

# ACT GOVERNMENT ARCHITECT ANNUAL REPORTING



**ACT**  
Government

REPORTING FROM 2023 TO 2025

Front cover image 'Lowana Street Townhouses by Marcus Graham'

**© Australian Capital Territory, Canberra 2026**

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission from:

Director-General, Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development  
Directorate, ACT Government, GPO Box 158, Canberra ACT 2601.

**Telephone:** 13 22 81

**Website:** [www.planning.act.gov.au](http://www.planning.act.gov.au)

**Accessibility**

The ACT Government is committed to making its information, services, events and venues as accessible as possible. If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like to receive this publication in an alternative format, such as large print, please phone Access Canberra on 13 22 81 or email the City and Environment Directorate at [CEDCComms@act.gov.au](mailto:CEDCComms@act.gov.au).

If English is not your first language and you require a translating and interpreting service, please phone 13 14 50.

If you are deaf, or have a speech or hearing impairment, and need the teletypewriter service, please phone 13 36 77 and ask for Access Canberra on 13 22 81.

For speak and listen users, please phone 1300 555 727 and ask for Access Canberra on 13 22 81.

For more information on these services visit <http://www.relayservice.com.au>

# CONTENTS

- ABOUT THE ACT GOVERNMENT ARCHITECT .....3
- COMMITTEES AND ENGAGEMENT.....4
  - COMMITTEES IN 2023 TO 2025 .....4
  - ENGAGEMENT IN 2023 TO 2025 .....6
    - INDUSTRY .....6
    - COMMUNITY .....6
    - EDUCATION .....7
    - GOVERNMENT .....8
- MAJOR PROPOSALS, PLANNING AND DESIGN INITIATIVES ..... 12
  - NATIONAL CAPITAL DESIGN REVIEW PANEL ..... 12
    - FY2022-2023..... 13
    - FY2023-2024..... 13
    - FY2024-2025..... 13



# ABOUT THE ACT GOVERNMENT ARCHITECT

**MS CATHERINE TOWNSEND** was appointed to the position of ACT Government Architect in September 2016. In August 2022 Catherine was reappointed to the role for a further term, that was extended to August 2026. The role is part time, and this enables her ongoing mutually beneficial commitments to industry, education and practice:

- her position as ACT Government Architect enables a full overview of the field and activities within industry and government
- her long involvement in industry forums facilitates an airing of alternative views and the identification of unifying positions (Building Regulatory Advisory Committee, liaison with industry peak bodies, leadership positions within the Australian Institute of Architects) as past Chair of the ACT Architects Registration Board she is knowledgeable about regulatory mechanisms, their administrative and compliance operations and issues
- as past President of the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA) she is aware of international best practice in education, accreditation, professional competencies and professional registration
- Ms Townsend's appointment as Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Arts and Design enables her input to and understanding of the education of next generation practitioners, and
- her position as co-Director of Townsend + Associates Architects forms a vital link in providing informed advice to government in a real understanding of how policy translates to the marketplace.

While the most significant part of her role is as the Co-Chair of the NCDRP, the Government Architect also has a role in engaging with the local development and construction industry, government entities and the community on issues of design quality. The Government Architect also provides advice to the ACT Government on design issues, is an expert advisor on tenders for major projects and is government's design representative on juries of design competitions.

This annual reporting provides a summary of the key activities undertaken by the Government Architect over the period. Reporting from 2023 to 2025 has been combined.

# COMMITTEES AND ENGAGEMENT

## Committees in 2023 to 2025

The ACT Government Architect participates and provides strategic advice across several committees and working groups for individual projects. Two on-going committees for 2023-25 include:

### Planning and Construction Industry Chief Executive Reference Group (PACICERG)

The Government Architect is a member of the Planning and Construction Industry Chief Executive Reference Group (PACICERG) which exists to discuss matters of importance to the development and construction industry. The Government Architect regularly provides advice to this group.

### Government Architects Network of Australia (GANA)

The Government Architect is a member of the Government Architects Network of Australia (GANA) which meets bi-monthly to discuss issues of common concern. Between meetings jurisdictions and individuals liaise as necessary.

