



ACT
Government

HOUSING CHOICES DISCUSSION PAPER

NOVEMBER 2017



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RZ4 in Turner





MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

As Canberra matures into a major metropolitan centre, its residents are becoming more diverse and calling for a city that meets their differing needs.

This discussion paper on housing choices is looking at how we can better meet the needs of our residents, be they single, couples, families or groups. As I found out during consultation on my Minister's Statement of Planning Intent, there is no longer the presumption that everyone aspires to a large suburban block with a garden. People want different forms of housing in the suburbs, as well as in centres and mixed use areas. This includes town houses, terrace houses, secondary dwellings and apartments as well as a continuing demand for detached homes. While this is being driven to an extent by the younger generation, it is also being sought by older residents who do not want to leave the suburb they may have lived in for 50 years, but no longer want—or are able—to live in a big home that can be better used by a larger family.

This desire for housing choice is complementing the drive for Canberra to be sustainable, compact and well-connected. We can no longer expect our urban footprint to keep extending into agricultural areas and areas of ecological value; our ecological footprint is higher than the national average and one of the highest in the world. We need to combine our different lifestyle aspirations with consideration of our urban and carbon footprints to create a more compact city—without compromising the lifestyle that is so dear to us in the 'Bush Capital'.

In my travels interstate and internationally, I have been impressed by the use of innovative urban renewal to meet the community's aspirations for more—and high quality—housing choice.

This discussion paper raises issues that we need to address over the coming years. It outlines background studies and surveys as well as the ACT planning framework so you can see how these issues fit with current planning rules.

This discussion is integral to the delivery of my Ministerial Statement of Planning Intent, which mandates the creation of 'sustainable, compact and liveable neighbourhoods with better transport choices' and the delivery of 'an outcome-focused planning system to reward design excellence and innovation'.

It has strong linkages to the conversation the ACT Government is having to improve housing affordability in our city. Improving the availability of appropriate housing in Canberra can boost supply and assist in the delivery of more affordable options.

The ACT Government values your input, which will be used to inform any proposed updates to government policies and our planning framework. Further community engagement will occur if and when any changes are made to the Territory Plan or relevant strategies.

I look forward to hearing the community's views on this important evolution of our city to ensure we continue to have a well-designed and friendly urban environment that promotes the health, wellbeing and prosperity of all Canberrans.

Mick Gentleman
Minister for Planning and Land Management
November 2017



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ACT Government is investigating whether the housing needs of the Canberra community are currently being met and how they can be better met in the future. This discussion paper provides a basis for community comment to inform future planning decisions on improving housing choice.

The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) plays a key role in facilitating housing choices for Canberra residents through its role in implementing key elements of the ACT planning system, including the ACT Planning Strategy (2012) and Territory Plan. To date, consistent with the ACT Planning Strategy, housing choices policy has focussed on encouraging a more compact city by focusing urban intensification in town centres, around group centres and along the major public transport routes.

A review of the ACT Planning Strategy 2012 will start in 2017, focusing on key economic, social and environmental changes facing the ACT. This will involve a separate community engagement process.

The Minister for Planning's Statement of Planning Intent, developed with the community, also encourages high quality housing choice and placemaking in our neighbourhoods.

Starting from a young base, Canberra is one of the fastest ageing capital cities in Australia. The number of residents aged 65 and above is projected to increase 93% from 2016 to 2041.

Changes in household structure also create a need for more housing choices in Canberra. Traditional family structures (i.e. a couple with children) have fallen from 45% to 33% as a share of total households since 1991. In comparison, the number of couples with no children and single persons living alone has dramatically increased. These changes create different requirements for the size and adaptability of our dwellings.

In addition to social drivers for housing choices, there are environmental and sustainability benefits to moving towards a more compact city. Well planned cities are better able to respond to changes in our climate, including more extreme weather events. They encourage alternative forms of transport and support active travel (walking, cycling and access to public transport). Well designed homes are also an important contributor to reducing Canberra's ecological footprint.

The community supports a greater diversity in housing choice. There has been growing community interest in housing policies through media articles and radio talkback sessions with ACT ministers.

In many instances, people are questioning the current provisions for residential development and indicating a desire for greater housing choices and more flexible housing forms, such as dual occupancies, villas and town houses. People have said that the present planning system limits the economic feasibility of developing multi-unit housing in existing residential areas.

As part of the Housing Choices Project, EPSDD commissioned two research projects to gather information from the community and industry about housing options. This included a survey of residents living in all residential zones (RZ1–RZ5) and an economic analysis of the housing redevelopment market. Mixed-use areas located in commercial zones were not included in the sample set, although it is acknowledged that a large number of people who live in apartments live in these zones. The results of this research and other planning studies and plans, and community feedback have informed the preparation of this discussion paper. Project findings are presented throughout this paper.

The questions asked in this discussion paper aim to start a conversation about how housing choices can be improved. This paper focuses on residential zones (RZ1–RZ5) and considers the requirements of the multi-unit housing development code. Maintaining the character and amenity of Canberra's suburbs is fundamental to maintaining Canberra's reputation as a garden city, and as such, proposed changes in the RZ1 zone are expected to be modest. The majority of change is expected to occur in the RZ2–RZ4 zones.

Following this stage of consultation future options will be explored.

YOUR FEEDBACK

EPSDD seeks community and industry feedback on this paper, including responses to a series of questions relating to potential legislative and policy options. The key questions below are discussed in Section 4. They were derived from research with the community and industry, background research by EPSDD and community feedback through letters to the Minister and EPSDD, media articles, and opinions aired in the media and on talkback radio. Your feedback will help EPSDD assess how planning policies could better meet the needs of Canberra's demographically changing population and provide better housing choices for current and future residents.

What would help you to better understand the ACT planning system?

What do you think about the current range of housing options in the lower density suburbs?

What changes would you support in the RZ1 zone to improve housing choice?

What changes would you support to help increase diversity of housing choices in the RZ2 zone?

What changes would you support to the medium density residential zones to improve housing choice?

Do you think we have the right balance of residential zones to support greater housing choice?

Are you aware of a best practice model in another city that we should examine?

What is good housing design? What elements make a good residential building or development?

How can design outcomes for medium to higher density residential development be improved?

What are the examples of well designed residential development in your neighbourhood or elsewhere?

Bonner



1. INTRODUCTION

Like many cities across Australia, Canberra's population is growing and changing. Careful planning is required to manage urban development in a way that provides a diverse range of affordable housing while moving towards a more sustainable, compact city with a reduced ecological footprint.

The ACT has a finite supply of land able to accommodate urban development. Providing a balance of new housing in established and greenfield areas is one way to accommodate a growing population and reduce the impacts associated with urban sprawl.

To manage this, the ACT Government's 2012 ACT Planning Strategy commits to a target of 50% infill for new dwellings.¹ Intensification of development in established communities also contributes to a compact city where people are able to live close to established services. This helps reduce the demand, and associated cost, of new infrastructure.

A review of the ACT Planning Strategy is due in 2017, focusing on key economic, social and environmental changes facing the ACT. This will involve a separate engagement process.

In addition to targets for urban infill, the ACT has some of the most ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Australia. Well designed cities and homes are able to adapt to climate change and are designed to cope with increasingly extreme weather events.

Canberra has an ageing population. The median age rose from 33.4 in 2001 to 35.1 in 2015 - an increase of 1.7 years. During the same 14 year period, the national median rose by the same amount. The number of residents aged 65 and above is projected to increase 93% from 2016 to 2041. Research commissioned by the ACT Government indicates 50% of residents surveyed would like to stay living in their communities as they age.² This allows them to remain close to friends and continue to live near familiar amenities. The community also indicated a lack of housing options (e.g. lower maintenance town houses, units and apartments) will make downsizing their homes, or remaining in their communities, difficult.

Changes in household structure also create a need for greater diversity of housing in Canberra. Traditional family structures (i.e. a couple with children) have fallen from 45% to 33% as a share of total households since 1991. In comparison, the number of couples with no children and single persons living alone has dramatically increased. These changes create different requirements for the size and adaptability of our dwellings.

The ACT Government is responsible for implementing a planning framework that supports quality redevelopment to meet the expectations of the community. The development industry has indicated residential policies are restrictive and providing greater housing choices in established areas is often not economically viable.

The Minister for Planning's Statement of Planning Intent reinforces the desire for the community to be involved in creating sustainable, compact and liveable neighbourhoods that are appealing to live, visit and play in.

This discussion paper aims to facilitate a conversation about how housing choices can be improved through planning provisions in residential areas. To guide discussion, questions are posed in Section 4 of the paper. Potential changes identified in response to comments received may be implemented through a range of mechanisms, including legislative reform and/or amendments to the Territory Plan.

1 ACT Government (2012) ACT Planning Strategy: Planning for a sustainable city, Canberra: Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate, p 5.

2 Winton Sustainable Research Strategies (2015) Housing Choices Community Survey, Canberra: ACT Government.



2. SETTING THE SCENE

The Canberra community has always shown considerable interest and involvement in the planning process. Housing policies have again come to the fore, with considerable interest in housing choice and affordability (e.g. through media articles, ministerial correspondence and talk back radio with ACT ministers).

Through these forums, members of the community have indicated a desire for increased housing choices in their neighbourhoods, while also protecting existing character.

To date, and consistent with the 2012 ACT Planning Strategy, housing choices policy has focused on encouraging a more compact city by focusing urban intensification in town centres, around group centres and along the major public transport routes. Based on community feedback and subsequent research by EPSDD, it is recognised there also needs to be greater choice in existing residential areas, with a focus on areas close to existing services, facilities, work places, educational institutions and alternative transport options.

2.1 PLANNING IN THE ACT

Two key pieces of legislation govern planning in the ACT; the Commonwealth *Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988* (PALM Act) and the ACT *Planning and Development Act 2007* (the Act).

In developing planning strategies and legislation, the government is guided by community expectations and aspirations. Community consultation is important to the government. In recent years community consultation has influenced the ACT Planning Strategy, City Plan, master plans for town and group centres and the Minister's Statement of Planning Intent. All these documents have considered in part, the demand for more housing choice.

See more about the ACT's planning history at Appendix A.

2.1.1 Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988

The PALM Act was established to ensure Canberra and the ACT are planned and developed in accordance with their national significance as the nation's capital. To achieve this, the PALM Act established the National Capital Authority (NCA), which is responsible for preparing and administering the National Capital Plan (NCP). The PALM Act requires that the Territory Plan is not inconsistent with the NCP.

2.1.2 Planning and Development Act 2007

The Act provides a planning and land system that 'contributes to the orderly and sustainable development of the ACT, consistent with the social, environmental and economic aspirations of the people of the ACT; and in accordance with sound financial principles'.

The Act establishes the Planning and Land Authority (the Authority) which is responsible for preparing and administering the Territory Plan. The functions of the Authority are administered by EPSDD.

In addition to the Territory Plan, the ACT Government's ACT Planning Strategy: Planning for a Sustainable City (2012) (Strategy) and the Minister for Planning's Statement of Planning Intent 2015 provide a long-term vision for planning in the ACT. The Strategy establishes how the ACT will develop into the future, including how the community's aspirations and the environmental, social and economic challenges of the 21st century will be met.

A short history of planning policy in the ACT relevant to housing choices is provided at Appendix A.

2.1.3 Minister's Statement of Planning Intent 2015

The Minister for Planning's Statement of Planning Intent 2015 articulates four planning priorities for Canberra which have evolved over a number of years and strongly reflect the key messages heard from the community and stakeholders.

Delivering an outcomes-focused planning system to reward design excellence and innovation is a key priority to support diversification of housing choice. A number of immediate, short and medium term actions for this priority are directly relevant to the development of housing choice policy, including:

1. Review current residential zonings to achieve a wider range of housing choice and innovative medium-density housing forms across individual neighbourhoods and suburbs to meet the demand for age-friendly living and affordable housing.
2. Investigate the inclusion of outcome- and performance-based provisions in the Territory Plan precinct codes aimed at targeting urban renewal areas to encourage new design approaches and provide incentives for innovation and sustainable design.

