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Contribution for UP&R Practice Review

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Walter Burley Griffin is Dead. Long Live Walter Burley Griffin's Planning Ideals!

*"I have planned a city that is not like any other in the world.
I have planned it not in a way that I expected any government authorities in the world would
accept.
I have planned an ideal city - a city that meets my ideal of the city of the future."
Walter Burley Griffin, 1912*

ABSTRACT

In 2010 the ACT Government commenced a major public consultation exercise called 'Time to Talk – Canberra 2030' on Canberra's long term future as part of developing a new strategy plan for Canberra. In this context, the then ACT Planning Minister, Andrew Barr MLA, published a short article on his personal website proclaiming that Walter Burley Griffin is dead. According to Barr, Griffin has not had any involvement in the planning and development of Canberra since 1920 and that his plans for the city were never really implemented. Barr stated Griffin's ideals should not be 're-interpreted' and we 'should not be casting back a century for answers to Canberra's contemporary challenges' because 'Griffin could never have foreseen the changes in lifestyles that technology has delivered and that climate change will require'. Barr bemoaned the fact that Griffin's legacy continues to dominate debate about the future of Canberra and that Griffin is still held in high regard in Canberra planning circles. Barr argued therefore, that it was time to move beyond Griffin's planning legacy. Despite the fact that no planner can ever clearly foresee the changes the future brings, there are several good reasons why Griffin's planning ideals continue to pervade Canberra's planning. This article explores two of Griffin's planning ideals for Canberra and how they have endured in the development of two of Canberra's strategic plans. The paper argues that these planning ideals still have currency today and will continue to have currency well into the future.

KEY WORDS: Canberra, Walter Burley Griffin, Peter Harrison, National Capital Development Commission

Introduction

In November 2010, Andrew Barr, Member of the ACT Legislative Assembly and Minister for Planning in the ACT at that time, stated in a blog on his personal website that Walter Burley Griffin is dead, that there have been more than enough attempts to reinvent Griffin's legacy and that it is "time to move beyond this tired old debate" (Barr 2010). Barr asserted that because Griffin has not had anything to do with Canberra's planning and development since 1920, that Griffin's ideals for a city of the future should not be re-interpreted and that we should not be casting back a century for answers to Canberra's contemporary challenges. Barr also asserted that Griffin "could never have foreseen the changes in lifestyles that technology has delivered and that climate change will require" arguing that "our second century as a city must be about responding to our emerging needs and taking new opportunities as they present themselves" (Barr 2010).

Mr Barr's comments have woken me from my slumber. I have not commented on local planning matters in Canberra for over a decade after some considerable local exposure in the Canberra Times and on ABC Radio from the mid 1970s to the late 1990s campaigning for better administration of our unique leasehold land tenure system and the proper enforcement of lease conditions with respect to land use and development. Mr Barr's comments should not be

left unchallenged because they are disrespectful, not only of Griffin's contributions to planning generally, but also of the contributions made by those that followed Griffin including the late Peter Harrison and the late John Gilchrist. I knew both of these men personally and professionally.

Peter Harrison was the first Chief Planner at the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) from 1957 to 1972. I joined the NCDC in 1973 and quickly learnt that Peter Harrison was a hallowed name around the corridors. He was a friend, critic, adviser and mentor to many (Wensing 1993). I got to know Peter very well because we shared many long, late night telephone conversations practically every night of the week for almost a decade before his death in 1990. John Gilchrist served as the Director of Metropolitan Planning for a number of years from the late 1970s to the mid 1980s, and in that role was responsible for reviewing the *Y Plan* that Peter had developed in the late 1960s. John was one of my supervisors and a mentor during my time in the Planning Division from 1979 to 1985 and we kept in regular contact until his death in 1998. Indeed, apart from their respective wives, I was the last person to have long conversations with each of them before their untimely deaths.

Griffin died shortly after he fell from scaffolding on a building site in Lucknow in India on 11 February 1937, but his planning ideals for Canberra live on and still have currency today and will have into the future. This paper demonstrates why. It begins by exploring the nature of Griffin's visionary planning ideals of fitting a city into the landscape and dispersing the centres of activity around the city rather than concentrating them all in one central business district. This paper briefly discusses these two ideals that Harrison embedded into the *Y Plan* some sixty years after Griffin's winning design and that Gilchrist affirmed in his review of the *Y Plan* two decades later. The paper concludes with some pertinent observations about planning for Canberra's future.

