

The City Renewal Authority Garema Place Upgrade

Submission into the Proposed Upgrades from the Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum

May 2023

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The CRA Garema Place Upgrade Input into the Proposed Upgrades Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum

Introduction

This submission sets out the Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum's views on the proposed upgrades to Garema Place in the ACT.

Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum Background

The Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum (Leaders Forum) is the ACT and region's peak tourism and events industry representative organisation.

The Leaders Forum is a not-for-profit representative body advocating for the ACT tourism and associated industry sectors in the National Capital and surrounding Canberra Region. The Leaders Forum's focus is on promoting the value of these sectors to the ACT visitor economy and acting as a 'think tank' and policy generator.

The Leaders Forum comprises heads and representatives of the leading tourism, sports, arts, cultural, business, aviation and educational sectors in the ACT, along with representation from Destination Southern New South Wales. A list of Board Members is at Appendix 1.

Your Brief

The City Renewal Authority (CRA) have asked Canberrans to tell you what they think of the designs you have developed for Garema Place. You have already identified a number of areas for enhancement based on community feedback.

You are now seeking views on how satisfied Canberrans are with what you have proposed.

The Leaders Forum have given a great deal of thought to the redesign of the National Capital's city centre and this submission addresses a number of aspects of the design that should be given thoughtful consideration.

Preamble

Draft City Plan & UDF Survey

The Leaders Forum responded to the **Draft City Plan & UDF Survey** in February 2023. Here is our initial response to the vision and goals outlined in this city plan.

The vision is impressive. In reality the city centre is in need of a massive overhaul. It does not reflect the feel of a modern 'global city: pavers are over 20 years old, there are trip hazards everywhere, the concrete structures behind the merry-go-round are old and crumbling, the shop fronts in Garema place are old and dirty, the social problems with drug abuse and anti-social behaviour every day in the centre of the city is a disgrace. There are regional cities across this country with beautiful city centres, leaving the national capital's CBD underwhelming and uninviting. These comments have been made over and over with little resolve to the look of the city.

The CRA is in need of millions of dollars to rectify and beautify the heart of our nation's capital city, and funds need to be allocated as a mandatory line item in each budget to ensure this major upgrade is achieved.

The changes you have proposed are focussed almost entirely on landscaping works: removing clutter, more greenery, trees, paving improvements, lighting and so on. This is commendable however we would suggest the critical component of redesigning this space is to review the look of the retail and food outlets in this area.

Garema Place is a mixture of aged and degraded infrastructure, a mismatch of shopfronts, verandas, signage, A-Frames, patchwork paint and a plethora of unkept assets. With this backdrop the 'Global City' aspirations of the ACT Government will never be achieved. Architectural excellence is a key component of redesign you have not dealt with, and we believe this is a missed opportunity.

In short, when the CRA Civic Advisory Groups were convened two years ago one sub-committee assessed place-making grant schemes for Civic. It was very clear this was the focus intended for the group. However rather than focus more on strategic issues the group concentrated their efforts on landscaping. Our recommendation is to look seriously at the entire city precinct, developing a world leading plan to transform this area into a modern, vibrant city centre.

There are many examples around the world where inspiration could be drawn upon to achieve this aim. Sadly, we are now focussed on dressing up an area through landscaping ideas rather than having the bolder objective of total transformation.

Garema Place Consultation May 2023

We are very pleased to be able to respond to your call for feedback on your re design of Garema Place.

a. Restaurant and Coffee Shops

Restaurant outdoor eating areas should abut the restaurant itself. This provides ease of delivery of food to tables and allows for more open space in Garema Place itself. The other issue is the safety of staff and patrons who at present need to negotiate passing pedestrians, cyclists and scooter riders, many who pass the entrances to these establishments at considerable speed.

We would recommend you provide guidelines to all restaurants with outdoor dining spaces on how their structures should conform to ensure they are sympathetic to the area. The Canberra Centre employ professional designers and experienced stylists should be employed here to provide expert advice. Unless this aspect of Garema Place is revamped you will not achieve the professional look you are aiming for. This will also assist with site lines.

Visual appeal of a city centre should be attractive for both visitors and locals. The proposed design you have prepared does increase informal spaces to sit, eat, and meet friends. These are commendable objectives, however this submission points to the difficulties in making this area appealing without more thought to the designs you have proposed.

It is the current visual look of the area and the varying quality of the shop fronts and the presentation of the restaurants, takeaway food outlets and retailers that is one of the biggest challenges you face in upgrading this area to the standards expected of the National Capital and of a 'Global City's' centre.

The design must also focus on supporting local businesses, and this includes pedestrian traffic flows, wayfinding, the safety of everyone transiting this precinct, and the way pedestrians have to interrelate with cyclist, scooters and other mobile devices.

b. Seating

In 2020 and 2021, upgrades were made to City Walk, including new street furniture, ambient lighting, mass planted garden beds, lawns, and repairs to paving and public artworks. This has in some respects caused unexpected social issues.

The experience of the upgrades to the area near the merry-go-round highlights the serious issues when installing lots of seating that is now occupied almost daily by individuals/groups drinking and displaying antisocial behaviour. ACT Policing are aware of this issue however the problem continues. This should not be repeated in Garema Place.

The placement of seats under trees mean bird droppings become an issue. If this is not cleaned daily it is a disincentive for people to use them. People need to move through Garema Place and if they wish to stop and enjoy a meal they can purchase food and drinks and sit in an establishment's indoor/outdoor dining area.

c. Trees and Greenery

We understand the desire to make this area appealing but advise against overdoing this feature. As sightlines are an important aspect of your redesign, this landscaping will lessen the professional look of the city centre.