2.1.4 Government policies and strategies influencing housing in the ACT

A number of additional strategic planning documents guide residential development in the ACT (see Figure 1). More information on these documents can be found on ACT Government websites.

2.1.5 The Territory Plan

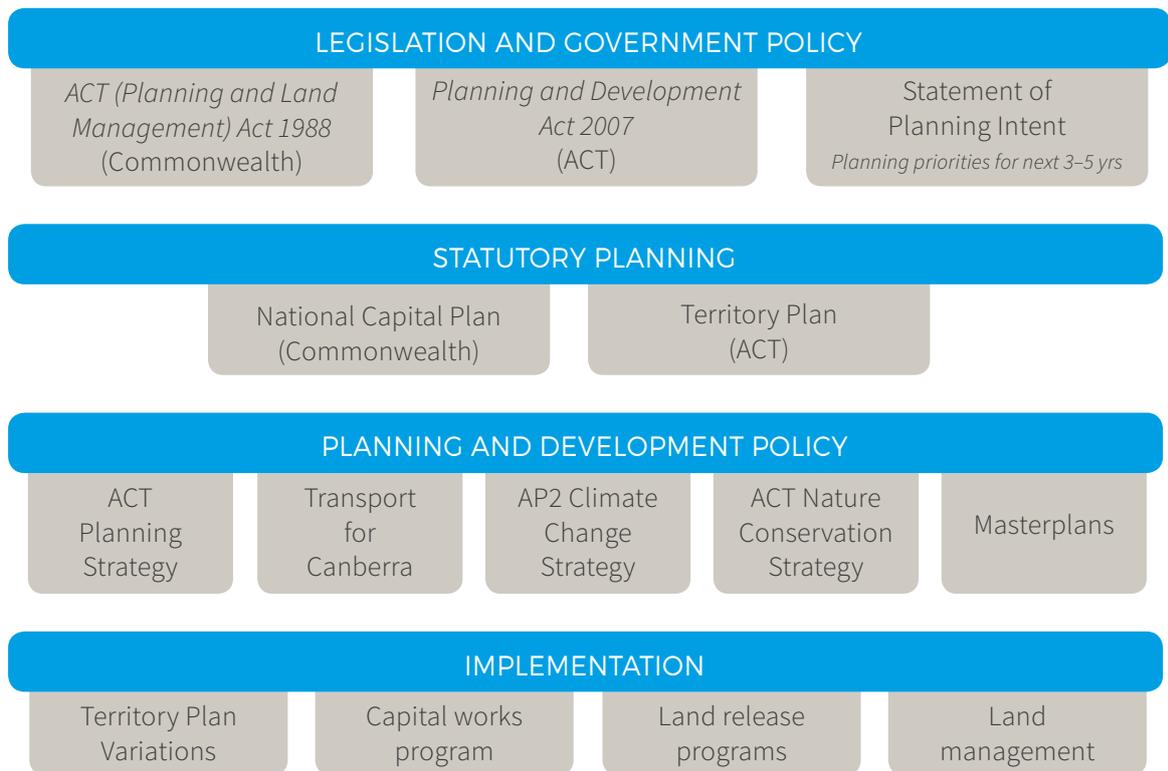
The Territory Plan guides and manages land use change and development in the ACT in line with strategic directions set by the ACT Government, Legislative Assembly and the community.

The Territory Plan allocates zones to all land in the ACT; these zones define what land uses can or cannot occur in that zone. Zone categories are residential (RZ), commercial (CZ), community facility (CFZ), industrial (IZ), parks and recreation (PRZ), transport and services (TSZ), and non urban (NUZ). Sub-categories provide more specific controls, for example RZ1 is a residential zone for low density housing in suburban areas while RZ5 is a residential zone for high density housing in urban centres and along major transport routes. Key elements of the Territory Plan include:

- » a statement of strategic directions
- » zones and precincts
- » objectives and development tables applying to each zone
- » precinct, development and general codes
- » structure plans and concept plans for the development of future urban areas.

More information on the Territory Plan is available on EPSDD's [website](#).

Figure 1: Planning documents in the ACT



Hierarchy of development assessment codes

The Territory Plan is based on a hierarchy of development codes. Inconsistencies between the provisions of different development codes are resolved according to the hierarchy outlined below:

1. Precinct codes: apply to geographical areas (i.e. suburbs or defined areas)
2. Development codes: apply to specific zones or development types (e.g. Multi-unit Housing Development Code)
3. General codes: may apply to defined development types and/or planning and design issues (e.g. Parking and Vehicular Access General Code).

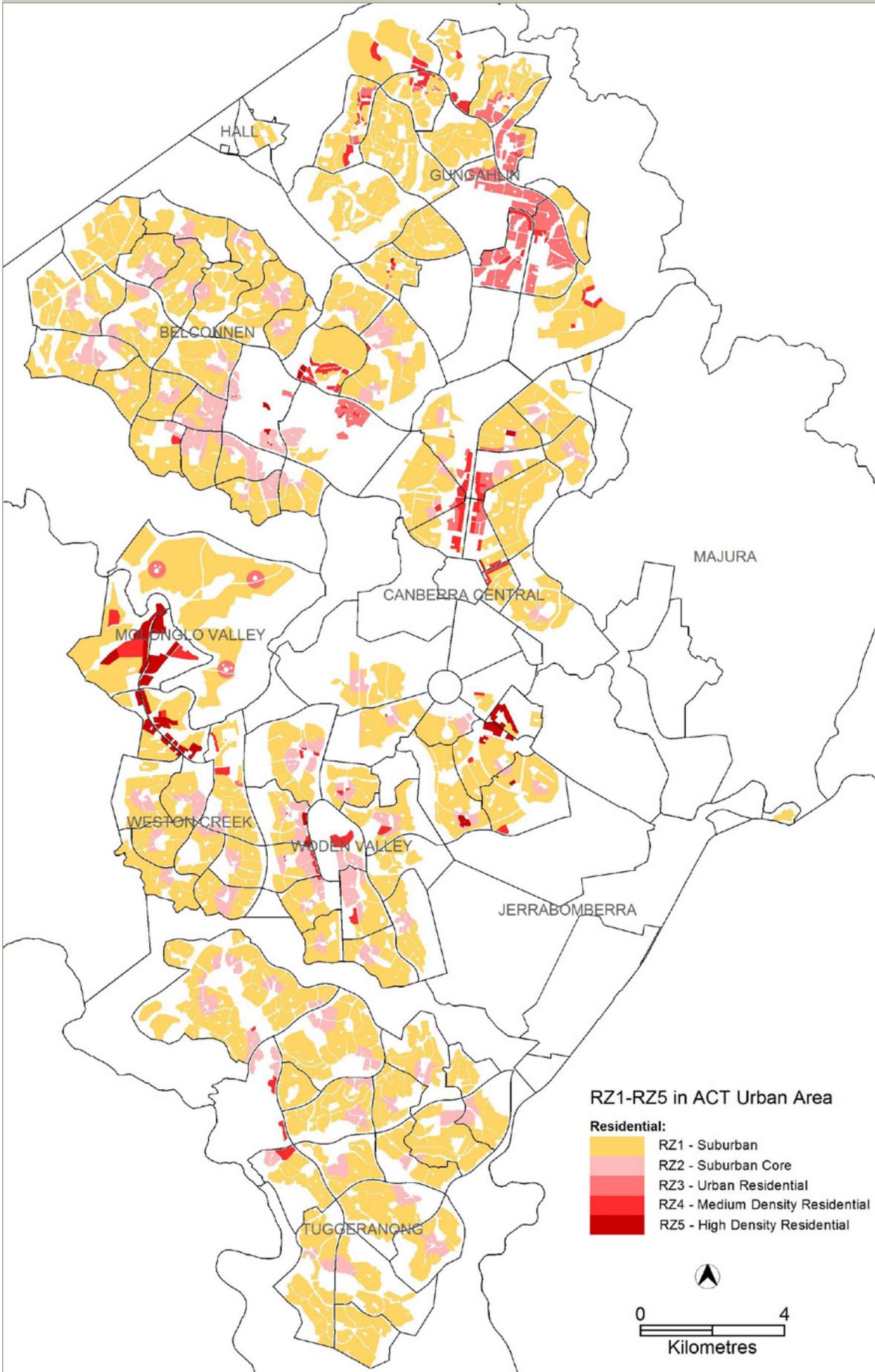
Residential development codes

The planning controls that apply to each development zone are detailed in development tables and codes. There are three key codes for residential development:

- » Residential Zones Development Code
- » Single Dwelling Housing Development Code
- » Multi-unit Housing Development Code.

A description of each code is provided at Appendix B.

Figure 2: Residential Zones (RZ1-RZ2) in the ACT urban area



Residential zones in the ACT

There are five residential zones in the Territory Plan (Figure 2 and Table 1). Residential RZ1 Suburban Zone is the most common zone, comprising over 80% of residential areas. See more about residential zones in Appendix B.

Table 1: Summary of residential zones in the ACT

Residential Zone	Area	Description
RZ1 Suburban Zone 	81%	Low rise and low density housing – mainly single residences.
RZ2 Suburban Core Zone 	11.5%	Low rise and low density housing types (e.g. dual occupancy, town house and terrace housing). No apartments.
RZ3 Urban Residential Zone 	3.5%	Low rise developments, with slightly higher density than RZ2. Apartments permitted.
RZ4 Medium Density Residential Zone 	2.5%	Medium rise and medium density to encourage housing diversity, contain urban expansion, and accommodate growth along major transport corridors.
RZ5 High Density Residential Zone 	1.5%	High rise and high density development (mainly apartments) which aims to increase the population in existing areas.

Residential zones in other Australian jurisdictions

Residential zones in the ACT are generally representative of zones in Australia’s eastern states (Table 2). Notably, the ACT’s RZ3 Urban Residential and RZ4 Medium Density Residential zones are often combined into a single medium-density zone in other jurisdictions.

Table 2: Comparison of residential zones in other Australian jurisdictions

State	Low density	Medium density		High density	
ACT	RZ1 Suburban	RZ2 Suburban Core	RZ3 Urban Residential	RZ4 Medium Density Residential	RZ5 High Density Residential
NSW	R1 General Residential	R2 Low Density Residential	R3 Medium Density Residential		R4 High Density Residential
Qld	Low Density Residential	Low-Medium Residential	Medium Density Residential		High Density Residential
Vic	Low Density Residential	General Residential		Residential Growth	Mixed Use Zone
	Neighbourhood Residential	Township			

See a summary of residential zones (RZ1–RZ5) in the ACT in Appendix B.

2.1.6 ACT leasehold system

Leasehold is the system of land tenure in the ACT. Prior to the establishment of the National Capital Development Commission in 1957, leases were the primary planning tool used in the ACT. Leases allowed Canberra to be developed in a structured way, avoiding some of the planning outcomes experienced in other Australian jurisdictions under the freehold system.

Development in the ACT is now managed through the Act. The Territory Plan sets the boundaries for permitted development and these requirements are generally reflected in leases. This complementary system provides for a well planned city able to meet the needs of the community through appropriate development.

The ACT Government is exploring options for alternative delivery models for residential development to address housing choice and affordability.

