

Tuesday 4 May 2021

Doug Millen
Community Engagement Officer
City Renewal Authority
GPO Box 158 Canberra City ACT 2601

Re: Woolley Street Dickson Streetscape Upgrade 2021

Dear Doug

Thank you for agreeing to meet on-site with Dickson Residents Group on Friday 30 April 2021 for a walk through and discussion about the Woolley Street upgrade proposed. Please convey our thanks to Richard Nash (Purdon Planning) and Hayden Rosser (AECOM) for their time and input.

We understand that the current upgrade is limited because restaurant owners are recovering from the loss of trade during COVID and do not want major disruption caused by a lengthy revitalisation. We regard that as a sensible approach, but would encourage the government to set aside further funding and take a two-stage approach, with a commitment to resuming the project within 18 months of completion, following an evaluation.

Key is to establish and coordinate clear communication, decision making and place management

We would like the report on community consultation to be explicit about the need for relevant ACT government agencies to collaborate on a unified approach to upgrading Woolley Street. We wish to avoid perpetuating the situation where important matters sometimes languish because decision making is diffused between agencies and specific items are not budgeted for and therefore fall through the cracks.

The concept designs for enlarging and landscaping the northern and southern entry points to Woolley Street, and the central plaza near Jimmy's Place, seem positive. The physically raised, shortened and emphasised pedestrian crossing at the northern end of Woolley Street near the junction with Badham Street is especially welcome. We support introducing many more large street trees (Platanus, consistent with the existing theme) and blossoming small trees for colour. Well designed sculpture that is playful is welcome.

Our priorities

- Remove physical clutter and junk, obstructions to ease of movement, trip hazards
- Address safety issues such as customers stepping out of premises into the path of a fast moving bike or scooter etc
- Improve and enhance the experience for visitors by providing high quality place making that takes advantage of the special and distinctive character and history of this restaurant and nightlife precinct, and gives expression to that

- Improve connectivity through to surrounding precincts via laneways, pedestrian crossings, potentially sub-surface underpasses and bridging over roads
- Ensure that local businesses are supported so they can function effectively, including deliveries, waste removal and parking nearby for their employees (who will finish late)
- Provide opportunities for other night life and entertainment such as an art house cinema, live music venues, late night bookshops, dancing
- Make this precinct safe and attractive both day and night – plant and maintain shade trees and greenery that softens, install comfortable seating and durable materials that encourage people to spend time and socialise, provide adequate bicycle parking that works well, consider aesthetics and noise, speed limits, cameras?

Additional improvements recommended:

1. One way treatment would have multiple benefits and is strongly supported by the community. Making Woolley Street one way would increase the space available for pedestrians, seating and al fresco dining, reduce congestion, and reduce use of the road as a rat run. If this is done, consideration needs to be given to cycle access in both directions on Woolley Street. One option would be for the single lane to have a cycle lane on each side of it. Widening the footpath on the northern side of Woolley Street is essential along the east-west section between Badham and Challis Streets to improve pedestrian/cycle flow between the main Dickson shops and the light rail/bus interchange, and further west to Lyneham. This is a key element of Woolley Street and 4m should be the mandatory minimum.
2. Better safer connections through to adjoining areas should be pursued vigorously. The Badham Street crossings are both compromised and require attention. The McDonalds northern carpark would be an excellent site for a pocket park.
3. Clean safe 24 hour public toilet facilities are needed and out sourcing that to private operators doesn't work well and is inequitable to vulnerable groups. If the ACT government is unwilling to provide toilets in the area (because of maintenance/cleaning or perceptions of safety), then the ones at the bus stop in Cowper Street could be closed and new ones provided in a central location that also serves passengers for the bus interchange.
4. Opening discussions with private landlords to negotiate better access outcomes could include floor space bonuses or rate relief to incentivise positive talks. Access from the carpark at the rear of Block 2 Section 32 (Jimmy's Place and neighbouring tenants) needs to be improved and made secure long term so that a through route remains viable. A covered arcade could work here.
5. Emphasis on the arts should be on an ongoing basis. Working with a group of artists to achieve unusual and exciting effects can be done and most of the murals to date nearby have been outstanding. As the area's character becomes more pronounced, these interventions may be more subtle.
6. Lanterns would be a welcome addition, and a lantern theme for lighting would be popular.

Questions

Regarding the matter of licences to private premises that occupy public space –

- how is this currently managed;
- can licences be revoked for failing to provide adequate amenity or safety or encroaching onto pedestrian footpaths and cycle routes;
- is there a limit to how large a footprint they can occupy;
- are there clear guidelines on materials that can be used;
- is there a maximum number of private licences or percentage of an open area that can be issued and how will that be policed?

Concerns and risks to be considered and managed

- a) Timing – both the Coles redevelopment Block 21 Section 30 and changes to the McDonalds northern carpark will mean that Badham Street is a mess for 2-3 years minimum.
- b) Redevelopment proposals for blocks of land fronting or backing on to Woolley Street – any major redevelopment will impact and will need to be integrated sensitively. Dickson Precinct Code does not offer useful guidance in terms of design or integration and Dickson Master Plan lacks statutory weight.
- c) Safety – the recent incident where a group of students harassed a local shop owner and filmed it points to an anti-Asian racist element.
- d) Parking – the private Wilsons multi-storey carpark between Challis and Woolley is extremely unsafe, and when the Coles site is hoarded off there will be a noticeable shortage that impacts on businesses in Woolley Street.
- e) Allowing the public domain to be dominated by private entities – cluttering the central plaza with semi-enclosed private licences spilling out into what should rightly be dedicated public pedestrian routes must be controlled carefully. The new Dickson Taphouse has effectively taken over the entire footpath area so when people cross Woolley at the elbow, they feel themselves to be entering a pub.

We particularly recommend taking the initiative to resolve the issue of private leases that control access to what are understood to be public footpaths and public plazas, ie from the north (the Antill service road that links through private property past Jimmy's Place) and from Challis Street to the west. By default these operate to feed people into and through the area, but the risk of their closure, the very poor standard of the laneway to the north and the many trip hazards in the paving of the open plaza undermine what the Woolley Street project is setting out to achieve.

We look forward to hearing back about this project, and watching it unfold.

Kind regards

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