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Copied to:
Chief Minister Andrew Barr
Minister Chris Steele MLA
Minister Marisa Patterson MLA
Minister Yvette Berry
Ms Fiona Carrick MLA
Mr Jeremy Hanson MLA
Mr Tom Emerson MLA, Independents for Canberra
Mr Shane Rattenbury MLA
Ms Laura Nuttall MLA

11 Jan 25

To whom it may concern,

**Objections regarding DA202443325
1, 3, 5 Irving St - Block 2 Section 22 - Woden**

The Friends of Manuka Pool (FoMP) appreciates the opportunity to comment on this DA which not only impacts the Woden Town Centre, but also the many Canberrans that use this much loved and needed outdoor 50m pool.

FoMP supports the Save the Phillip Pool group and Woden Community Council in their endeavours to keep the current 50m outdoor pool and broader complex in Irving St, Woden. That this pool was allowed to be poorly maintained and become rundown, such that it was unable to open a few years ago, is a sad reflection on the ACT government's management and oversight of community facilities and respect for Woden area residents and Canberra's aquatic pool users. In addition, the removal of the community use concession and privatisation of the land (on which the Phillip pool and ice-skating rink is situated) to Geocon, is another slap in the face to the Woden community where community land is continually being removed from a thriving town centre at a time where it is needed to support increased densification.

In Australia, 50m outdoor pools are culturally essential due to our deep-rooted relationship with swimming and its aquatic lifestyle. *We are a swimming nation.* Canberra is not on the coast and yet we have a very hot summer climate that warrants many outdoor pools for its residents to enjoy – sadly the numbers of pools are dropping, not increasing, with our growing Canberra population. Swimming pools serve as vital

community hubs for fitness, recreation, and social interaction; just like Manuka Pool did back in the 1930s to 1960s right through to the present day.

Australia has a long history of winning gold medals in competitive swimming, and 50m pools are necessary for training elite athletes and fostering the next generation of swimmers. Whilst training can be performed in indoor pools, the ready availability of outdoor pools offers a sense of freedom and connection to nature, enhancing Australian values of outdoor living and an active, water-based culture. There are also limited indoor 50 m training options in Canberra,

The ACT has the lowest pool to citizen ratio in Australia, and this is an appalling fact given that we are the nation's capital. <https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/Aquatic-Risk-and-Guidelines/aquatic-research/the-state-of-aquatic-facility-infrastructure> (page 9).

Apart from elite swimming, the numbers of swimmers are greater for individuals who swim for fitness, rehabilitation and pleasure. However, with less children learning to swim and with many people born outside of Australia having not been taught swimming as children, the drownings statistics are shocking as evidenced by the latest figures by the Royal Lifesaving Society <https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/research-and-policy/drowning-research/national-drowning-reports>. This summer alone there have already been 43 drownings across the country. Learning to swim and having access to facilities to do so is generally accepted as a right of passage for all Australians.

This summer season has witnessed a high number of preventable drownings in many types of bodies water, and it is a sad reflection on the ACT and Federal governments that more is not being done to increase swimming skills in Australia. How can this be done? Adequate aquatic facilities for not just swimming lessons but also many aquatic sports are needed, as well as more swim teachers and affordable lessons. With Phillip pool to become a shadow of its former self, a multi-purpose aquatic centre must be considered for the Woden area. Community health and welfare depends on it. Australians depend on such facilities and now, more than ever, since the disastrous drowning numbers. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-12-22/lifesavers-renew-water-safety-warnings-as-drownings-spike/104755642>

The original plan to have Geocon provide a 50m pool was interesting to some extent, but ACT residents are now aware that negotiations resulted in Geocon only having to deliver a 25m pool. Where was the community consultation in all of this, especially consultation with key stakeholders – pool users? A pool this size cannot possibly service the residents in the two (plus three later) proposed towers as well as locals and visitors.

Without a 50m pool, the proposed alternative is to drive to Stromlo aquatic centre or Civic (assuming a replacement facility is 50m). It is almost impossible to use public transport to access Stromlo from the Woden Valley especially noting the times that lap swimmers regularly train are early mornings (especially our more elite athletes) or later in the evening.

It is time that the ACT government proves their commitment to their electors by supporting communities on the southside and insist on social impact studies with genuine community input rather than token comments that they know what is best. This includes reviewing the proposal for the Phillip Pool.

From reading the DA documents, it seems Geocon has made some attempts to commit to the advice and suggestions by the National Capital Design Review Panel but has simply created a mediocre compromise. The latest design which was made public recently in the Canberra Times and RiotAct, has been met with backlash from local community groups, residents, other aquatic-facility using groups and even some local politicians. FoMP also opposes the current proposal noting the broader impact this has on the community.

Community input is essential in urban development because it ensures that projects reflect the needs, values, and aspirations of the people who will be most affected by them. Community consultation is regularly dismissed in the ACT despite its importance in creating a successful and liveable community and city, and this is why groups such as Friends of Manuka Pool and others must stand up and push for fairness, equity and transparency. Although Geocon now own the land as mentioned above, it does not mean that their urban development plan is a free-for-all without any need for a participatory approach involving all affected groups.

According to the Development Outcomes Report (December 2023):

1.2 Phillip Pool Redevelopment – the replacement of the Phillip Pools (50m and toddler) with what is proposed to service 5 primarily residential towers is inadequate enough, but to then expect this aquatic area to service the residents of Woden as well, is woefully underestimating the community needs. It seems that the eventual aim is only to provide a private pool area for the tower residents and not be for public usage. FoMP believes that the Woden area still needs an outdoor 50m pool and if this cannot be on the current site, then the ACT government needs to find another appropriate site in the area
FoMP supports Fiona Carrick MLA and her request for the ACT Government to:

- retain and upgrade the existing Phillip Swimming & Ice-Skating Centre until a new ice rink is built and a 50m pool and associated aquatic and green spaces are available in the Woden Town Centre; and
- commission an independent review and community consultation into the high-density development in the Woden Town Centre, to ensure it is environmentally and socially sustainable, and climate adaptive.

Thank you for your consideration of maintaining the current 50m pool at Phillip.

Regards,



Caroline Luke-Evered
President
Friends of Manuka Pool