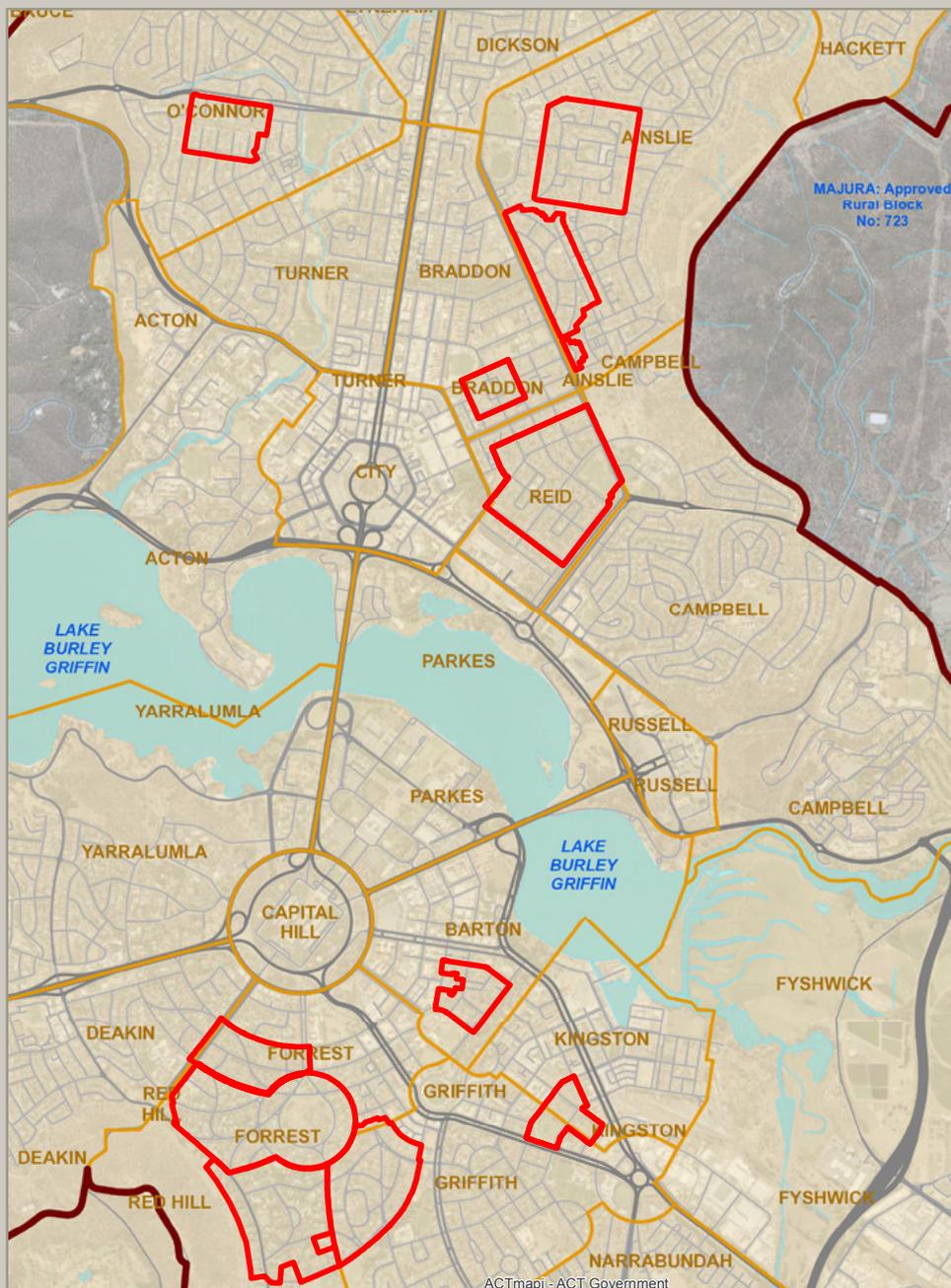
There are 11 precincts across Canberra listed as examples of ‘Garden City Planning’

2.2 HERITAGE

The ACT Heritage Register, maintained under the *Heritage Act 2004*, lists places and objects in the ACT with heritage significance at the Territory level.³ For heritage properties, there are two main listing types; individual places and residential housing precincts.

There are 12 major residential heritage precincts in the ACT, 11 of which are recognised as examples of ‘Garden City Planning’ (Figure 3). Within these precincts, there are some individual identified dwellings noted for their specific heritage significance. Statutory heritage guidelines apply to all heritage registered precincts. The guidelines outline mandatory requirements with regards to alterations and development, as well as requirements subject to the discretion of the planning and land authority. The ACT Heritage Council provides advice to the planning and land authority on referred development applications within the framework of the *Heritage Act 2004* and the aforementioned heritage guidelines.

Figure 3: Subset of heritage listed ‘Garden City’ precincts in Canberra



3 The Heritage Register is available at: http://www.environment.act.gov.au/heritage/heritage_register

2.3 CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE ACT

Canberra and the surrounding region are projected to become hotter over the coming decades, with an increase in the frequency of extreme weather and fire danger events. Rainfall is projected to become more variable, with an increase in extreme storms as well as more drought.

To respond to this challenge, the ACT has set the most ambitious greenhouse gas emission reductions targets in Australia. The *Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act 2010* formalises targets of zero net emissions (carbon neutrality) by 2050 and a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by 2020.

As the effects of climate change are already being experienced, it is also clear that we need to adapt to this new climate. The ACT is preparing a draft Climate Change Adaptation Strategy which recognises the important role of the built environment and our landscape in managing the impacts of climate change.

It is estimated that 50% of human-caused greenhouse gas emissions result from heating and cooling buildings and transporting people and goods.⁴ This makes regulation to mitigate the effects of climate change particularly relevant to housing choices in the ACT.

Well designed cities which consider structure (e.g. the layout and distribution of different land uses), built form (e.g. density and design of development) and integrated transport and land uses can significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help communities adapt to the effects of climate change.

There are a number of practical measures able to be incorporated into our homes which can help us adapt to climate change. Approaches include adopting environmental performance standards for new dwellings (e.g. building regulations under the *Building Act 2004*); use of new technologies to keep houses cool (e.g. cool roofs); accounting for solar access and passive design; and investing in living infrastructure (e.g. urban forests which help to cool our neighbourhoods).

The dwellings we build also have considerable implications for energy and water use. The most efficient forms of housing for both water and energy consumption is medium-density houses, town houses and villas.⁵ An increase in the number of these dwellings can support the ACT Government's climate change targets.

50% of human-caused greenhouse gas emissions result from heating and cooling buildings and transporting people and goods

4 National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (2013) Climate Change Adaptation at <http://www.nccarf.edu.au/content/adaptation>

5 Talent, M. Troy, P. and Dovers, S. (2014) Canberra Residential Energy and Water Consumption, Canberra: Fenner School for Environment and Society, Australian National University.





RZ2 in Cook

2

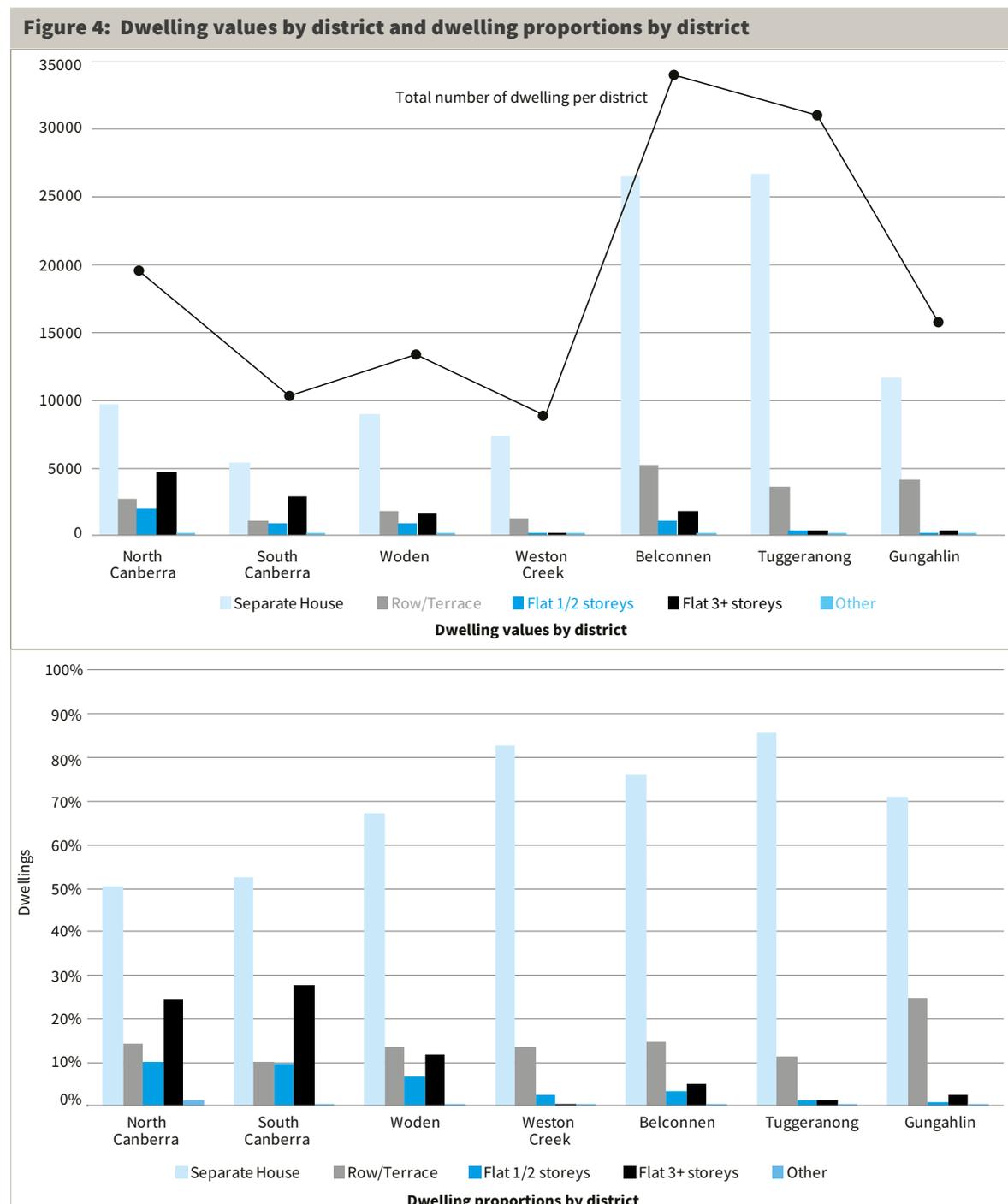
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3. CURRENT AND FUTURE TRENDS AFFECTING HOUSING CHOICE IN THE ACT

3.1 AVAILABLE DWELLINGS IN THE ACT

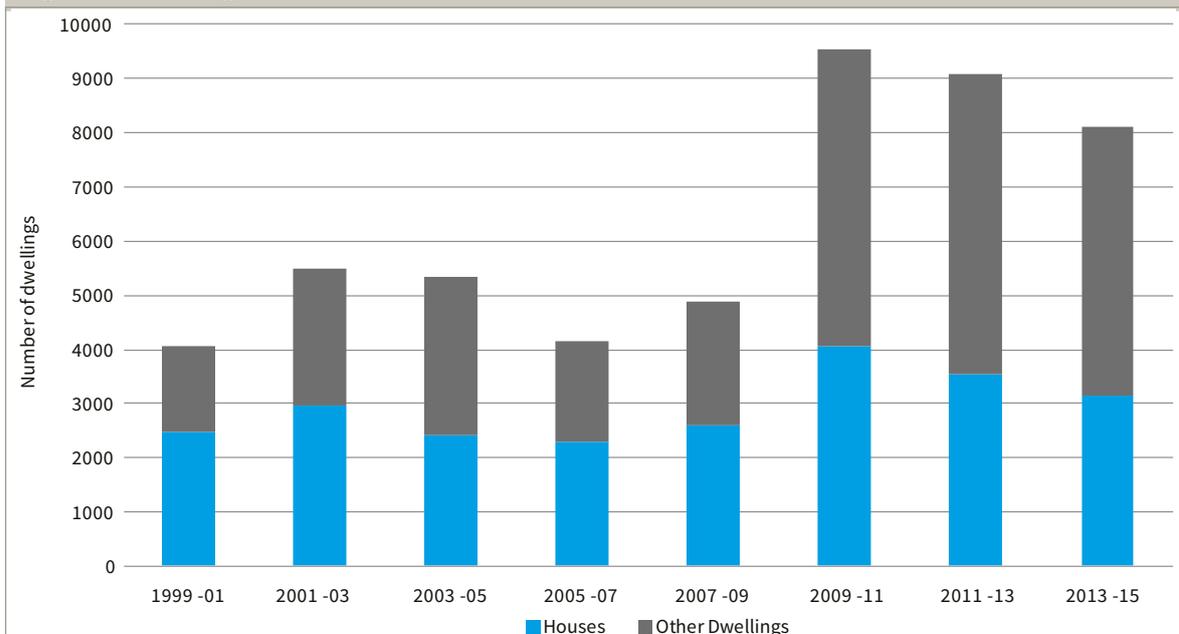
Current economic, social and environmental research supports a move towards providing a diverse range of housing choices. Detached houses are the most common dwelling available throughout Canberra (Figure 4) and the greatest proportion of detached houses are located in Canberra’s outer districts (e.g. Tuggeranong). Intensification of development (i.e. infill redevelopment) occurring in Canberra’s inner North and inner South districts has resulted in a greater diversity of housing choice in these areas (i.e. more terrace houses and flats, see Figure 4).⁶



