concept of the unitary source controlling the vision; and this applies to town planning as much as to architecture.

serious model of the NCA proposals on public display at Regatta Point. Somewhere along the way the NCA were ambushed and persuaded to drop any idealism in favour of a purely commercial set of proposals with political overtones in the construction of a vast ASIO complex on Constitution Avenue. This work of the NCA was not logically supported in the arguments put forward in the book, nor was it supported by proper planning controls and procedures. It contained ideas actively detrimental to what we have left, on the ground, of Griffin's plan.

In my opinion, the term 'Griffin Legacy' is so sullied that it should not be used again. It should provide no basis for future action. I believe that it would serve Canberra well, both locally and nationally, to drop all vestiges of these proposals and to begin again with a proper analysis of Griffin's plan. We should look at why we have failed to provide the living heart for Canberra which lies in Griffin's plan. Then, understanding this, we may be able to make Canberra a vital, beautiful city to engage all visitors and Canberrans alike.

With regard to the appropriate level of oversight required to achieve the highest standards in design for areas of national significance:

There are difficulties in managing an intelligent and intelligible concept, which the design and future growth of a city must be, unless it is completely left to market forces. In my experience, **management** tends to break down and restructure concepts into manageable parts. Someone needs to keep the integrity of the whole vision intact – to be the unitary source of control. In Canberra this unitary source is required to integrate a plan which takes care of both the national and the municipal functions. Many people have suggested a role for a National Capital Architect. I am ambivalent about this as a policy role and against it if considered a substitute for a strong planning authority with a national capital perspective, under the leadership of a world class planner.

We have been asked to consider how to increase engagement with the Canberra community:

I would say that we need to encourage citizen pride in the development of their city; this is also a curb on adverse development. Had the NCA communicated their research on the Griffin plan to the public and fostered an interest on the benefits



Griffin recognized both the National and Municipal characters of Canberra and structured them into his plan, but avoided creating the duality of two cities. Many of Griffin's ideas have not been implemented, but **the great triangle**, formed by Constitution Avenue, Commonwealth and Kings Avenues, still unifies the city across the water. This is the great planning structure, along with the 'Land' and 'Water' axes, for the organic and democratic vision which now needs to be carried forward into the future.

The harmonization of planning systems would be best achieved by a single overarching planning body, assuming responsibility and public accountability for the National Capital and Territory Plan. This body should distinguish the national and municipal aspects of the plan and take responsibility for the management of the national functions. The NCA has had its planning responsibility curtailed from its initial charge as the NCPA. While I am indeed critical of the NCA's recent proposals I believe the overarching planning body must have a national perspective.

An autonomous, publicly accountable arm of the overarching planning body should operate to **administer** the municipal development functions within the requirements of the National Capital and Territory Plan. This municipal arm would propose and collaborate on amendments to the plan within the planning structure of the overarching body

It must be remembered that Canberra's function as a National Capital is the constitutional reason for its existence. This function also greatly benefits the citizens of Canberra – where else in Australia is there an inland city of 340 000 people with the sophistication of Canberra? Canberra needs Federal Government commitment and support to retain its pride of place as the National Capital.

In regard to the public accountability of the NCA, I can refer to the 'spin' in the NCA use of the term 'the Griffin Legacy'. Quietly and unostentatiously the NCA began an exciting program of research into what elements of Griffin's plan exist in Canberra and what elements still have potential for development realization. The results of this research were not formally exposed to peer professionals or the public. Suddenly the public was presented with a glossy book called 'The Griffin Legacy' and then a

The integrity of the Griffin plan lies in its national vision and the planning structures which provide for a developed democracy and regard for the natural environment and systems of nature. It is an organic basis for future growth. Cities grow; town planning is subject to continuous change; it is never finished. A town plan is in effect a guidelines document for the management of growth and change. It requires extensive collaboration, frequent review and amendment

Because Griffin's plan has a vision and is 'a scheme which the mind can grasp', as indeed is this building, it would be folly to disregard it and allow changes which do not embrace its fundamental principles. One of the most admired aspects of the design of this building is the way in which it responds to the planning structures of Griffin's plan. Romaldo Giurgola found Griffin's plan no impediment to his creativity. His response is multi dimensional – from the story of the land along the land axis to the relationship which the pyramidal form of the flag mast structure has to the planning structure of the great triangle

In regard to the paper I submitted to the Committee, the following gives what I consider being the most important points in relation to the terms of reference:

Self Government in the ACT established two planning bodies, one dealing with National the other dealing with Municipal issues. There is an inbuilt tendency for two such bodies to go in different directions and for there to be power struggles between two different sets of objectives, arising from different pressures. If political compromise is achieved it inevitably results in compromising the design vision of either or both. In any case, the eventual outcomes from two planning bodies are likely to be a divided city. A growing municipal city, developed by and for market forces and reducing the organic relationship to surrounding land forms, would smother the 'national' city. The national vision, left to the Parliamentary Triangle on the south side of the lake, Commonwealth Park with its reduced fringe of foreshore parkland and Anzac Parade would struggle to maintain some sense of national dignity and transcendental purpose. I believe that is the direction of the NCA's recent proposals which were undoubtedly a compromise from many pressures.



Griffin offered Canberra, and where and why Canberra is different, real issues would have been raised for public discourse. There is a high level of education and sophistication in the Canberra community. Such discourse may even have spread to enlighten the nation and increase national pride in Canberra. The best way to ensure cooperation with a planning authority is to promote public understanding and pride in the plan.

In all aspects of promotion of the National Capital I can see the merit of having another look at Griffin's vision:

The initial vision of the National Capital was of a place where Democracy, as the best system of governance and the best way of living, enables human life to coexist with all life on the planet. This is surely a vision to promote in the world today.

Griffin also believed in an urban environment and in facilities for recreation and pleasure, built into its heart. He designed the parks studded with recreational, sporting and cultural facilities on the north side of the lake and the midway gardens with the casino – restaurants and sculpture gardens – pleasurable open space at the heart of urban density. He believed in the provision of appropriate infrastructure and effective communication routes for modern means of vehicular transport. .

We could learn something from this approach to a 'living city'. Its planning structures created a vision in a 'scheme which the mind could grasp'. The Australian people seen ready to grasp that vision today. The evidence is in television and radio programmes, in newspapers and in the 2020 Summit last weekend. We are willing to develop our democracy and have a growing concern for planet earth.

Within that vision there is enormous opportunity for genuine creativity. Australia's National Capital needs a single overarching planning body to carry forward that vision and inspire that creativity. We need world class planning leadership with awareness of the structures and ideals which integrate this city and belief in the creative opportunities which this city provides.

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<sup>i</sup> Ibid, p 404 'Architecture' lecture transcript by WBG, 11 pages, p 6.