When you consider the many city malls in Australia, they remain uncluttered and certainly not full of greenery. The same applies to the great retail precincts in global cities across the world.

It is suggested trees and furnishing need to be compatible with Canberra's changing climate. Furnishing which require continual upkeep and are not maintained will impact on the visual appeal of the area.

d. Lighting

It appears your design addresses the upgrading of lighting which will be a very welcome feature.

e. Safety

In addressing this issue, we have described the antisocial behaviours now prevalent in sections of the city. During the day Canberrans and visitors are often verbally abused by inebriated individuals or harassed by groups. The behaviour of individuals sleeping rough is also cause for concern. A group of Canberra business leaders have been meeting and consulting with ACT Policing on how to deal with this growing problem.

Safety (cont.)

In noting this problem, we are very sympathetic to the plight of these people. This is a greater social issue that needs addressing and requires a whole-of-Government approach with the support of the private sector.

Saying that, this is an issue that needs immediate attention. South Bank in Brisbane evidently had similar problems until special security powers were introduced. This has been a key driver for the success of this city park precinct. **It is recommended an experienced security adviser be consulted on your re-design to ensure the present proposal does not exacerbate antisocial behaviour and associated crime.**

Recent commentary in the media have highlighted the dangers cyclists and scooters pose to pedestrians. In many cities around the world cyclists and scooter riders are required to dismount when approaching high pedestrian areas. This should be introduced in Canberra.

According to Travel and Leisure Magazine:

After their burst of popularity, electronic scooters are getting banned or temporarily suspended in cities around the world, as accidents, including ones that are fatal, increase. There are major global cities such as New Orleans and Las Vegas who have strict ride-share e-scooter bans. Paris just voted to ban e-scooters. This month Singapore announced a temporary ban on e-scooters on sidewalks after several accidents and one fatality. It could become an all-out ban next year, according to CNN.

Whilst the Leaders Forum has nothing against new modes of transport, any introduction of these services should not be at the detriment of pedestrians and the free and safe movement of people across the city centre.

f. Paving

Modern, stylish pavers must be a feature of this re-design. This should extend through Gus's laneway to Bunda Street and also up to Mort Street past King O'Malley's. At present the city overall looks shabby and unkept and nothing short of a quality upgrade will detract from what you are trying to achieve.

Accessibility for people with mobility issues, the use of wheelchairs and walking frames, the elderly, the very young and the visually impaired all need to feel comfortable in negotiating these spaces. We believe your design has addressed the changing levels around Garema Place.

g. Clutter

The Leaders Forum fully supports the removal of clutter. The fountain and silver cushion could go. The Magpie sculpture however is proving to be a popular attraction. Where space for future events should be considered, there will be few and should not overshadow the importance of prioritising the day-to-day use of this area.

h. Final comments

You mentioned '*a variety of elements have been included in the proposed design, however, we may not be able to include them all in the final design*'. We hope this does not indicate decisions have already been locked in place. We will be seeking a response on any of the suggestions we have made that are not considered.

The Leaders Forum would urge CRA not to necessarily accept the lowest quotes to undertake what should be a high-quality redesign exercise.

Trip hazards and the cleanliness of the area at present is well below the standards expected. Once completed ensure frequent cleaning of the area is initiated and Garema Place and surrounds are well maintained. Rubbish bins should be accessible and emptied daily. Chipped and crumbling concrete structures are evidence of neglect in the city and Garema Place should never be allowed to deteriorate to its current state again.

We urge CRA to expedite this re-design project to lift the quality of the experience in visiting the city centre to shop, dine, work and be entertained.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our thoughts on your proposed redesign.

For Further Information

The Leaders Forum would be happy to provide additional information. Contact:

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Appendix 1

Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum 2023 Board Members

Member	Position
Richie Alan	Representing the Traditional Owners
Dot Barclay	President SKAL ACT & Proprietor Forrest Hotel & Apartments
Sally Barnes	CEO National Capital Authority
Vanessa Brettell	Owner Café Stepping Up representing social enterprise
James Hawketts	General Manager Australian Hotels Association ACT
Graham Catt	CEO Canberra Business Chamber
Rachael Coghlan	Assist Sec Parliamentary Engagement Parliament House
Richard Beere	Chair Destination Southern NSW
Russell Jackson	President National Capital Attractions Association
Jonathan Kobus	Director Visit Canberra
Noel Langdon	Tourism Australia Cultural Signature Series and Sec. CRTLF
David Marshall	Chair Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum
Michael Matthews	CEO Canberra Convention Bureau
Gordon Ramsay	CEO Canberra Museum and Gallery
Dash Rumble	Owner Operator Pilot and Such and Such Restaurants
Katie Russell	CEO Australian Museum and Galleries Association
Emma Shaw	Piquenique Wine representing Canberra District Wines
Gary Stewart	General Manager Canberra Centre
Rob Stefanic	Secretary Parliamentary Services Parliament House/NCETP
Michael Thomson	Head of Aviation Canberra Airport
Olivia Thornton	CEO Cricket ACT representing sporting associations
Marg Wade	Head Canberra Tour Operators Alliance & ATEC Chair
Brian Weir	Lecturer, UC Tourism Program, representing education sector
Stephen Wood	General Manager National Convention Centre