Issues are focussed on the following topics:

- 1. The value of good design:** How can we ensure that high-quality urban design and place making outcomes are embedded in procurement, governance and decision-making processes?
- 2. Capital city thinking:** How can we play a role in the delivery of a coordinated vision for our respective capital cities that both inspires people to think about their own long-term aspirations and informs future capital and non-capital programs?
- 3. The missing middle:** How can we propose new housing options that meet contemporary community, urban and environmental challenges?



# ENGAGEMENT IN 2023 TO 2025

## Community and Industry

During 2023–25, the ACT Government Architect continued to engage with a wide range of community groups and industry organisations to support open dialogue on design quality and emerging built-environment issues. These engagements provided opportunities to explain the role of the Government Architect, share insights and gather feedback on key government initiatives.

### Industry

During the 2023 to 2025 period, the ACT Government Architect maintained strong engagement with key industry bodies across the planning, architecture, construction and development sectors. These engagements provided opportunities to discuss design quality, share insights from design review processes and seeking feedback on significant policy initiatives, including the Missing Middle Housing Reforms and broader planning system improvements. The ACT Government Architect also contributed to industry-led committees and professional forums, supporting collaboration and reinforcing the value of high-quality design across Canberra's built environment.

As part of the Missing Middle Housing Reforms industry consultation program, the ACT Government Architect served as Co-chair of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and participated in the Pool of Practitioners (POP). These groups brought together industry experts to provide targeted advice on the proposed planning changes and the development of the draft Missing Middle Housing

Design Guide. The ACT Government Architect contributed to technical workshops, reviewed industry feedback and helped guide the refinement of policy elements to support well-designed, diverse and sustainable housing outcomes. Industry groups included:

- ACT Property Council / Property Council of Australia
- Government Architect Network Australia
- Master Builders Association
- Australian Institute of Building
- Planning Institute of Australia
- Australian Institute of Architects
- Australian Institute of Landscape Architects

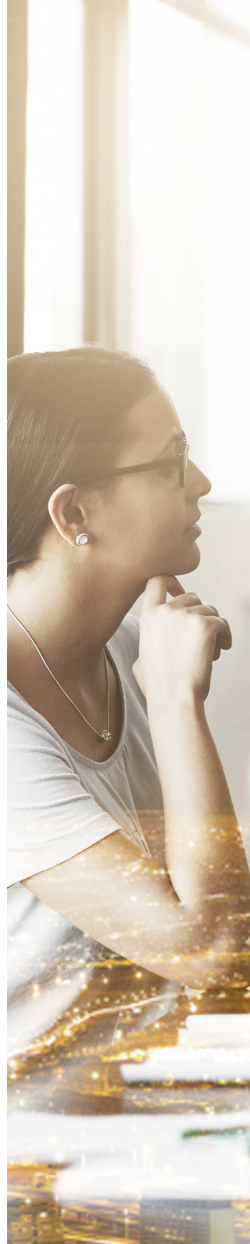
### Community

As part of the Missing Middle Housing Reform community consultation, face to face 'listening spaces' were offered at two locations during the engagement period, with opportunities for members of the public to visit at any time during the day, or to book specific sessions with the ACT Government Architect

#### 'Meet the Government Architect' sessions

'Meet the Government Architect' sessions were run at the two listening spaces.

Members of the community were invited to register for small group sessions with the Government Architect, to discuss the proposed Missing Middle Housing Reform in detail.



## Woden session

The Woden session was attended by seven (7) people, including representatives from the Woden Valley Community. The discussion was wide-ranging and focused on the proposed Missing Middle Housing Reforms and their anticipated impacts for the Woden Valley District, including questions about neighbourhood character, residential amenity and opportunities for appropriate housing diversity within established suburbs.

## Belconnen session

The Belconnen 'Meet the Government Architect' session was attended by three (3) people. There was discussion about the proposed Missing Middle Housing Reforms, including the potential for innovation in transport such as using car share to augment residential parking. One of the attendees was interested in discussing the potential for their specific development opportunity.

# Education

## Alastair Swayn Masters Research Grant

The ACT Government Architect has continued to support the Alastair Swayn Masters Research Grant (previously known as the Alastair Swayn Internship). The program honours Alastair Swayn AO, the inaugural ACT Government Architect and a Professorial Fellow at the University of Canberra. It provides an annual opportunity for Master of Architecture students at the University of Canberra to undertake a semester-long research assignment aligned with the work of the ACT Government's City and Environment Directorate (CED), through the Policy, Planning and Built Environment group. Each participant receives guidance from the ACT Government Architect during their research, and their completed work is published by the Alastair Swayn Foundation.