Griffin's Enduring Planning Ideals

Countless books and journal articles have been written about Griffin and his work on Canberra (for example Birrell 1964, Harrison 1995, Overall 1995, Reps 1997, Reid 2002, Pegrum 2008, McGregor 2009), and indeed Griffin himself wrote extensively about his plan for Canberra (Griffin 2008). Many people are generally not aware of how much material is available and many also fail to appreciate the value of Griffin's work. Pegrum describes Griffin's plan as "nobly conceived" (2008:112). Harrison (1995:29) describes the Griffins' drawings for Canberra as a "tour de force in presentation" and believes they show with remarkable clarity Griffin's understanding of the topography of the site and his ideas for the future city. More importantly, Harrison (1995:30) noted that "it is the conscious use of space as a design element which has given Canberra a most distinctive character, unlike, as Griffin said, any other city in the world". In the Preface to his book documenting what happened to Canberra following Griffin, Reid (2002: ix) believes that anyone who invokes Griffin's name in proposing changes to Canberra should do so "in knowledge and not in ignorance".

When Griffin submitted his design for the national capital it was accompanied by an explanatory report which was reproduced as Appendix B in the 1955 Senate Select Committee's Report on the Development of Canberra (1955:93-102) and in Dustin Griffin's collection of Walter Burley Griffin's writings (Griffin 2008:2-20). There are many planning ideals in Griffin's 'Report Explanatory' that permeate his winning design for Canberra. These ideals include for example, respect for the topography of the site describing the central area as a natural amphitheatre, the grouping of federal government activities in a linear axis (the land axis), the need for space for recreation and public gardens, a place for the 'military group'

where the commanders of the country's defence forces would have their offices, an 'education group' for higher education, and a place for the 'municipal group' away from the federal government group, the need for good transport and communication links between the various 'groups' or activity nodes. These ideas made sound building blocks for a modern city.

I will focus on two of Griffin's planning ideals that have endured. They were applied by Peter Harrison and his team in developing the *Y Plan* in the late 1960s (NCDC 1970) and were reaffirmed by John Gilchrist and his team when the NCDC reviewed the *Y Plan* in the early 1980s (NCDC 1984). They are often misunderstood.

Setting the city into the landscape

The first planning ideal in Griffin's Plan is that of setting the city into the landscape. In creating his design, Griffin studied the topographic maps prepared by Charles Scrivener that had been issued to each of the competitors. This is demonstrated by Griffin's description of the site selected for Canberra. In his Report Explanatory, Griffin describes the five distinctive topographical features of the site:

- the mountain ranges and distinct snow-capped peaks to the south and south-west as scenic background;
- the three local mountains (Ainslie, Black Mountain and Mugga Mugga) too lofty and exposed for building purposes;
- the lesser hills and spurs (Kurrajong, Camp Hill, Vernon, Russell, Shale and others) which Griffin utilised as termini of radial thoroughfares and as sites for the most important structures;
- the waterway (Molonglo River) and floor basin for architectural effect, recreation and the climate's amelioration; and
- the flat valleys for the general purpose of industry and habitation (Griffin 2008:48-49).

In 1914, in discussing his plan before interested audiences, Griffin describes the site as follows: "Taken as a whole, the site may be considered as an irregular amphitheatre:

- with Ainslie at the northeast in the rear, flanked either side by Black Mountain and Pleasant Hill, all forming the top galleries;
- with the slopes to the water, the auditorium;
- with the waterway and flood basin, the terraced stage and setting of monumental government structures sharply defines, rising tier on tier to the culminating highest internal forested hill of the Capitol; and
- with Mugga Mugga, Red Hill, and the blue distant mountain ranges, sun reflecting, forming the back scene of the theatrical whole." (Griffin 2008:88).

According to Harrison "Griffin's design was presented in a most impressive set of drawings" and "as well as being a tour de force in presentation, the drawings show with remarkable clarity the designer's understanding of the topography of the site and his ideals for the future city" (Harrison 1995:29). **Figure 1** is Griffin's primary drawing 'City and Environs', rendered in sepia tones in tontine fabric and mounted on stretchers. In addition to this drawing, sections and elevations through the central areas were drawn in four parts. When joined, these drawings along the main axes of the plan measure approximately 6.1 metres (or 20 feet) in length, and the central area is illustrated by a perspective about 2.4 metres (8 feet) wide (Harrison 1995:29). I have had the privilege of seeing these drawings first hand on two separate occasions.

