



Canberra Community Action on Acton Incorporated

President: Phone & Fax: 6231 2948

Secretary: Phone: 6247 0738 Fax: 6247 0768

PO Box 45, Ainslie 2602

**Supplementary Submission
to the
Commonwealth Parliament Joint Standing Committee
on the National Capital and External Territories
Inquiry into the Role of the National Capital Authority**

July 2003

CCAA appeared before the Joint Standing Committee on 20 June 2003, and wishes to make a further response due to the time limitation at that hearing.

Former Commonwealth Site in Blackall Street, Barton [and other similar sites]
[now the Landmark residential development]

In CCAA's view, it would be more appropriate if the National Capital Authority was able to manage the disposal of such a site, rather than the Department of Finance and Administration, as occurred. In this way, the sale or otherwise of the land could have been linked to associated infrastructure development for national capital advancement, as envisaged in the founding legislation for the establishment of Canberra. In this particular case, value could have been added to the land through infrastructure works involving the replacement of Bowen Drive (lying between the site and the lake), with the missing Causeway axis crossing. Generally, the NCA should be given powers to arrange and manage such integrated developments in the central national area, to the benefit of the national capital. Similarly, the development of significant dwellings on State Circle between Hobart Avenue and The Lodge could be implemented by the NCA for use by senior Federal politicians, both Government and non-Government.

A Transport System (Light-rail) for the Central National Area

Recent significant commercial developments at Canberra Airport and in York Park, Parkes, proposed residential and commercial developments at Kingston Foreshores, and the establishment of the National Museum on Acton Peninsula indicate the urgent need for an integrated, attractive, efficient, light-rail system for workers, residents and visitors in the Central National Area. This light-rail service should be frequent, and preferably driverless and free. The system would necessarily involve The Causeway, and an Acton Peninsula crossing (for light-rail, pedestrians, and bicycles only), and not use the Commonwealth and Kings Avenue bridges which, after all, converge and carry massive volumes of normal road traffic.

CCAA believes that this concept should be given priority by the Commonwealth Government, and passed to the NCA for design, development and implementation, involving the private sector.

Re-visiting the Design of the Central National Area

The above two points highlight the need for an integrated and co-ordinated approach to the central area of Canberra. Accordingly, we have attached for the Joint Standing Committee's consideration an article by CCAA President Jack Kershaw entitled: "*A New Design Competition for Canberra*" (updated 23rd June 2003).

Composition of the NCA Board

Further to our earlier suggestion that the NCA Board meetings have a public gallery, we also suggest that representation on the NCA Board must be widened to include, say, key State and local-government positions. This is because many submissions to the JSC concern inter-government relationships and community consultation in regard to the impact both have on the role and functions of the NCA.

Whereas CCAA has recommended that the NCA have jurisdiction only over the central area of Canberra, with other jurisdictions including the Commonwealth having jurisdiction over the remaining areas and beyond, clearly, the activities of the NCA cannot exist in isolation.

-----ooo0ooo-----

Canberra Community Action on Acton Inc
P O Box 45
Ainslie ACT 2602

7 August 2003

Contacts: Jack Kershaw (President) ----- Phone and Fax: 6231 2948
Noel Haberecht (Secretary) --- Phone: 6247 0738; Fax: 6247 0768

Copy for members of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital re the Committee's current review of the National Capital Authority, and as an addendum to Canberra Community Action on Acton's supplementary submission to the Committee of 7 August 2003.

A NEW DESIGN COMPETITION FOR CANBERRA

To restore and extend the works of the Griffins, to define, stimulate and guide the design and development of the central areas of the Capital, with the winning design protected in law.

In view of many on-going concerns about planning, design and development in the central areas of Canberra, and the reaction to them implicit in the National Capital Authority's current *Legacy-of-Griffin Project*, a new design competition based on Walter Burley and Marion Mahony Griffin's work, may offer the most productive, independent and creative way forward.

To find out why, we could examine aspects of the progress of the city's development from its beginnings in 1911. In her exquisite renderings, Marion Mahony Griffin depicted highly distinctive architecture, strategically sited with scale and form to complement the topographically-based geometry, the lakes, planting and vistas in her husband's winning design for the new capital of Australia. Her work was germane to the appeal and success of the overall design. If fully implemented, the outcome would have been visually most satisfactory, albeit with some infrastructure more suited to the technology of the early twentieth century.

Walter Burley Griffin became a landscape architect, a relatively new term for his time which has a somewhat different meaning today. Like his fellow American, Frank Lloyd Wright, he developed a new style of total "organic" architecture and landscape design which strongly related to and included the natural environment of the site. Griffin's Newman College and Capitol Theatre, both in Melbourne, and houses and street layouts at Castlecrag in Sydney, are examples of his other Australian work which attest to the depth of his architectural talent and landscape philosophy, and the timelessness of his designs.

While brilliance and vision delivered the forward tree planting in Canberra, decision makers apparently felt more comfortable with the parlance of engineers and surveyors than with Griffin as an architect, and later, with others caught up in

the cross-over from the Beaux Arts architectural school to modernism, and by the impact of the car. Architecture was managed rather than nurtured, and often shunned, postponed, and even subverted as a medium to form the city. Similarly, key elements of Griffin's spatial design were compromised. Examples include the changed geometry, extent and levels of the lake's basins, the shelved Causeway and Acton-Peninsula crossings, and of course, the imposed freeway-style Parkes Way cutting off the city from the lake. Eventually, Griffin had to leave.