6 Data in Figure 4 is derived from all zones across Canberra (i.e. both residential and commercial zones)

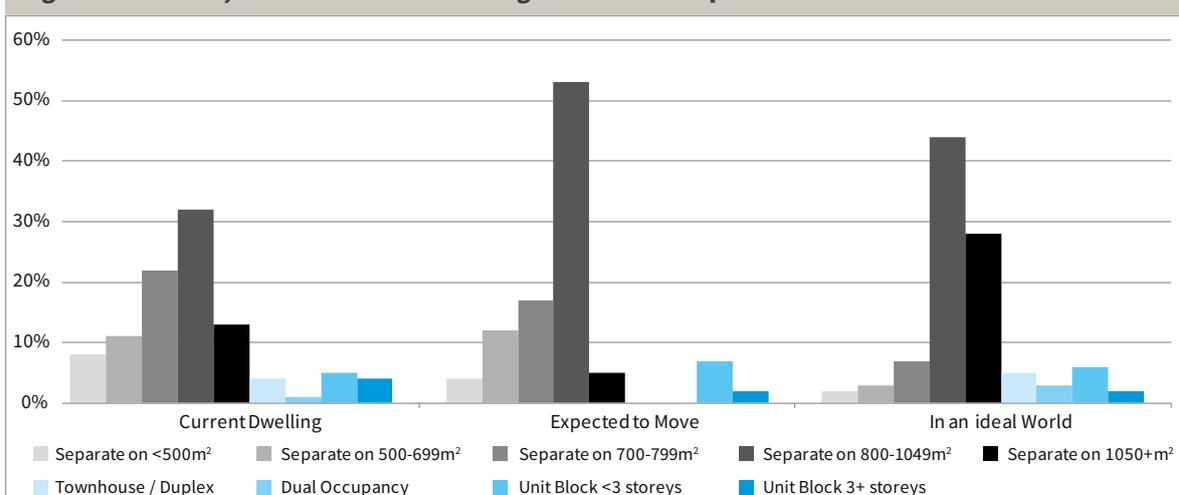
An increased demand for alternative dwellings (e.g. town houses, units, apartments) is reflected in the type of dwellings built between 1990–91 and 2014–15. During this period more alternative dwellings were constructed than detached houses (Figure 5). Of note, this data represents commencements across all zones in Canberra (i.e. residential and commercial zones). As such, the increase in apartment construction, particularly in town centres, does not necessarily respond to some residents’ aspiration to remain living in their existing communities.

Figure 5: Dwelling commencements from 1990–91 to 2014–15



Despite this trend towards more diverse housing, almost 20% of Canberra residents indicate their ideal choice of dwelling is not available in the locations they would like to live (Figure 6).⁷ Understanding the community’s current, future and ideal dwelling choices is important to ensuring future preferences are catered for in the residential market.

Figure 6: Current, future and ideal dwelling choice % of respondents⁸

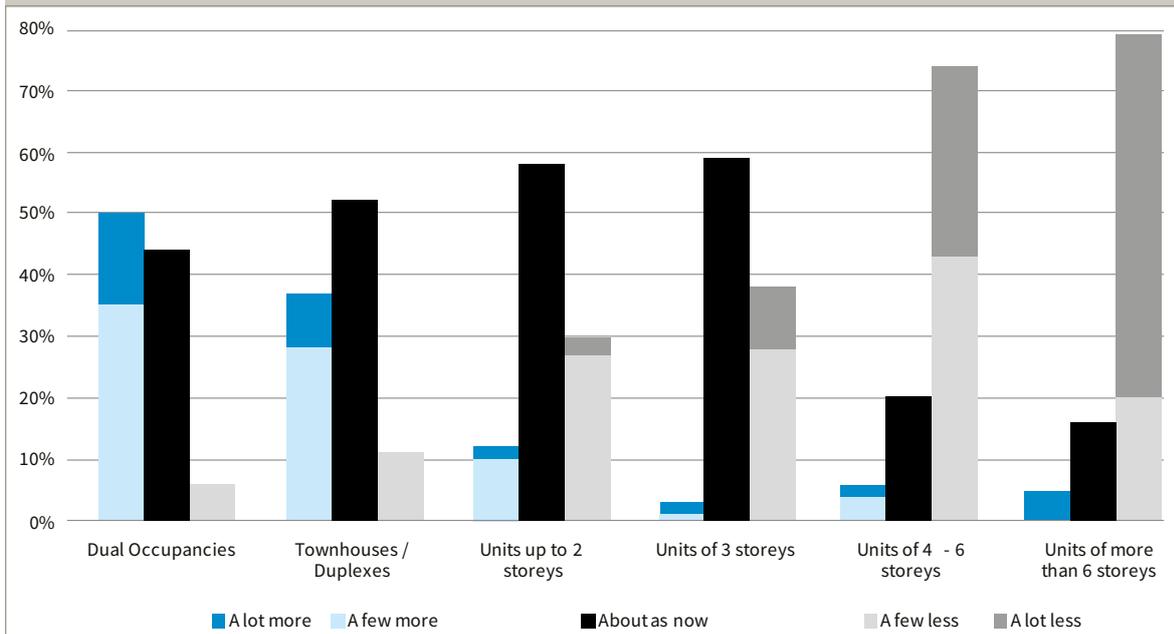


More than 50 % of residents surveyed think there should be more dual occupancy developments in some residential areas. More than a third of people think there should be more town houses in residential areas (Figure 7).

7 Winton Sustainable Research Strategies (2015) Volume 1: Report 2014 Housing Choices Community Survey, Canberra, ACT Government

8 Winton Sustainable Research Strategies (2015). Housing Choices Community Survey, Canberra: ACT Government.

Figure 7: Community opinions on various residential dwelling types



3.2 DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

There are a number of current and future drivers for change that will influence demand for housing in Canberra over the coming years. These drivers are summarised in Table 3 and detailed below.

Table 3: Summary of drivers for change

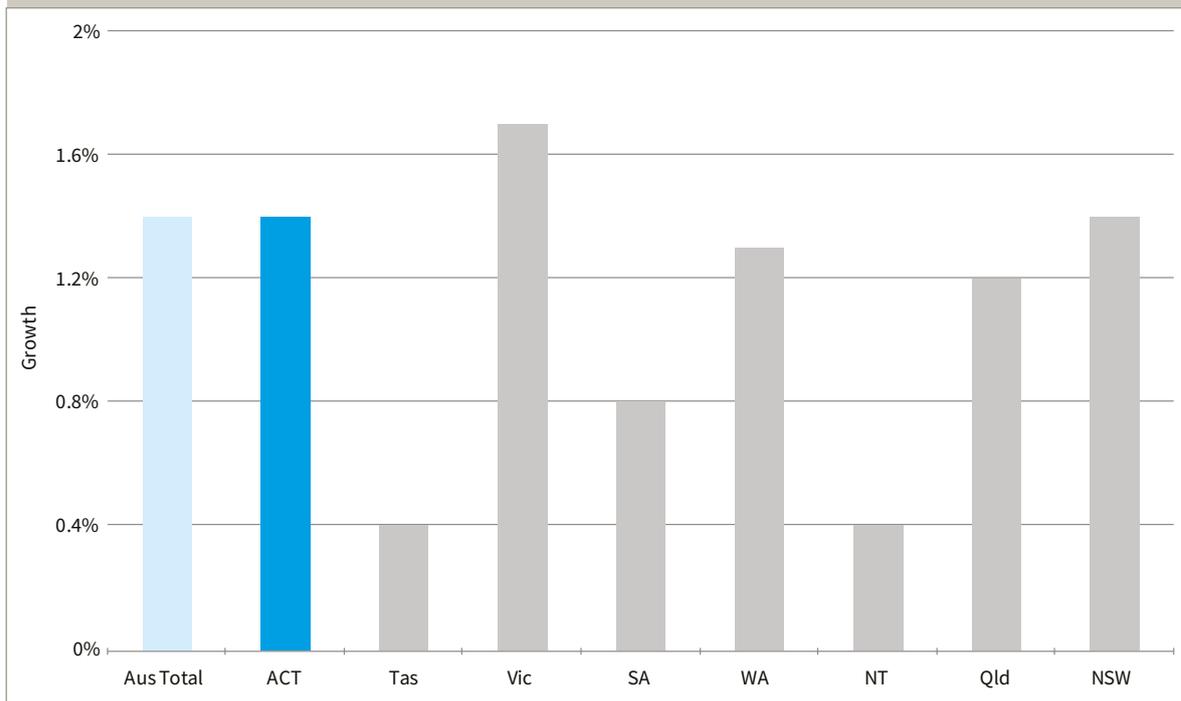
	<p>Our population is growing and ageing Canberra is one of the fastest ageing capitals in Australia and our population is continuing to grow.</p>
	<p>Our households are changing Household sizes across Australia have declined in the last 100 years. Despite this, our houses are some of the biggest in the world.</p>
	<p>Household compositions are also changing. The number of couples with children has fallen 14% since 1991. In comparison, the number of couples with no children and single persons living alone has increased.</p>
	<p>Our ecological footprint is one of the highest in the world In 2011–12 Canberra had a higher ecological footprint than the Australian average. In short, we impact the global environment more than people in most places on earth.</p>

3.2.1 Our population is growing

The ACT's population is growing and will continue to grow. Population growth was consistent with average growth across Australia at 1.4% (Figure 8). The ACT Government estimates that by 2062, Canberra will have a resident population of approximately 681,000 people.⁹

⁹ ACT Government, (2013) Population Projections:2013 edition, Canberra: Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

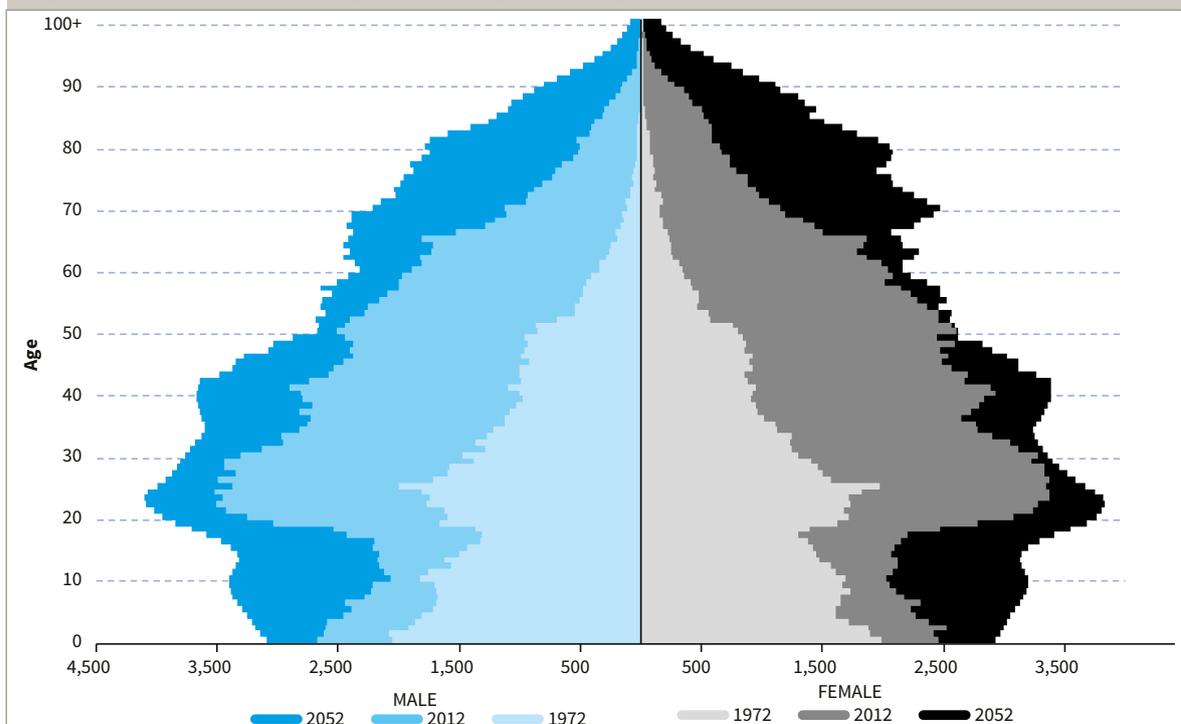
Figure 8: Population growth in Australia (2015) ¹⁰