Griffin used the topography as the setting for the city by carefully placing the various functions of the city into the landscape (Griffin 2008:89). As Harrison (1957) explained, Griffin “designed a grand formal landscape using avenues, water features, and the hills and mountains, taking advantage of every natural feature that the splendid site had to offer” (p.236). In his Master’s Thesis on Walter Burley Griffin, Harrison (1995) goes on to note that “[t]he distinctive characteristics of Griffin’s conception derive from his unerring grasp of the topography, a complete feeling for the landforms...” (Harrison 1995:92), and notes that “It is the conscious use of space as a design element which has given Canberra a most distinctive character unlike, as Griffin said, any other city in the world” (Harrison 1995:30).

In contrast, many of Australia’s state capital cities simply outgrew their original shell and “even in the chaos of suburban development, the rectangular grid of streets was adopted with ... ‘monotonous fidelity’” (Freestone 1989:41), often ignoring the topography and the natural landscape. In recent decades, there is much greater emphasis on the interactions between the natural and built environments (Williams and Smart 2012:127) and on sustainable development “that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland 1987). In some respects therefore, Griffin’s ideals about designing the city to fit into the natural landscape were well in advance of his time.

Dispersed employment centres

The second planning ideal in Griffin’s Plan is the dispersal of employment centres. In his Report Explanatory, Griffin explains the various functions of the city and their spatial arrangement around the city based on a land axis and a water axis. In the Primary Division of functions, Griffin located the government functions and recreation. In the Secondary Division, Griffin located the university, the military, the municipal administration and markets, industry, and the residential sections. Griffin also expounded the need for efficient internal circulation in the city suggesting wide boulevards for the major connecting avenues between the various centres of activity, including public transport. In the view from the summit of Mount Ainslie prepared by Marion Mahony Griffin as part of the competition drawings, the sketches clearly show three to four storey housing in the residential areas on either side of what is now called Anzac Parade and elsewhere in the city.

As Harrison (1995) notes, Griffin’s “principle of dispersal of employment centres rather than the adoption of a conventional central business district in his plan and the generous provision of circulation made it possible for Canberra to grow beyond 100,000 population...” (p93). Harrison was undoubtedly the intellectual force behind the *Y Plan* (a description he deplored) as the metropolitan strategy for the growth of Canberra, the principle of which was to locate employment, residences and services in close proximity to avoid suburban isolation, long journeys to work and central city congestion. Harrison used to say that “Canberra is the first and last capital we are going to build, so let us make it first class” (Harrison cited in Wensing 1993:3). Harrison’s goal in developing the *Y Plan* was to give a hierarchical form to the structure of the city (NCDC 1970:173), not too dissimilar to the multi-centred metropolitan strategic plans currently in existence for many of the State capitals around Australia.

Figure 1. Griffin's plan – 1912



Source: Collection: National Capital Authority Library & Information Service

While Canberra as a city is much smaller in comparison to the other capital cities in Australia, the most recent metropolitan strategies for Sydney, Melbourne, SE Queensland and Perth all contain strategic directions and policies aimed at dispersing employment and creating multi-centred cities¹. For example, one of the strategic directions and key policy settings in the current Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036 is to make Sydney a more resilient, compact, connected, multi-centred and networked city (NSW Planning and Infrastructure, no date). The ‘city of cities’ strategy within the Metropolitan Strategy supports the development of the three regional cities and many ‘major centres’ to extend economic activity, improve access to employment and relieve congestion associated with a single-centred city. The major centres are the building blocks of the public transport network and will be the focus of population growth, concentrating major shopping destinations, local jobs and services near homes within subregional catchments (NSW Planning and Infrastructure, no date; NSW Department of Planning 2005).