Across the 2022 to 2025 period, two students participated in 2022. The program was on hiatus in 2023. It recommenced in 2024 with three participating students.





## 2022 Research Topics

- Built Forms on Ngunnawal Country; Investigation and Adaptation - by Kieran Minto
- Interface; Cemetery and City - by Courtney Thoo

## 2024 Research Topics

- Retuning the Ex Govie; A guide to renovation and extension of the Canberra 400 series ex government houses - by Flynn Hopkins
- Beyond the Traditional Stadium; Strengthening the Relationship Between the Stadium and the City - by Robert McKay
- Adaptive Reuse and Canberra; How does the application of adaptive reuse of commercial office buildings for residential purposes fit into Canberra's urban planning goals for 2030? - by Cooper Davis

## 2025 Research Topics

- Colouring Canberra's Suburbs Blue: A Sustainable Densification Option - by Stephanie Williamson
- Space Syntax analysis of Canberra's 'family homes': Lessons from Detached Houses to inform the Design of Apartments - by Julia McGrath
- Walkability and Feelings of Insiderness: Analysing Aged Care Facilities in Canberra - by Nick Brown

Further details on the Alastair Swain Foundation and the research grant program can be found at <https://alastairswainfoundation.org/education/masters-research-grant>.

# Government

## City and Environment Directorate (CED), formerly the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

During the 2023 to 2025 period, the ACT Government Architect continued to support the implementation of the new planning system. Her contributions focused on measures to strengthen design quality outcomes in the built environment, particularly for multi-unit residential development, with attention to residential amenity, environmental performance and sustainability.

As part of this broader reform agenda, the ACT Government Architect collaborated in the development of key design guidance, including the Housing Design Guide, the Urban Design Guide and the City Centre Urban Design Guide. These documents establish a foundation for more consistent, design-led outcomes across the city.



A key focus of the ACT Government Architect's work with the City and Environment Directorate during the 2023 to 2025 period was the Missing Middle Housing reforms. The ACT Government Architect provided advice on the development of the draft Missing Middle Housing Design Guide and on associated planning provisions intended to support well-designed multi-unit housing within existing suburbs. This work included input on site layout, building placement, privacy, solar access, tree protection and the integration of new housing typologies into established neighbourhoods. The ACT Government Architect's contributions supported the creation of policy settings that encourage diverse and sustainable housing options while maintaining a high standard of design quality across the city. The ACT Government Architect has also provided input to the development of strategic policy integrating knowledge gained through professional practice and understanding of critical issues derived from her role as Co-chair of the NCD RP.

In addition, working with the NCD RP Secretariat, the ACT Government Architect supported the involvement of the Development Planning Assessment team (formerly part of Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate), in the design review process. This enabled early coordination between design review, planning assessment and operational considerations, with a focus on movement networks, active travel and public transport connections, as well as waste servicing and tree management, supporting more integrated and informed design outcomes.



In her role, the ACT Government Architect also regularly meets with the Chief Planner and CED Executives to discuss the NCD RP work program, insights and the Government Architect's broader engagement with industry and the community.

## National Capital Authority (NCA)

The ACT Government Architect works closely with the National Capital Authority as the joint partner responsible for the National Capital Design Review Panel (NCDRP). This includes monthly meetings to coordinate the NCDRP program, review recent and upcoming proposals, select panellists and ensure alignment in the administration of design review.

During the 2022 to 2025 period, the ACT Government Architect collaborated with the NCA on a range of strategic and project-specific matters. This included work on the Hume Circle project, managed by the NCA, with discussions focusing on design quality outcomes, landscape considerations and the interface between national and territory-level planning requirements.

The ACT Government Architect and the NCA also continued broader discussions on improving design quality across designated areas and other locations of national significance.



## Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) - Now CED

Working with the NCDRP Secretariat, the ACT Government Architect has promoted the participation of TCCS – Development Planning team (now CED) within the design review process, enabling early engagement between the development industry and TCCS and

the early identification of potential issues relating to movement networks (i.e. supporting pedestrians, active travel and connections to public transport), waste and tree management.