3.2.2 Our community is ageing

Canberra is one of the fastest ageing capital cities in Australia.¹¹ By 2062, the number of residents aged 65 and above is predicted to increase by 11.5% compared to 2012 (Figure 10).¹²

Figure 9: ACT historical and projected population age structure 2012–2052¹³



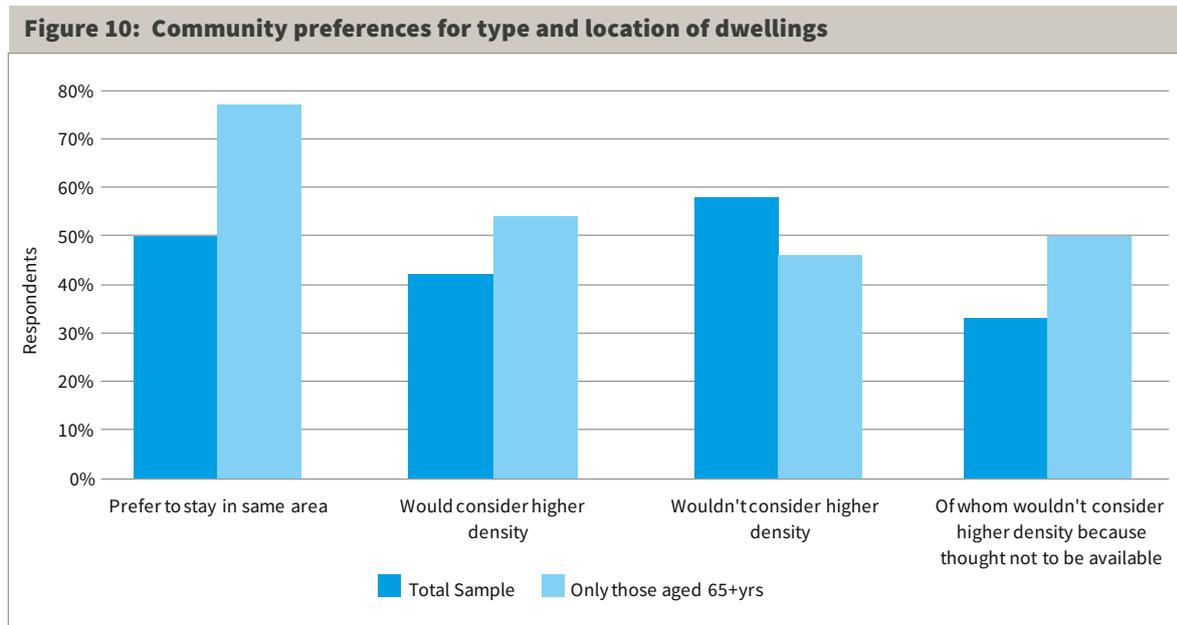
10 Australian Government, (2015) Australian Demographic Statistics June 2015, Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics

11 Australian Government (2014), Feature Article: Population by Age and Sex, Australia, States and Territories, Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics

12 ACT Government (2013) 2013 to 2062 Projected ACT Population, Canberra: ACT Treasury

13 ACT Government (2013) 2013 to 2062 Projected ACT Population, Canberra: ACT Treasury

Canberra residents have expressed a desire to stay in their neighbourhoods as they age. They also want more choice about where and how they live. Approximately 60% of residents surveyed anticipate they will move in the next decade in response to anticipated needs and lifestyle changes (e.g. down-sizing to a lower maintenance dwelling) (Figure 10). Developing responsible policies that encourage greater housing choice to meet the needs of an ageing population requires careful planning and consideration.



3.2.3 Our households are changing

Household sizes across Australia have dramatically declined in the last 100 years. In 2011 the average household was 2.6 people in the ACT and nationally, compared to 4.5 people in 1911.¹⁴ In 2016 the average household size (which is not the same as dwelling occupancy rate) in the ACT was 2.5 and 2.6 nationally. Despite a decline in household size, the average floor area of new single dwelling houses in the ACT has increased by 53% between 1984–85 and 2002–03 and 31% for other residential buildings during the same period.¹⁵ This makes Australian homes amongst the biggest in the world.

Average floor areas of new detached dwellings in the ACT peaked at 257m² in 2007-08 and have fallen since with the latest available data (June 2013) indicating an average of 213m². Average floor areas of new non-detached dwellings (town houses and apartments combined) in the ACT peaked at 177m² in 2003–04 and have fallen since with the latest available data (June 2013) indicating an average of 80m².

Household compositions have also dramatically changed over the past two decades. Traditional family structures (i.e. a couple with children) have fallen from 45% to 33% as a share of total households since 1991. In comparison, the number of couple families with no children and single persons living alone has increased (Figure 11)¹⁶. These changes add to the complexity of the housing choices project as they create a need for our dwellings to adapt to a range of different needs over time (e.g. a single space may act over time as a home office, a nursery, a family study or a bedroom for an elderly relative).¹⁷

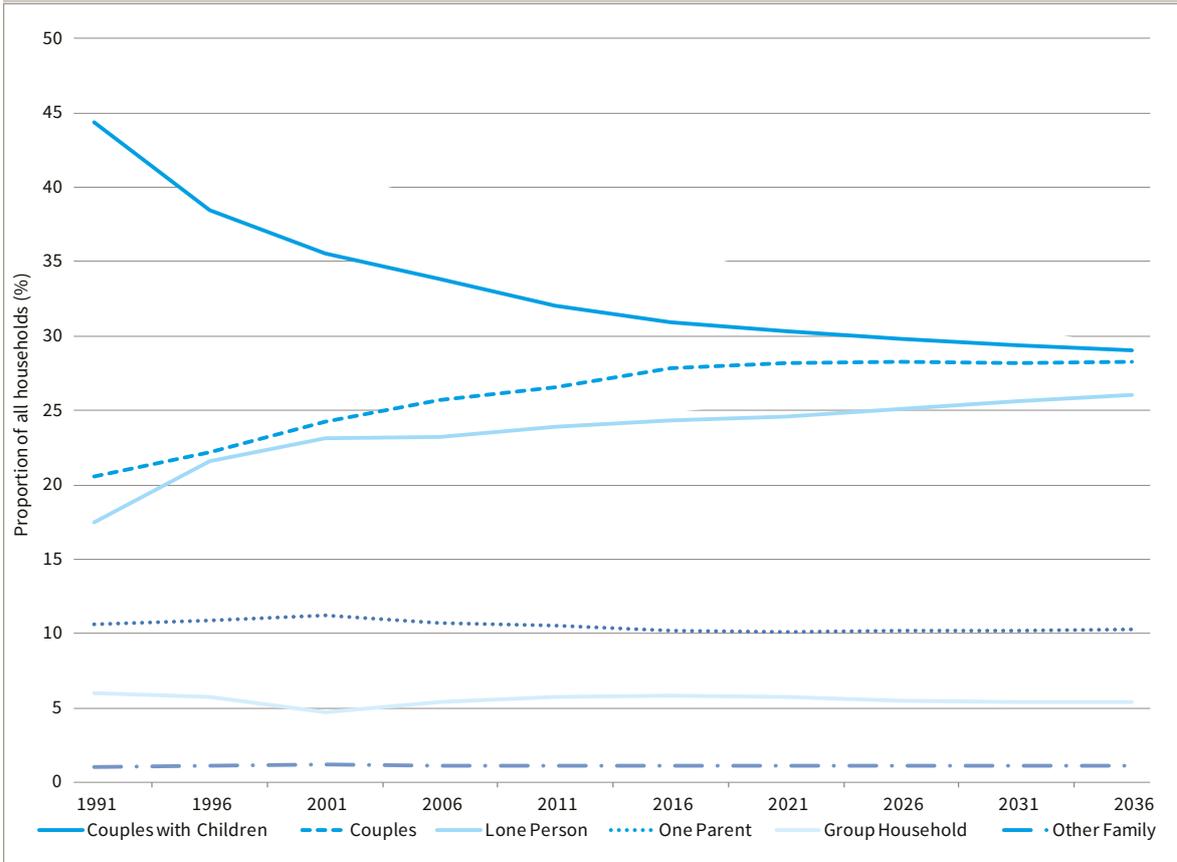
14 Australian Government, Households in Australia: household size, Canberra: Australian Institute of Family Studies

15 Australian Government, Households in Australia: household size, Canberra: Australian Institute of Family Studies

16 Australian Government (2015) ABS cat 3236.0 - Household and Family Projections, Australia, 2011 to 2036, Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics. Data from 1991 – 2011 sourced from various Census data.

17 For further information see: Australian Government, Your Home, available at: <http://www.yourhome.gov.au/housing/livable-and-adaptable-house>

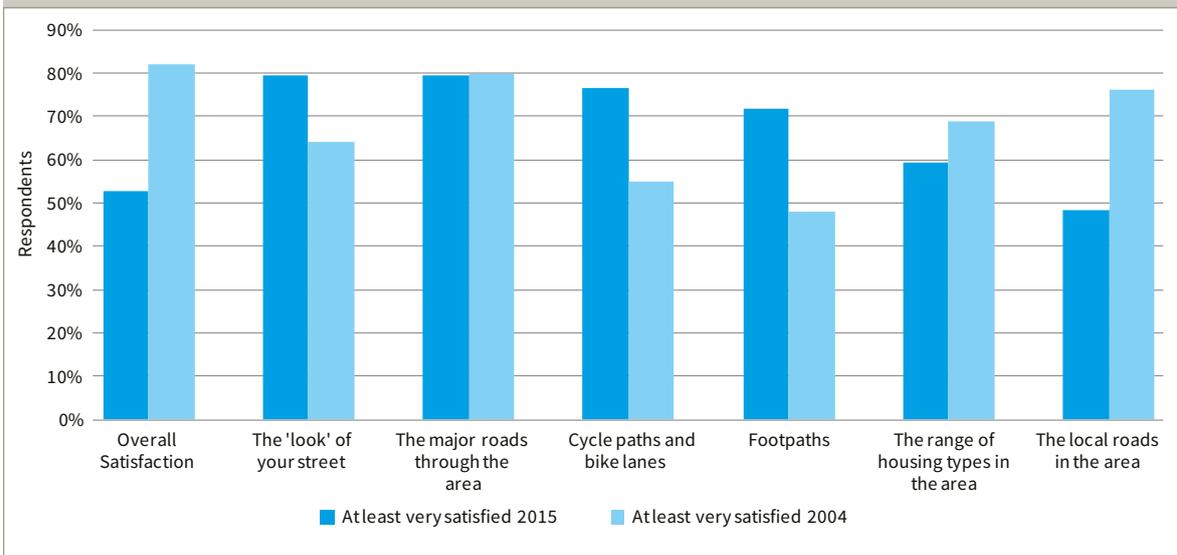
Figure 11: ACT household types – historic and projected