Griffin’s enduring planning ideals beyond the Griffin Plan

Long before his appointment as the National Capital Development Commission’s (NCDC) first Chief Planner, Harrison had developed a personal and professional interest in Walter Burley Griffin and had become a specialist on Griffin’s winning design for Canberra. As an advocate of Griffin’s design, Harrison supported Griffin’s planning ideals in giving evidence to the Senate Select Committee of Inquiry into the Development of Canberra in 1954-55 as a representative of the Royal Australian Planning Institute (Reid 2002:355 and Freestone in Harrison 1995:ix). In the Planning Institute’s submission to the Senate Select Committee, which is reproduced as Appendix J in the Senate Select Committee’s 1955 Report, Harrison stated that Griffin’s ideas for the capital were “derived from a close study of the site formation and a deep sympathy with the national and aesthetic aspirations of the founders of the Commonwealth” (Senate Select Committee 1955:117). Harrison noted that while Griffin’s term as Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction from 1913 to 1920 had “resulted in many modifications to the domestic areas of the Plan”, the national features of the Plan were confirmed and that “nearly half a century of planning experience since can add nothing to its quality” (Senate Select Committee 1955:117). Harrison argued, as he did for the rest of his life, for the importance of adhering to Griffin’s planning ideals (Wensing 1993, Norman 1993). Indeed, the Senate Select Committee concluded that “The more one studies Griffin’s plan and his explanatory statements, the more obvious it is that departures from his main principles should not be lightly countenanced” (Senate Select Committee 1955:57-58).

The design competition conditions in 1911 envisaged a population of 25,000 people for Canberra, and by the mid 1960s Canberra had reached 130,000 people. Shortly after joining the NCDC in 1957, Harrison discovered that the NCDC’s plans did not go beyond the perimeters of old Canberra. One of his earliest fights, which he described as ‘soul searching’, was to get the NCDC to plan for growth to a population of at least 250,000 people or half a million people, and then a million people (Wright 1990). “I didn’t care when it reached that target, the point was to see that when it did grow you knew what you were doing, that planning was well ahead of growth” (Harrison cited in Wensing 1993:2). “The immediate challenge was to devise a structure in which the city could go on growing efficiently and indefinitely” (NCDC 1970:xviii).

¹ See also Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development 2008, Queensland Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning 2009, and the Western Australian Planning Commission 2010.

Harrison pointed out the choices for expanding Canberra lay between: “the intensification of densities at existing population centres with the extension of the urban fringe areas in the traditional growth pattern of Australian cities, or preserving the open character of the City by limiting the existing population area and forming new residential areas or residential districts on the surrounding rural areas” (Gilchrist 1985 cited in Norman 1993:4). According to Harrison, only the latter course was capable of preserving the integrity of the Griffin Plan, with the topography the dominant element in the city structure (Gilchrist 1985, Wensing 1993, Norman 1993).

As part of the research for developing a strategy plan for Canberra, the NCDC commissioned Alan M Vorhees and Associates in 1966, a firm of land use and transport consultants, to examine a range of development and transport options. The Vorhees study evaluated six options consisting of different arrangements of towns each with a population of 50,000 to 150,000 people. The conclusions of the study provided the basis for the development of a linear pattern to achieve a more efficient transport system. The strategic plan published in *Tomorrow's Canberra* in 1970 became known as the *Y Plan* because of its shape (**Figure 2**).

In developing the *Y Plan*, the NCDC (1970:169) set a number of planning goals, including:

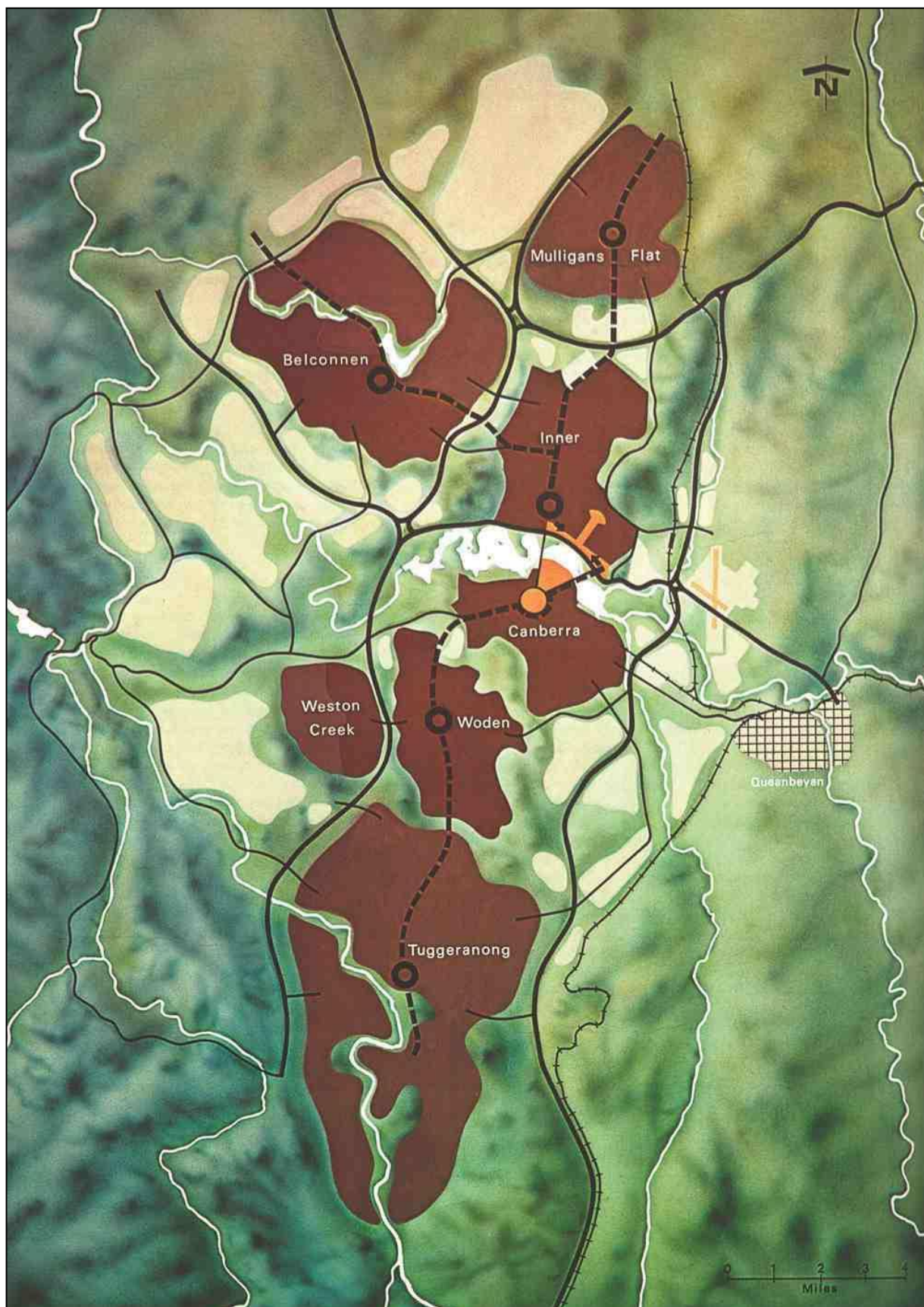
- The quality of the city as the national capital should remain paramount;
- The stability of land use and land tenure should not be impaired;
- Future needs should be satisfied functionally, economically, socially and aesthetically;
- The range of opportunity for choice should be widened;
- Growth and change should be facilitated without loss in environmental qualities and cost effectiveness;
- The structure of the city should be capable of accommodating growth and change without losing its enduring qualities.

The NCDC concluded that the traditional comprehensive master plan would be too rigid and instead opted for a planning strategy (NCDC 1970:169). In the course of developing the planning strategy, a number of different forms of urban structure were explored including centralised, linear and dispersed development forms. The urban structure selected from this exercise was the linear structure depicted in the *Y Plan* in Figure 2 which sought to relate Canberra's projected growth pattern to the surrounding topography (NCDC 1970:225).

| The *Y Plan* embodies several important planning principles, including:

- Major national uses would be located in the Central National Area;
- The new transport system would channel private vehicles to parkways on the periphery of urban districts and concentrate public transport travel between the districts onto a central spine linking the town centres;
- The hills and ridges within Canberra would be retained in their natural state to act as a backdrop and setting for the City and also as a means of separating and defining the towns (this was later to become known as the National Capital Open Space System); and
- The National Capital would be one in which environmental standards would be high. (NCDC 1970).

Figure 2. Strategy Plan for Metropolitan Growth 1969 – The Y Plan



Source: Collection: National Capital Authority Library & Information Service. See also NCDC 1970:226.

In many respects, these principles embody many of Griffin's planning ideals, especially those relating to fitting the city into the existing landscape and providing a number of dispersed employment and retail centres. The NCDC's research showed that the *Y Plan* would be as valid as any alternative urban structure until the population reached 400,000 to 450,000 people and had certain distinct advantages over other urban forms, especially on environmental grounds (Joint Committee on the ACT 1987:26).