## City Renewal Authority (CRA)

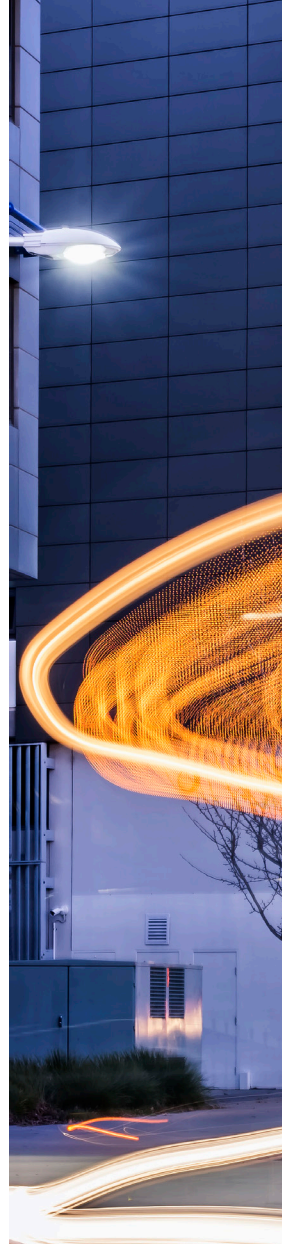
The ACT Government Architect worked closely with the City Renewal Authority on strategic planning and urban design matters within the City Centre during the 2023 to 2025 period. This included input into the Canberra Civic and Cultural District, which forms part of the City Hill precinct and focuses on strengthening the cultural and civic identity of the area around Civic Square and the Canberra Theatre Centre. The ACT Government Architect contributed design advice to support people-centred public space planning, improved connections, and high-quality built form outcomes across this nationally significant precinct.

The ACT Government Architect also provided an avenue for strategic coordination between the CRA and the City and Environment Directorate on shared policy interests related to urban renewal and design quality. Representatives from the CRA participate in National Capital Design Review Panel sessions for proposals located within their jurisdiction to ensure that design review outcomes align with strategic priorities for the City Renewal Precinct and the evolving Canberra Civic and Cultural District.

## Infrastructure Canberra (iCBR)

The ACT Government Architect engaged with Infrastructure Canberra on major ACT Government development and infrastructure projects, including Light Rail Stage 2B, the Canberra Hospital Expansion and the Canberra Institute of Technology Woden Campus. Engagement also included the Northside Hospital project, with contributions provided both through direct collaboration with Infrastructure Canberra and through National Capital Design Review Panel sessions. The ACT Government Architect's advice supported the pursuit of high-quality public domain, integrated movement networks and design solutions that respond well to their surrounding urban settings.

The ACT Government Architect contributed to a number of Infrastructure Canberra-led working groups and advisory processes during the 2023 to 2025 period. This included serving as a member of the Canberra Theatre Design Review Working Group and acting as Chair of the Public Art Working Group for public art procurement associated with Light Rail Stage 2A. These roles provided opportunities to strengthen design integration, enhance public domain outcomes and ensure that major infrastructure projects contribute positively to the character and experience of the city.



## ACT Heritage Council

The ACT Government Architect continues to engage with ACT Heritage and the ACT Heritage Council for heritage related projects across the city including significant urban renewal proposals such as the Kingston Arts Precinct redevelopment.

In concert with the NCDRP Secretariat, the Government Architect has worked to ensure specialist heritage panel representation for relevant development proposals attending the NCDRP.

## Suburban Land Agency (SLA)

The ACT Government Architect engaged with the Suburban Land Agency on a range of significant planning and design initiatives across greenfield and established areas during the 2023 to 2025 period. This included design advice on the Kingston Arts Precinct and strategic planning for the East Lake Urban Renewal Area, including the Causeway Precinct, with a focus on achieving high-quality urban outcomes, improved public domain integration and sustainable neighbourhood structures. The Government Architect also contributed to SLA-led planning for local centres in Whitlam and Jacka through both direct consultation and National Capital Design Review Panel processes. Engagement extended to the Molonglo Town Centre proposal through workshops and coordinated review activities.

The ACT Government Architect provided design input to SLA demonstration housing initiatives including North Wright Sustainable Precinct and Jacka Micro Lots, supporting opportunities for innovation, improved residential amenity and more diverse housing options. Engagement with the SLA consistently emphasised social and environmental sustainability, recognition of First Nations cultural values and the importance of design quality in delivering successful and resilient communities.

## ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment

The ACT Government Architect met with the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Dr Maxine Cooper to discuss matters at the intersection of sustainability and the built environment.



## National Gallery of Australia

The ACT Government Architect engaged with the National Gallery of Australia through membership of the National Sculpture Garden Reference Group during the 2023 to 2025 period. This role involved providing design and planning advice on projects relating to the Sculpture Garden and its interface with the surrounding landscape, with a focus on ensuring high-quality public realm outcomes and enhancing the visitor experience. Engagement supported the Gallery's broader objectives to maintain and improve one of Canberra's significant cultural landscapes.



# Major proposals, planning and design initiatives

- Light Rail Stage 2
  - > The second stage of the ACT's Light Rail network, with engagement focused on ensuring high quality urban design and public domain outcomes.
- Demonstration Housing
  - > An ACT Government project that investigates the potential of innovative housing typologies within Canberra.
- Missing Middle Housing Reform
  - > A planning reform program aimed at enabling diverse, well designed housing types across Canberra. Engagement focused on supporting design quality, developing the Missing Middle Housing Design Guide and contributing to associated planning provisions.
- Canberra Hospital Expansion (formerly titled 'The Surgical Procedures, Interventional, Radiology and Emergency (SPIRE) Centre')
  - > A significant expansion and addition to the Canberra Hospital campus, including public domain works.
- Northside Hospital Project
  - > The planning and design for the new Northside Hospital will deliver modern facilities to meet Canberra's growing community health needs.
- Canberra Institute of Technology - Woden
  - > A significant new campus development and pivotal contribution to the Woden Town Centre.

## National Capital Design Review Panel

The National Capital Design Review Panel continued to operate throughout the 2023 to 2025 period under the provisions of the *Planning Act 2023*. The ACT Government Architect chaired all panel sessions and co-chaired with the National Capital Authority for proposals located on designated land. Most design review sessions were delivered virtually, with in-person sessions arranged for large city-shaping proposals. Additional government funding enabled the program to expand to as many as six design review sessions per month, significantly reducing the time required for proponents to access design review.

The ACT Government Architect met weekly with the NCDRP Secretariat within the City and Environment Directorate to coordinate the program, discuss operational matters and identify opportunities for continued improvement. This regular engagement also enabled close connection with other teams across the directorate, supporting alignment between strategic planning, policy development and the design review process.

The NCDRP delivered 45 design review sessions in the 2023 to 2024 financial year and 34 sessions in the 2024 to 2025 financial year. Panel advice continued to advocate for high quality design outcomes consistent with the *Design Principles for the ACT*, with an emphasis on sustainability, climate-responsive design, major infrastructure proposals and reinforcing national capital values where relevant. A formal procurement process to refresh panel membership was completed in 2024–25. The refreshed panel includes newly appointed members as well as returning members whose contributions remain highly valued, ensuring the NCDRP continues to provide contemporary, independent design advice for significant proposals across Canberra.



## FY2022-2023

In 2022–23 the NCDRP delivered 38 design review sessions and reviewed 35 projects. Of these projects, 31 were required to engage with the design review process prior to submitting a development application and four were self-referred.

Notable projects included the Woden CIT Campus, Light Rail Stage 2A, London Quarter and The Barracks II.

## FY2023-2024

In 2023–24 the NCDRP delivered 45 design review sessions and reviewed 34 projects. Of these projects, 28 were prescribed to engage with the design review process and five were self-referred.

Notable projects included the Kingston Arts Precinct, the Canberra Theatre Redevelopment, the Phillip Swimming Pool Redevelopment Stage 1, UNSW Canberra City Stage 1, the Canberra Casino redevelopment, the redevelopment of 60 London Circuit City and Dickson Green.

## FY2024-2025

In 2024–25 the NCDRP delivered 34 design review sessions and reviewed 26 projects. Of these projects, 24 were prescribed to engage with the design review process, one was self-referred and one was required under contractual deed conditions.

Notable projects included Coggans Village, the Phillip Pool Redevelopment Stage 2, the Jacka Local Centre, 496 Northbourne Avenue, 220 Northbourne Avenue and the Kippax Fair mixed-use redevelopment.