3.2.4 Neighbourhood satisfaction has declined

While the majority of residents surveyed are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live, the overall level of satisfaction has declined from 99% over the last decade.¹⁸ Specifically relating to housing choice, almost 10% of residents surveyed are less satisfied with the range of housing types in their neighbourhood compared to just over a decade ago (currently 59.4%, compared with 69% in 2004) (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Satisfaction with neighbourhood



¹⁸ Winton Sustainable Research Strategies (2015) Volume 1: Report 2014 Housing Choices Community Survey, Canberra: ACT Government

3.3 OTHER FACTORS INFLUENCING HOUSING CHOICE

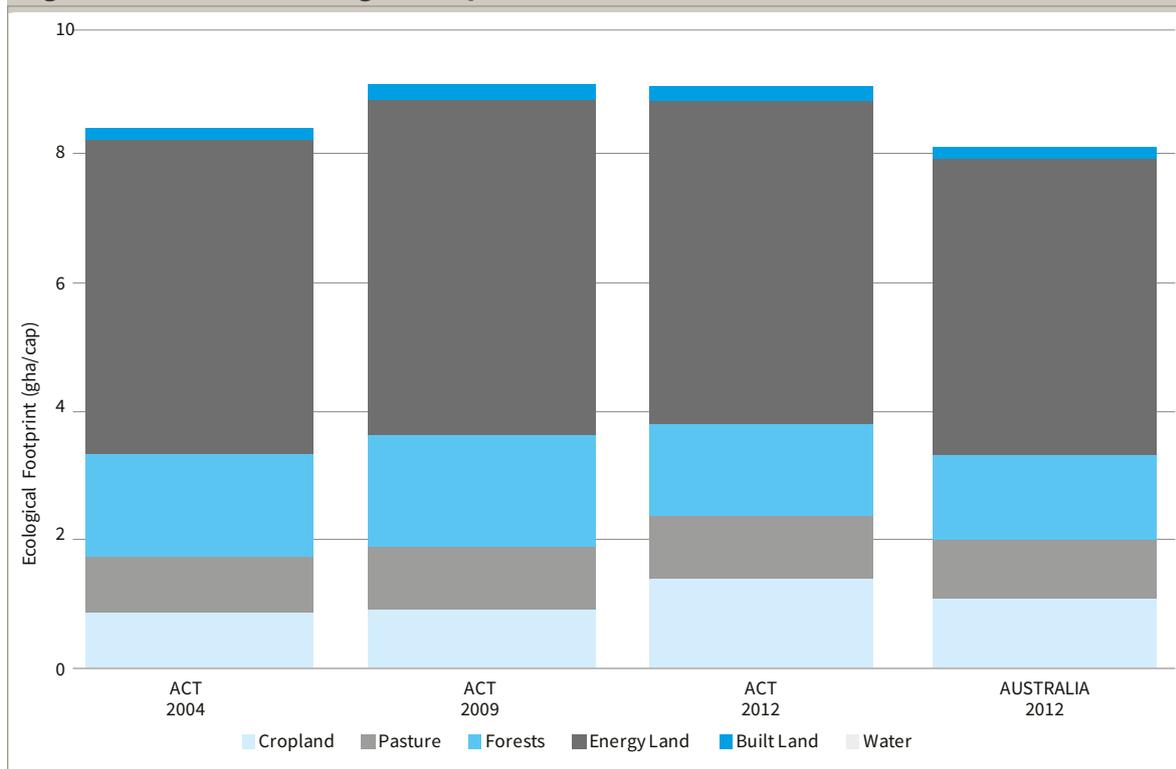
3.3.1 Limited greenfield land available for development

Greenfield development has a range of social, economic and environmental consequences as well as benefits that need to be balanced when considering residential development in the ACT. Greenfield developments require significant investment in public infrastructure (e.g. roads, services, community facilities) and can compete with other land uses. Much of the ACT's remaining 'urban capable' land presents significant financial and environmental constraints due to location, terrain and environmental values (e.g. endangered species and habitats).

A sprawling city also has long-term implications for sustainability. Residents living in Canberra's outer districts are more likely to rely on cars to travel to work, and in 2015 Canberra had the second highest number of passenger cars in Australia per 100 people.¹⁹ For many households the cost of travel is consuming in excess of 25% of their annual income. The 2012 ACT Planning Strategy aims to balance these pressures by committing to 50% infill for new dwellings to manage a growing population.

A move towards a more compact city by encouraging urban infill can help reduce our environmental impact. In 2011–12 Canberra had a higher ecological footprint than the Australian average (Figure 13).²⁰ Our average ecological footprint was 8.9 global hectares per person (gha/person), which is about three and a half times the global per person average. In short, Canberrans impact the global environment more than people in most places on earth.

Figure 13: Canberran's ecological footprint



Our average ecological footprint is one of the highest in the world

19 Charting Transport (2014) Trends in car ownership, available at: <http://chartingtransport.com/2011/08/07/trends-in-car-ownership>

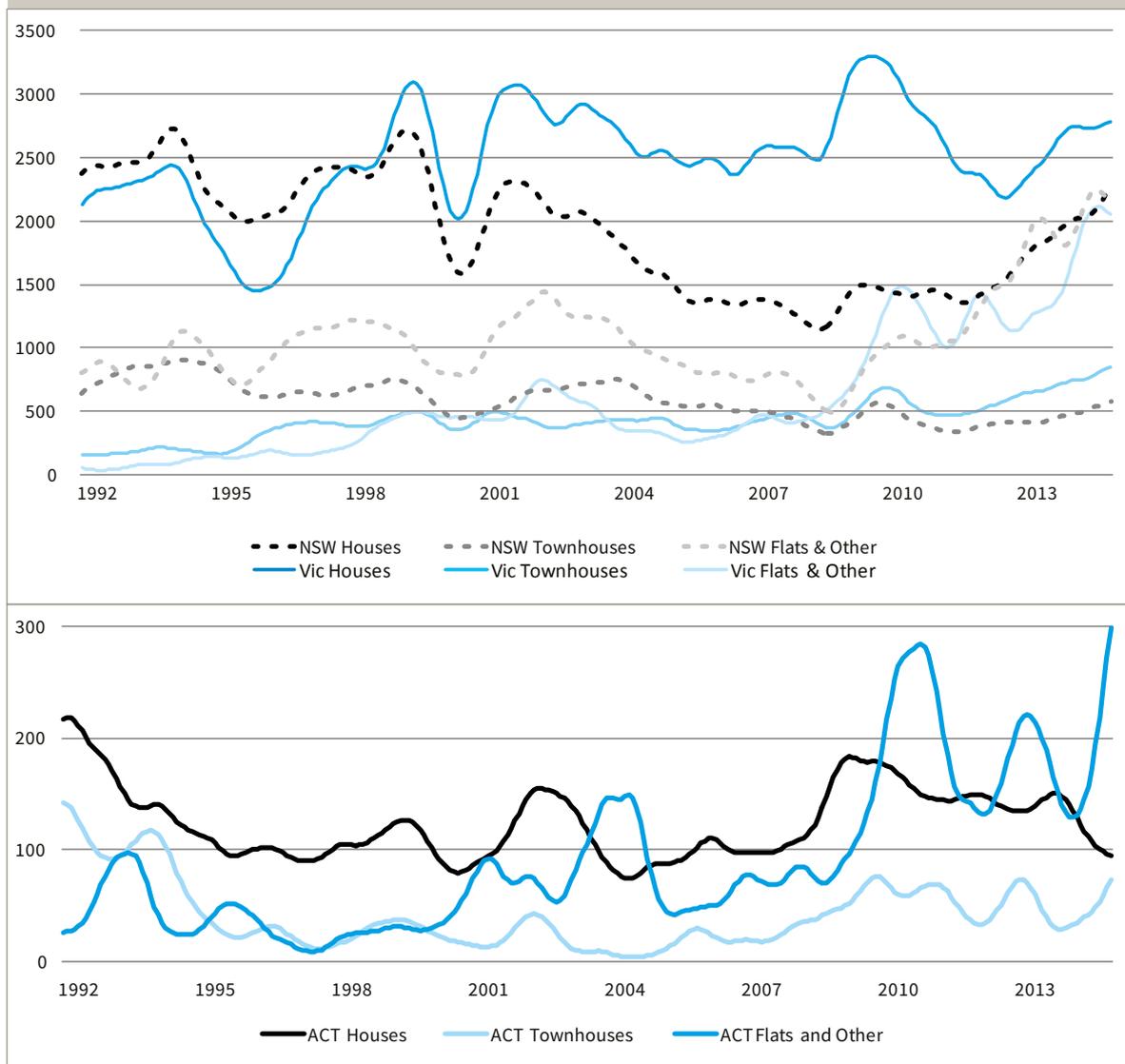
20 ACT Government (2015, State of the Environment Report: ACT Ecological Footprint, Canberra: Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

3.3.2 A trend to higher density housing across Australia's eastern states

Dwelling approvals are generally representative of dwelling construction. In most states, a decline in the number of free-standing houses has been replaced by an increase in approvals for high-density, rather than medium-density, dwellings. In Victoria the number of town houses approved has increased. In NSW and Victoria, more apartments have been approved compared to houses and town houses (Figure 14).

This trend has also been seen in the ACT, where approvals for apartments (greater than three storeys) have increased and overtaken the number of approvals for free-standing houses. Demand for medium-density housing approvals grew from 2007 to early 2010 with a peak in approvals for dwellings other than free-standing houses occurring between 2009 and 2010.

Figure 14: Monthly approvals by dwelling type in Victoria and NSW and ACT





RZ4 in Turner

3.3.3 Financial and economic factors impacting development trends

Community and industry feedback indicates a range of financial and economic factors impact residential development in the ACT, including:

- » difficulty securing bank loans and equity
- » perceived restrictions in the ACT regulatory system (including difficulty understanding the Territory Plan and Lease Variation Charges)
- » market uncertainty from the local economy
- » challenges finding land available for redevelopment (including initial greenfield land available for development)
- » high cost of land and property
- » long approval timeframes.

Industry feedback indicates that a number of these factors make medium-density development in Canberra's residential zones particularly challenging.

The ACT Government acknowledges these challenges and is exploring alternative ways of financing medium-density residential developments through other projects and engagement processes.

3.3.4 Current Territory Plan provisions need updating to improve viability of medium density development

The ACT Government has received feedback from industry that only greenfield developments and apartments of greater than six storeys are economically viable. This concern was generally supported by economic research testing the viability of medium-density development in residential zones.

Of the six case studies undertaken, no developments in RZ2–RZ4 zones were found to be viable under the current economic conditions and planning provisions.²¹ This finding is not considered to be unique to the ACT's planning framework and trends indicate the high cost of land results in developments in most capital cities being apartments greater than six storeys.

21 Real Sustainability (2015) Housing Choices: Economic Analysis, Canberra: ACT Government



RZ4 in O'Connor

4. HOW DO WE IMPROVE HOUSING CHOICE?

We know there is a demand for a more diverse range of dwellings across Canberra and that residents want to see a greater range of housing choice in their suburbs. There are a range of mechanisms available to government to encourage this diversity, including potential legislative, regulatory and policy changes. For more information on residential zones, see Appendix B.

4.1 CHANGES TO THE TERRITORY PLAN

Community and industry groups say the residential development provisions in the Territory Plan are too prescriptive, inflexible and do not encourage innovation. Current development assessment provisions are also considered to be too complex.

Feedback from residents indicates changes to the Territory Plan's residential development provisions would be supported.

In addition to wanting change, EPSDD has received requests from the community for more information, training and assistance in understanding and negotiating the ACT planning system. Specific requests include further guidance (e.g. regarding 'desired character' provisions in each zone where plot ratios²² are not specified), training sessions, documents written in 'plain English', and greater accessibility to information.

Several people have requested a simple and more web-friendly version of the Territory Plan. Examples include simplifying residential zoning codes and rules so they can be more easily understood.

4.1.1 Residential RZ1 Suburban Zone

Maintaining the character and amenity of Canberra's suburbs is fundamental to maintaining Canberra's reputation as a garden city.