By the late 1970's several community and business groups in Canberra were increasingly raising questions about the continued viability of the *Y Plan*. The most often expressed view was that for a city of 250,000 people, the distances are much greater than for comparable cities elsewhere, that the densities are too low and should be increased, and that there should be a single, large commercial centre.

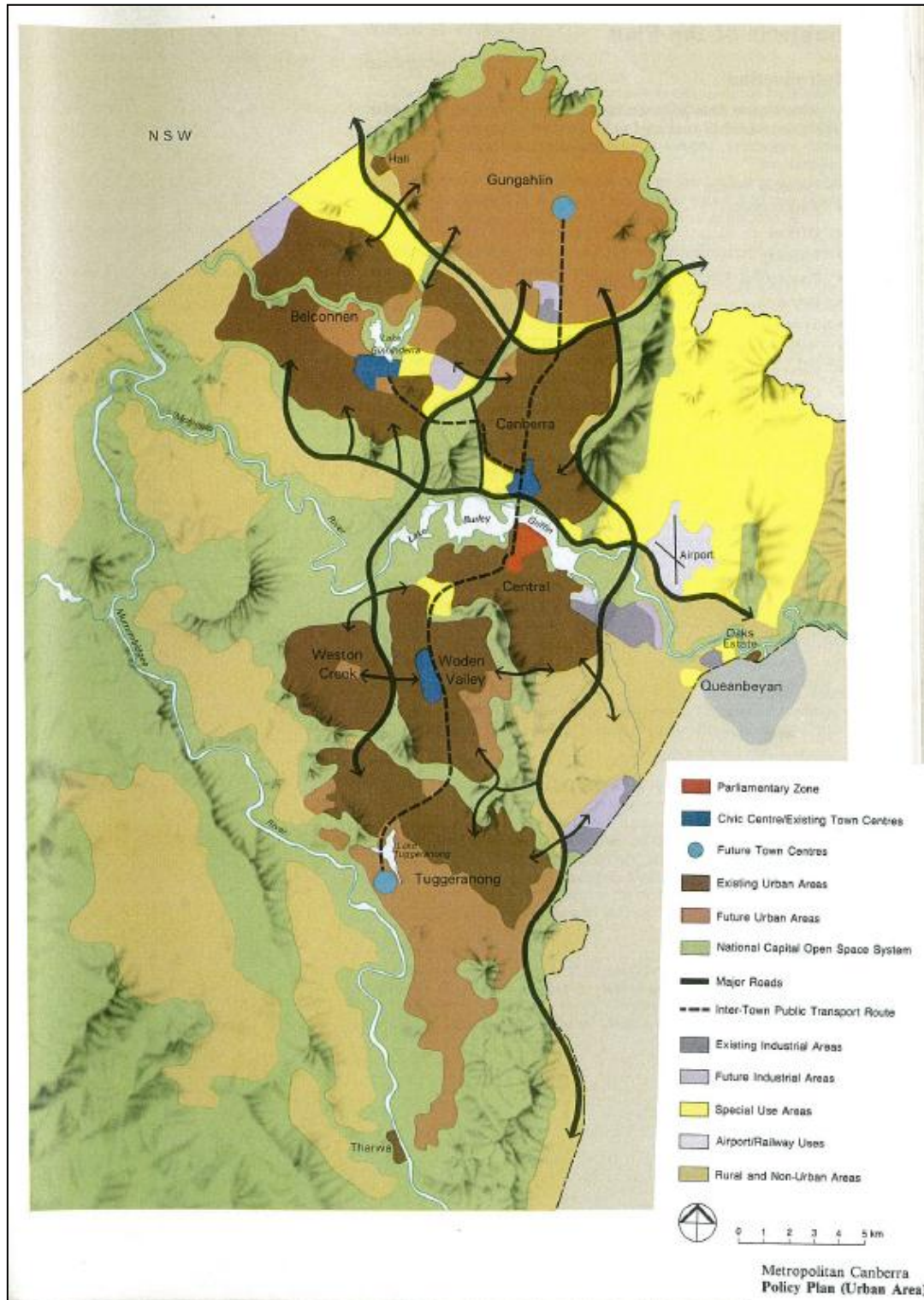
In 1980 the NCDC commenced a review of the *Y Plan* and published a Discussion Paper (NCDC 1980) canvassing options for Canberra's future urban structure. The Discussion Paper canvassed two options: a concentrated plan and a dispersed plan. In the concentrated option, a significant level of employment and retail floor space would be concentrated in the central area and in the then established town centres of Woden and Belconnen. In the dispersed option, employment and retail opportunities would be dispersed in all the town centres of Tuggeranong, Woden, Civic, Belconnen and Gungahlin as envisaged in the 1970 *Y-Plan*.