Many believe that the planning and development processes followed ever since his departure, are vulnerable to interference, and unable to deliver the most enlightened advancement of our capital city in aesthetic and symbolic terms. Jettisoned was the mandatory reference to an appealing and detailed three-dimensional spatial design, setting out a comprehensive architectural, infrastructure and landscape matrix, for specific uses, or even into which appropriate uses could be subsequently allocated, and that could actually stimulate demand and precipitate innovative uses.

Compared to the uncertain period after Griffin, a new civic pride has apparently emerged today in which good design is more understood and is in demand. Architects, their sponsors and project deliverers are more confident and united in their goals; and are more and more aware of the significance of this land's original occupants, and the importance of energy conservation and environmental sustainability. Technical advancement in design and construction has reached a zenith enabling virtually infinite creativity and the ultimate well-designed environment, even within reasonable budgetary constraints.

Despite this, the central area of our city does not seem to be able to move forward in any meaningful or satisfying way. The Commonwealth Government has apparently lost a lot of interest in the nation's capital, there are concerns about the National Capital Authority's changed role and priorities, and unproductive and even destructive bickering continues between the two arms of government here.

As well, genuine concerns continue to be raised about particular planning, landscape and design issues. For instance, the urban-design outcomes at Acton Peninsula and at the parliamentary foreshores; what to do about Northbourne Avenue and east and west Civic; how to better link Civic, Russell, the Airport, Queanbeyan, Acton Peninsula and the parliamentary zone for workers, residents and tourists; inner city light rail; pedestrian and bicycle paths; the placement of the new ACT hospice right on Griffin's Causeway transport axis; the compromised geometry and levels of the central lake basins; the connections between planning

and the economy; the overnight appearance of major commercial facilities at Canberra Airport and York Park; the future siting of Floriade, and so on.

It is evident that what Canberra is ready for now is an update of that strong statutory planning element delivered by the Griffins in 1911, and not more wordy reviews of *The National Capital Plan*, prosaic two-dimensional master plans, and dry analyses of Canberra's real-estate potential.

This would be a modern, grand, three-dimensional spatial design, with, like the Griffins', timeless aesthetic, philosophical and symbolic characteristics, and scope for micro change. Of course it would also need to satisfy all contemporary criteria relating to demographics, transport, traffic, employment, social planning, density, amenity, sustainability, tourism, services infrastructure and so on -criteria that should all be fully defined in the brief for such a design - and be presented in the most comprehensible format that 3D graphic and information technologies can offer, and be accessible to all.

A properly-constituted, wide-ranging, multi-stage international competition would be the most enlightened method of obtaining such a design, independent of political or entrenched departmental influence. Most importantly, to avoid the spoiling ego-driven interference of lesser talents, as happened to the Griffins, the status and moral rights of the winning designer would need to be clearly established in legislation, with he or she, and the anointed successors, being appointed and funded as the *National Capital Architect*, responsible directly to the Minister for Territories in the context of an amended ACT *Planning and Land Management Act*. No other position, "*Statutory Planner*," or whatever, could truly administer and implement such a vital design-based planning element.

Many significant vacant, under-utilised or compromised sites exist in the Central National Area and its environs, which could provide the framework for this spatial and strategic design proposal. They include but are not limited to:

- The Parliamentary Zone north of the provisional Parliament House
- Vacant or under-utilised land along Constitution Avenue
- Parkes Way
- Russell as an entry to the capital

- Vacant or under-utilised land around State Circle
- The Barton and York Park office precincts
- parts of Kingston Foreshores
- The Causeway
- the other missing lake crossing, from Lennox to Acton
- City Hill
- Two virtually-vacant large office-type buildings at Anzac Park East and West
- Stirling Ridge and its foreshores

Each individual entrant in the design competition is envisaged as heading a multi-disciplinary design/consultant consortium. Prize money would need to be substantial to attract the best, reflect Australia's care in these matters, and to optimise investment returns on the outlay. Bold concepts that deviate from preconceived notions should not be discouraged or summarily rejected.

By design, the ambience of the central area of Canberra is one that can be enjoyed. But sadly, too many negative characteristics still prevail, typified by its inaccessibility to and from and within, a dearth of people, colour, light and recreational activity especially at night and in the depths of winter, its alienation by traffic and carparks, its lack of attractive and familiar municipal places, disappointing design outcomes at some of the national institutions and other sites of significance, its dumbed-down "aesthetic" controls and land-use zoning, compromised planting, and its general incomprehensibility at ground level - in other words its lack of soul.

However, most visitors do instinctively understand that this is potentially a special place befitting Australia's national capital. But what young and old realise is that, despite the general plan for the central area being nearly 100 years old, its design and realisation both remain very *unfulfilled*.

The aspirations of a new nation were given design expression by the Griffins. With their departure we languished; and time, dissipated by a sometimes arrogant and yet strangely over-cautious bureaucracy, took its toll. Now, the search for true

talent must begin again, to restore and extend the Griffin philosophy of design, architecture, landscape, public art, and infrastructure- and to define, stimulate and guide the Capital's future development.

Jack Kershaw

23rd June 2003

Tel/Fax: [02] 6231 2948

5 Lovegrove Place
Kambah ACT 2902

Jack Kershaw is a Canberra architect who has been involved with and written about many planning and design issues in Canberra over the last decade. He was President of political party The Residents' Rally for Canberra Inc, and is President of Canberra Community Action on Acton Inc.

He has excluded himself from entering into a competition such as he has proposed in this paper.