This view is supported by the community, with more than 50% of the Canberra residents surveyed rating the visual attractiveness of their neighbourhood as one of the most important aspects of where they live. Almost 80% of residents surveyed are currently satisfied with the 'look' of their street. However, this creates a conundrum, as despite being satisfied with their neighbourhoods, Canberra residents have indicated they want change in residential areas.

Conversation starters

Dual occupancies

More than half of residents surveyed want more dual occupancy developments while fewer than 5% think there are too many dual occupancies. Almost 50% of people surveyed said they would undertake a dual occupancy development themselves if it could be separately unit titled. This drops to less than 7% if dual occupancies were not able to be separately unit titled.

Dual occupancies in the RZ1 zone are not currently able to be separately unit titled, and as such they cannot be sold separately.

²² Plot ratio limits generally control the scale of development permitted on a site. Plot ratios represent the proportion (or ratio) of floor area of a building relevant to the total area of the site. For example, a 50% plot ratio on a 700 m² site would represent a maximum permitted floor area of 350m².

What would help you to better understand the ACT planning system?



What do you think about the current range of housing options in the lower density suburbs?

What changes would you support in the RZ1 zone to improve housing choice?

This creates significant financial restrictions for people wanting to undertake a dual occupancy development, as securing a bank loan to fund the development is difficult.

An additional challenge with dual occupancy development is how to manage appropriate development. Ideally dual occupancy development would be 'salt and peppered' throughout a neighbourhood. Examples of how to achieve this could be to restrict development to larger blocks with a minimum street frontage.

This salt and peppering approach is increasingly occurring internationally. In the United States of America, research has been conducted into how to improve housing choices in residential areas and encourage walkable urban living.²³ This work encourages a variety of building types (with footprints no greater than a single dwelling) to be distributed throughout suburban areas and stand side-by-side with single dwelling detached houses. This blend of housing options encourages a transition to higher density suburbs while maintaining neighbourhood aesthetics (Figure 16).

Subdivision

Between 1987 and 2007, the average urban block size in Canberra's suburbs decreased by 3% to 835 m². This decline is a result of increased production of new blocks of less than 600m².

Despite this trend, there are still very large blocks in some of Canberra's existing suburbs that may be appropriate to subdivide.

To encourage a range of new developments within existing neighbourhoods, subdivision of large accessible blocks (e.g. corner blocks or blocks with large frontage) or consolidation and subdivision of blocks are options that could be considered.

Development codes

Plot ratio limits generally control the scale of development permitted on a site and represent the proportion of floor area of a building relevant to the total area of the site.

Consideration needs to be given to managing residential amenity in making any changes. This includes considering changes to provisions for maximum site coverage, and/or reviewing requirements for the amount of private open space available on a site (e.g. landscaped areas).

Requiring all new developments, including dual occupancies, to meet adaptability standards²⁴ may be another way to ensure dwellings are able to meet the needs of a diverse range of people and allow people to age in place in the future.

23 Opticos Design Inc (2015) Missing Middle Housing: Responding to the Demand for Walkable Urban Living, California

24 That is, requiring houses to be designed in such a way they can be modified easily to become accessible to both occupants and visitors with disabilities or progressive frailties (see Australian Standard AS 4299 Adaptable Housing).

Figure 15: Example of neighbourhood block with a mix of housing choices

Reproduced with the permission of Opticos Design, Inc © 2015



4.1.2 Residential RZ2 Suburban Core Zone

Residential RZ2 zones have been introduced to enable greater density of development, while maintaining low rise and a mix of dwellings. While this zone permits dual occupancy and town house-style developments, community surveys have indicated there is an unfilled demand for these types of dwellings.

The current provision of the RZ2 zone are provided in Table 4.

Conversation starters

Consideration could be given to increasing the permitted density of development on a block in RZ2 zones (for both multi-unit and adaptable dwelling developments)²⁵, particularly on large blocks. The number of adaptable dwellings available for the ageing population and the mobility impaired could be further improved by providing a sliding scale of development density depending on the number of adaptable units.

Consideration could also be given to standardising plot ratios for all dwellings. Linking plot ratios to minimum block widths where they front a street (i.e. minimum frontages) is another way of ensuring the amenity of our streetscapes is maintained.

The dwelling replacement rule in the RZ2 zone requires that when a single dwelling is demolished and replaced by a multi-unit development, at least one unit must contain the same number of bedrooms as the original single dwelling. If this rule was removed, the number of bedrooms in a dwelling would not be limited. This would allow the market to drive the number of bedrooms in new developments.

It may be appropriate to review the definition of ‘apartments’ in the Multi-Unit Development Code. Consideration could be given to permitting dual occupancy style dwellings to be built on top of one another. This development would allow each dwelling to be on a single level while limiting site coverage. From the street, this kind of dwelling would look like a two storey house, and would increase the range of housing available without impacting on the amenity of the street.



What changes would you support to help increase diversity of housing choices in the RZ2 zone?

25 ACT Government (2016) Residential Zones Development Code, Canberra: Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

What changes would you support to the medium density residential zones to improve housing choice?

Table 4: Current provisions of the Residential RZ2 Zone

	Current RZ2 provision [^]
Existing block density: single dwelling blocks	700m ² with one dwelling per 350m ² and an additional dwelling per 250m ² over 2100m ² * E.g. this provision allows a maximum of six dwellings for a 2100m ² site
Existing block density: adaptable housing allowable on single dwelling blocks	600m ² with one dwelling per 250m ² for sites up to 1350m ² and over *
Plot ratio	Up to 50% (35% if rear dwelling and 17.5% for rear dwelling)
Dwelling replacement rule	Any demolished single dwelling house of 3–4 bedrooms must be replaced with a dwelling of three or more bedrooms. This rule does not apply to supportive housing.

* Not less than 250 m² is required for every additional dwelling.

[^] Current provisions are on page 13 of the Multi-Unit Housing Development Code



4.1.3 Residential RZ3 Urban Residential Zone and Residential RZ4 Medium Density Residential Zone

The majority of RZ3 and RZ4 zones are located in the Inner North of Canberra, Gungahlin and new greenfield areas. A diversity of housing choices is already available to the community in these areas. Trends in recent development applications indicate some developers are undertaking RZ2 style developments (e.g. town houses) in RZ3 and RZ4 zones. This is being driven by a demand for multi-unit developments and encouraged through flexibility in the RZ3 and RZ4 provisions.

Research conducted into the RZ3 and RZ4 zones indicates there may be efficiencies in combining the RZ3 and RZ4 into a single zone. Options for change in these two zones need to be considered in conjunction with potential changes to the RZ2 zone to encourage a greater diversity of housing choice.

Conversation starters

One option is to amalgamate RZ3 and RZ4 areas into a single zone where the current RZ4 provisions apply. This potential change would result in the ACT’s residential zones more closely reflecting residential zones in other Australian jurisdictions (see Table 2).

Another option is to keep the two zones separate and vary provisions within each zone to increase dwelling heights and plot ratios. For example, the economic analysis recommended an increase in plot ratio from 65% to 80% for developments in the RZ3 zone, and from 80% to 130% in the RZ4 zone.

Alternatively, plot ratios could be increased to 100% as a rule in both zones, with criteria added to permit plot ratios of 130% for high quality, well designed developments.

Another option is to keep the two zones separate and vary provisions within each zone to increase building heights and plot ratios. We are interested in your views about appropriate development densities in these zones.

4.1.4 Review of residential zones

In addition to reviewing the provisions of residential zones, there has been increasing community feedback that a review of the locations of residential zones is required.

The current distribution of residential zones is largely based on Variation 200, which commenced in August 2003. Variation 200 sought to address dual and triple occupancies which, prior to the amendment, were permitted across all residential areas. On commencement of the amendment, multi-unit residences were limited in 80% of Canberra's residential area (current RZ1 zones).

Variation 200 managed intensification of development through creating what are now RZ2 zones. These zones were located within approximately 200 and 300 metres of local and group centres respectively. However, in some circumstances, some RZ1 zone blocks are closer to services and facilities than RZ2 zoned blocks.

While there have been changes to residential zones since Variation 200, these have generally been site specific. To achieve greater consistency across residential zones, a more in-depth review of the location of zones that reflects broader policy and planning outcomes and subdivision patterns may be desirable.

Do you think we have the right balance of residential zones to support greater housing choice?

RZ2 in Downer





RZ3 in Bruce

*Are you aware of
a best practice
model in another
city that we should
examine?*

4.2 FOCUS ON QUALITY DESIGN OUTCOMES

60% of the ACT community surveyed indicated they were reluctant to consider living in higher density housing due to concerns about building design and poor quality construction.

Delivering an outcome-focused planning system to reward design excellence is a key priority of the 2015 Statement of Planning Intent.

4.2.1 Excellence through design

Sixty percent of the ACT community surveyed indicated they were reluctant to consider living in higher density housing due to concerns about building design and poor construction quality.

In the ACT, development of apartments is regulated through the Territory Plan's Multi-Unit Housing Development Code. In other jurisdictions the design of residential apartments is regulated through planning policies or guidelines.

For example, in NSW the State Environmental Planning Policy number 65 – Design Quality of Residential Apartment Development (SEPP 65) regulates apartment design. SEPP 65 recognises the importance of high quality design through a set of principles (e.g. context and neighbourhood character, built form, amenity, and aesthetics). SEPP 65 also establishes design review panels to provide independent expert advice to government on certain development applications. Panels comprise at least three members with expertise in architecture, landscape architecture or urban design. Their advice has legal weight and can be used by government when approving or recommending changes to development proposals. SEPP65 is available from the [NSW Government website](#).

4.2.2 ACT Design review panel

A key action in the 2015 Statement of Planning Intent is to establish a single urban design advisory panel in the ACT with an aim to improve the design quality of development and the public realm.

The experience from other jurisdictions, both nationally and internationally, has demonstrated that design review early in the design process can achieve improved quality of development, reduced risks and costs for development and faster development approval processes. Multiple benefits for the community have also been identified such as improved amenity for building occupants, neighbours and the broader community.

Design review is a collaborative process that allows for the discussion and exchange of ideas, through peer review, to ultimately improve the design quality of buildings, precincts and public spaces.