The final Metropolitan Canberra Policy Plan/Development Plan published in 1984 (**Figure 3**) selected the dispersed option on the grounds that it was the more efficient option in terms of transport and equality of access to opportunities across the metropolitan area. The choice of the dispersed option also confirmed the basic structure of the *Y Plan* as a valid basis for continuing to guide Canberra's metropolitan growth up to the year 2000 and to a population of roughly 400,000 people (NCDC 1984:iv).

Similar to the 1970 *Y Plan*, the 1984 Metropolitan Canberra Policy Plan is premised on several important principles of urban structure, the four most significant of which relevant to this discussion include:

- The metropolitan growth of Canberra is based on the development of separate urban districts or towns, in a linear arrangement in the form of a 'Y'. Each town is intended to be relatively self-contained and provide for the needs of its residents, including employment, retail, community facilities, leisure and recreation. Each town is separated from adjacent towns by hills, ridges and major open spaces.
- The hierarchy of centres is maintained, with each town having a centre acting as a focal point for higher order retail functions, commercial services, offices and community facilities, with Civic as the highest order centre accommodating the majority of specialised functions and continuing to develop as the CBD and as Canberra's administrative centre.
- Large volume vehicular traffic is carried on peripheral parkway system, reducing the amount of traffic on the internal road systems of the towns. A public transport right-of-way will be developed linking the town centres on an internal spine.
- The hills and ridges within and around the urban areas of Canberra will be kept largely free of urban development both to act as a backdrop and setting for the City and also provide a means of separating and defining the towns (NCDC 1984:176).

Figure 3. The Metropolitan Canberra Policy Plan (Urban Area) – 1984



Source: Collection: National Capital Authority Library & Information Service. See also NCDC 1984:177.

One of the significant elements of urban structure embodied in the 1984 Metropolitan Policy Plan is the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS). The Plan identifies several areas of open space to be of national capital or regional significance and designated them as part of the NCOSS, to be kept free of urban development (NCDC 1984:173 and 194). While each part of the NCOSS has its own use and character, they are all interrelated as a total landscape open

space system, and the NCDC believed that NCOSS should be planned, developed and managed as an integrated system (NCDC 1984:194), with preferred uses being confined to those associated with recreation, conservation and open space (NCDC 1984:173).

As a former Chief Architect of the NCDC once noted, “Fitting the city sensitively into the landscape was something the NCDC believed it had inherited from Griffin” (Reid 2002:254). In creating NCOSS a very conscious decision was made to embed the principle of fitting the city into the landscape into Canberra’s metropolitan plan. The NCOSS confines urban development to the valleys, not only to preserve the hills as part of the setting for the National Capital, but also to play a functional role in determining the urban form and structure of the city as well as providing a place for recreation and conservation activities (Wensing 1992:48).

Both Harrison and Gilchrist had a sound understanding of the principles that Griffin applied to his winning design for the National Capital and the 1970 and 1984 metropolitan plans they developed both sought to continue the application of those important principles, albeit at a much larger metropolitan scale than that originally envisaged by Griffin.

Conclusions

Mr Barr raises many valid concerns about Canberra’s future. Barr’s vision for Canberra is that by 2030 the city should be “a progressive, inclusive and vibrant city with something to offer singles, couples and families. A city that offers services, entertainment, hospitality and amenities for a growing local and regional community. A place where people from many different backgrounds can live, work and play.” I agree with Barr when he states that Canberra needs to respond to emerging needs and take advantages of opportunities as they arise (Barr 2010)². Adhering and continuing to apply the principles of the Griffin Plan does not and will not impede the attainment of Barr’s vision.

