

Neighbourhood Planning In Full Swing

The Department of Urban Services, through Planning & Land Management (PALM), has recently completed the first stages of its Neighbourhood Planning Program, with Plans being finalised for the inner northern suburbs of Braddon, Deakin, Lyneham, O'Connor and Turner.

Touted as an initiative that encourages input and cooperation on planning matters between the ACT Government and the people 'who live, work, play, learn and invest' in particular ACT suburbs, the Planning Program is a unique blend of broad community visions with hard planning principles. Each Plan is essentially a policy document setting out visions for the future of the relevant suburb/neighbourhood, and the various actions/initiatives that will be required to achieve those visions. The framework documents address planning, social, cultural, environmental and economic issues, and are developed out of an extensive community consultation and feedback process in the document drafting stages.

Following the completion of these latest Plans, PALM is now in the process of determining the relevant sections to be adopted as Guidelines under the Territory Plan, the Territory's principle planning document. Discussions with the Neighbourhood Planning Manager suggest that some elements of the Plans will also result in proposals for amendments to the Territory Plan itself.

Downer, Watson and Hackett have been announced as the next focus of the Neighbourhood Planning Program, with some consultation already under way. For developments and more information relating to Neighbourhood Planning, visit <http://www.palm.act.gov.au/>.

Changes to PALM's Enforcement Powers Proposed

As part of its expressed progress towards the establishment of an independent planning authority under PALM, the ACT Government introduced a number of proposed amendments to the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991* on 20 February 2003.

The *Land (Planning and Environment) (Compliance) Amendment Bill 2002* proposes to extend the range of powers that PALM can exercise in carrying out its planning functions. The scope of potential orders is very broad, including stop work orders, the full range of development control and demolition orders and specific measures to stop soil erosion or the removal of soil within 20m of the banks of a watercourse.

These orders can be issued by PALM following an application by any person, or on its own initiative. Orders can be issued to the lessee or occupier of a place where a controlled activity was, is being or is to be carried out, or anyone by whom or on whose behalf a controlled activity was, is being or is to be conducted.

Notice of a proposed order or an application for an order must be served on all relevant persons. Any objections need to be lodged with PALM within 7 days of receipt of such a notice. Following this time, PALM can decide whether or not to issue a final order. This period if approved, will be substantially shorter than that allowed for similar responses in other Australian states.

Other additions to PALM's powers are intended to include Prohibition Notices (to prevent or lessen the likelihood of irreversible damage to a thing due to a controlled activity), Directions to carry out Rectification Work (eg. to ensure compliance with controlled activity approvals), and the ability to seek injunctions to prevent contravention of notices or orders.

Minor amendments to simplify issues arising out of building encroachments in the Territory are also proposed. A copy of the Bill and indications as to its progress through parliament can be accessed at <http://www.legislation.act.gov.au>.

Bushfire Recovery Taskforce

A Taskforce has been established to help coordinate the process of recovery and rebuilding from the 18 January 2003 fires. It includes members of the community, unions, business, education and the Commonwealth authorities, and is intended to act as a focus for the various administrative arms of government and enterprise that will be involved in the recovery. The Taskforce is also providing general advice in relation to the planning and environmental aspects of the recovery process.

Details can be found at <http://www.bushfirerecovery.act.gov.au>.