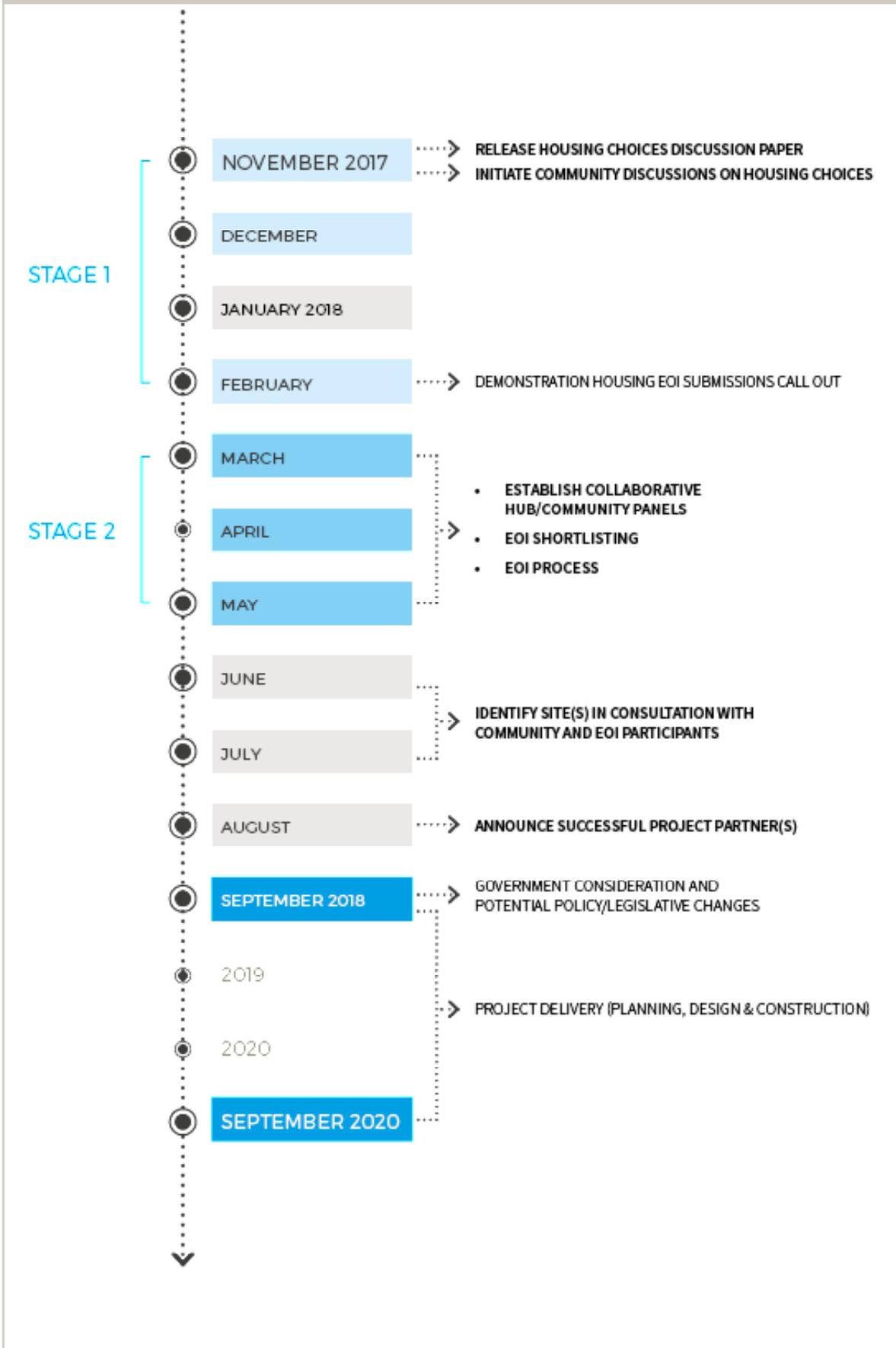
The ACT Government has commenced investigations to establish a single design review panel in the ACT as part of the pre-development application process. When established, the panel will be chaired by the ACT Government Architect and consist of a range of highly experienced multidisciplinary design experts. The aim of the panel will be to provide independent expert design advice for private sector development proposals and key public infrastructure projects.

*What is good housing design?
What elements make a good residential building or development?*

How can design outcomes for medium to higher density residential development be improved?

Where are the examples of well designed residential development in your neighbourhood or elsewhere?

Figure 16: Community engagement timeline



5. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

We recognise that improving the diversity of housing choice is an important issue that affects all current and future Canberrans, and that it is important to get future policy right. EPSDD looks forward to receiving your feedback on how housing choices can be improved.

Figure 16 illustrates the community engagement timeline over this period of time including two main stages of consultation.

The two main stages are:

- Stage 1 – release of Housing Choices Discussion Paper for community consultation and commencement at community discussions.
- Stage 2a – expression of interest for demonstration housing projects to test the impact of possible variations to the Territory Plan.
- Stage 2b – establish a community collaboration to consider ideas from Stage 1, and participate in the selection of demonstration housing projects.

Comments may be made:

- » online at www.yoursay.act.gov.au
- » by email to Terrplan@act.gov.au
- » by mail to
Housing Choices,
Planning Policy,
Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate,
PO Box 158, Canberra ACT 2601

Following community consultation, EPSDD will develop a consultation report and explore viable options in more detail for government endorsement. Any proposed changes to the planning system or broader legislative framework would require further analysis and follow usual statutory consultation processes.

Privacy

Before making a submission to this discussion paper, please review the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate's privacy policy and annex at www.environment.act.gov.au/about/privacy. Any personal information received in the course of your submission will be used only for the purposes of this community engagement process. Names of organisations may be included in any subsequent consultation report, but all individuals will be de-identified unless prior approval is gained.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

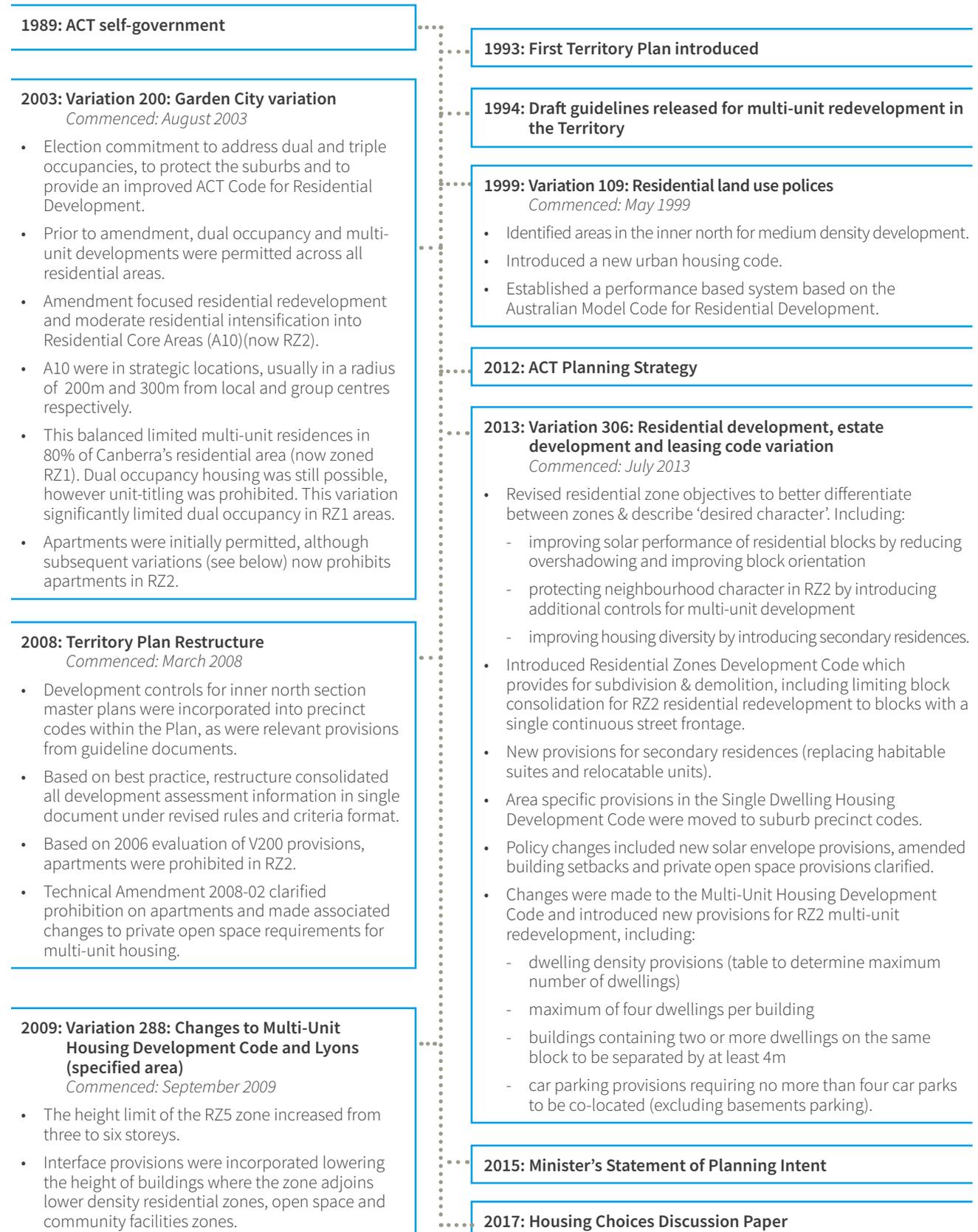
RZ4 in Weston



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PLANNING POLICY IN THE ACT: A SHORT HISTORY

Timeline of key planning decisions in the ACT



APPENDIX B: RESIDENTIAL ZONES IN THE TERRITORY PLAN

Residential development codes in the ACT

Relevant Code	Description
Residential Zones Development Code	<p>Applies to all development in residential zones (RZ1–RZ5). Provisions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• subdivision and demolition• limiting block consolidation to supportive housing for RZ1 developments• limiting block consolidation to a single continuous street frontage for RZ2 developments• secondary residences.
Single Dwelling Housing Development Code	<p>Applies to single dwellings in all zones. Provisions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• solar envelope• building setbacks• private open space• restricts number of storeys in RZ1 – RZ4.
Multi-unit Housing Development Code	<p>Applies to multi-unit development in all zones, including dual occupancies (two dwellings on one allotment), however does not apply to secondary residences. Contains additional controls for multi-unit housing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• with four or more storeys• in commercial zones• RZ2 developments.

Summary of residential zones in the Territory Plan

Residential Zone	Area*	Description
RZ1 Suburban Zone 	81%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low rise and predominantly low density housing, the majority of which are single residences. Multi-unit housing is permitted subject to strict limits on redevelopment of land originally used for single dwelling housing. Dual occupancies are permitted on blocks over 800m². Subdivision or unit titles are not permitted (i.e. dwellings cannot be sold separately).
RZ2 Suburban Core Zone 	11.5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low rise and low density housing types (e.g. dual occupancy, town house and terrace housing). Apartments are not permitted. Introduced in 2003 to enable greater density development with controls to limit redevelopment of existing suburban areas. Located close to centres (generally within 200–300m) and areas with good transport connections.
RZ3 Urban Residential Zone 	3.5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low rise developments, with slightly higher density permitted than RZ2. Apartments permitted. Provides a transition between low density suburban (RZ1) and medium density (RZ4) areas. Generally located near commercial centres and employment locations (e.g. Canberra City, Northbourne Ave and Gungahlin). Buildings have a maximum height of 9.5m and are generally two storeys.
RZ4 Medium Density Residential Zone 	2.5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium rise and medium density which encourages housing diversity, aims to contain urban expansion and accommodates population growth along major transport corridors. Generally located close to town centres and along major transportation corridors to take full advantage of the public transport system. Buildings have a maximum height of 12.5m and rules allow a maximum of three storeys, with four storeys permitted if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » associated criteria can be met, and » appearance from the street is not more than three storeys, and » reasonable solar access to adjoining dwellings is achieved.
RZ5 High Density Residential Zone 	1.5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High rise and high density development (predominantly apartments) which aims to increase the population in existing areas by promoting sustainable and environmentally sensitive development that is less dependent on car travel, and minimises infrastructure and service costs. Encourages housing in locations with access to employment, and accommodates population growth and changing household sizes. Buildings have a maximum height of 21.5m and are generally a maximum of six storeys. Building heights are lower in many parts of the zone as indicated by precinct codes.

* Proportion of total area zoned residential (RZ1 – RZ5)

Comparison of residential zones in the ACT

	RZ1 Suburban	RZ2 Suburban Core Zone	RZ3 Urban Residential Zone	RZ4 Medium Density Residential Zone	RZ5 High Density Residential Zone
Plot ratio for dual occupancy & multi unit	Formula up to 32.5% (up to 16.25% rear dwelling)	Up to 50% (35% if rear dwelling and 17.5% for rear dwelling)	65%	80%	n/a
Plot ratio single dwellings	50%	50%	not stated	not stated	not stated
Number of storeys	2 storey (1 storey rear dwelling)	2 storey	generally 2 storey*	generally 3 storey*	generally up to 6 storeys*
Maximum height	8.5m	8.5m	9.5m	12.5m	21.5m
Attics and basements	permitted but not in addition to 2 storeys	permitted	permitted	permitted	permitted
Dual occupancy	min block size 800m ²	min block size 700m ²	permitted	permitted	permitted
Multi unit (more than 2)	other than single dwelling block only	block density control with 1050m ² min block area required	permitted	permitted	permitted
Apartments	not permitted	not permitted	permitted	permitted	permitted
Unit titling subdivision	not permitted for single dwelling blocks except where dwelling pre-existed V200 (2003)	permitted	permitted	permitted	permitted
Consolidation	not permitted for single dwelling blocks except for supportive housing	permitted provided there is a continuous street frontage	permitted	permitted	permitted

* if specified criteria is met, additional storeys are possible, provided overall height limit is not exceeded.