The Griffin design and the character it imparts is what makes Canberra, by any standard, an exceptional city. Griffin’s brilliant design for the city has given the nation a capital city that is in harmony with its environs and environment. It would be foolish if Canberrans (and in fact Australians generally) didn’t protect that gift and build on it in a respectful and compatible way. As Professor John Reps (1997:267) states “It deserves protection from all but the most sensitive and carefully considered changes as one of the treasures not only of Australia, but of the entire urban world”. Canberra “is all exceedingly grand, dignified, elegant, yet reposeful; it will soon rank with Washington as one of the world’s great monumental capitals, an eloquent testimony to the wisdom of making haste slowly” (Hall 1988:196).

In developing an urban form for Canberra beyond the Griffin Plan, both Harrison and Gilchrist respected Griffin’s planning ideals of fitting the city into the landscape and dispersing employment and activity centres to create efficient movement and communication between them. Canberra is a long, thin city – a linear city. An urban form based on a linear structure containing a series of towns radiating from central Canberra is a very efficient urban form. With employment centres located along a central public transport spine, the travel demand is more evenly distributed rather than concentrated in one or other direction at either end of a normal working day.

² Since Andrew Barr made his comments in 2010, the ACT Government has released a new Planning Strategy for the ACT (ACT Government Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate 2012) but space limitations preclude an analysis of that Plan here.

Imagine for a moment, a Canberra with one dominant central business district (CBD) with most of the employment and retail opportunities located in one centre, Civic. A Canberra with a dominant CBD in Civic would have resulted in a much more congested and polluted city and developing a decent public transport system would be even more difficult and inefficient because all the travel demand would be in one direction during the morning peak and in the opposite direction during the evening peak.

Many of Canberra's current planning dilemmas stem from significant unplanned departures from the linear plan. For example, the expansion of office development in Barton³ through cheap land give-aways to national associations in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the massive explosion of office and retail developments at the Canberra Airport over the last decade have had a negative impact on the ability of Tuggeranong and Gungahlin Town Centres to act as employment centres. Canberra's planning dilemmas also arise from not developing a stronger central public transport spine linking the major centres. These developments are significant departures from the urban form laid down in the 1970 *Y Plan* and affirmed the 1984 Metropolitan Policy Plan.

Other dilemmas arise from the oft unstated issue that the ACT government needs growth to occur within its boundaries so that it reaps enough land sales revenue to stay afloat and, like all state/territory governments, is strapped for cash for essential infrastructure investments (Sansom 2009). These seem to be the real drivers of 'planning' policy.

Significant infrastructure investments in implementing the dispersed urban form for Canberra have been made and it needs to be understood that making departures from that urban form come at a significant cost both publicly and privately, as is evidenced by the implications of over development at the Canberra Airport. The 'edge city' that has developed at the airport has to be accommodated and the time is coming to make a significant investment in the public transport spine between the major centres. With the Airport and Queanbeyan to the east, investment in a fast and efficient east-west link, as well as a north-south link, will also be necessary.

The challenge for Canberra is twofold:

- to come up with a new conceptual framework ('big ideal') that retains and reinforces the idea of the city in a landscape given all that's happened, and
- to articulate in some detail a workable urban structure.

This requires a rigorous analysis of the choices and their longer term implications. The comments of Sir John Overall, the first Commissioner of the National Capital Development Commission from 1957 to 1972, in the preface to *Tomorrow's Canberra* are worth echoing. "Good city plans emerge from dialogue between planners and people, and the quality of the plan is largely determined by the quality of that dialogue. In order to contribute effectively to the planning of their city, people must understand the basic data on which planning is based; they must be aware of the options available; and they must have the planning choices stated clearly and objectively" (NCDC 1970:v).

Canberra's urban form of dispersed town centres in a linear arrangement with open space buffers between them offers the best possible option for the longer term sustainable development of this city. In order to achieve those outcomes it will be necessary to continue investing in and around all of our existing town centres and that does mean increasing densities

³ Barton is one of the suburbs in inner south Canberra adjacent to the Parliamentary Triangle.)

and encouraging mixed land use developments in those locations, perhaps with an emphasis on Civic to begin with and then balancing the demand by focussing on the other centres over time. The 1970 and 1984 Plans made provision for a more robust central public transport spine as an attractive alternative to the private motor vehicle and its development is long overdue. Recent commitments by the ACT Government to develop Canberra's first large-scale private sector partnership to plan, finance and develop the first stage of a Light Rail Network for Canberra – the Capital Metro – is a very welcome development (Gallagher 2012). Let's hope they turn into reality sooner rather than later.

Acknowledgements

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