

Mr Chris Steel MLA
Treasurer
Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate
GPO Box 158
Canberra ACT 2601

Via email: steel@act.gov.au, budgetconsultation@act.gov.au

Dear Minister Steel

Belconnen Community Council Submission to the 2025-26 ACT Budget Consultation

The Belconnen Community Council (BCC) thanks you for the opportunity to contribute to the ACT Government's upcoming 2025-26 Budget.

Since 1991, the BCC has advocated consistently for the wellbeing and economic advancement of everyone who lives, studies, works, and holds commercial or property interests in the Belconnen district. We gratefully acknowledge the ACT Government's longstanding funding and support, which enables our ongoing community work.

As the ACT's largest district—home to about one-quarter of Canberra's population—Belconnen faces both emerging and persistent challenges across multiple domains of the ACT Wellbeing Framework. These challenges demand immediate government action.

The facts speak clearly: Belconnen will grow by 70,000 residents by 2060, while our existing infrastructure and services already show signs of strain. Without forward-looking funding in this budget that matches our district's size and maturity, we risk poorly coordinated development, diminishing economic complexity, transport problems leading to gridlock, and compromised community wellbeing.

Drawing on our multifaceted community engagement, our submission makes targeted recommendations for the 2025-26 ACT Budget. These link directly to wellbeing indicators and reflect the frequency, strength, and breadth of community concerns that we have heard.

While we understand the territory budget faces significant fiscal pressures, smart investment in Belconnen today represents responsible management that will prevent failures and far costlier interventions tomorrow. Therefore, we present key strategic recommendations, in particular, not as "nice-to-have" ideas but as essential measures to prevent serious decline in our district.

We appreciate your consideration and welcome further discussion about this submission. To engage with BCC, please contact us on 0438 458 220 or via email to chair@belconnen.org.au.

Yours sincerely



Lachlan Butler
Chair
Belconnen Community Council

Summary of Recommendations

Table 1: Top 3 Strategic Priorities

#	Recommendation
1	Establish a Belconnen Renewal Authority or enact a Belconnen Renewal Taskforce to drive coordinated action across ACT Government directorates.
2	Improve transport connections through fully funding the Belconnen Bus Transitway to complete the project by 2028 and accelerate preliminary planning for the Belconnen-City light rail connection.
3	Urban greening and environmental conservation uplift

Table 2: Supporting Recommendations

#	Recommendation
4	Deliver more active travel and recreation infrastructure for Belconnen , particularly West and North Belconnen.
5	Bus stop and service improvements
6	Implement a Community Safety Pilot that measures impact of funding lighting upgrades and CCTV monitoring of the town and group centres, and seeks to identify, deliver and test implementation of Apply Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles.
7	Belconnen business centre support program – focusing on stimulating investment and redevelopment and growth of Belconnen town centre commercial precinct West of Belconnen Mall.
8	Equitable ACT Government employment in the district – office space and staff commensurate with size of the district.
9	Expand funding for local shopping centre improvements program with a focus on small, aging shopping centres.
10	Deliver Education Infrastructure to Belconnen - Identify, secure, and commence planning of a school site in the Belconnen Town Centre to serve the growing number of families in high-density residential developments.
11	Protect and expand community and recreational space including at Margaret Timpson Park

Economic Impact and Return on Investment

The BCC acknowledges the fiscal constraints facing the ACT Government and the need to demonstrate value for money in budget allocations. We contend that the recommendations in this submission represent sound investments that will deliver significant economic, social, and environmental returns.

Key economic impacts include:

- **Enhanced Productivity:** Improved transport infrastructure and local employment opportunities will reduce commuting times and associated productivity losses.
- **Local Economic Development:** Investments in business support, local centres, and government employment will stimulate economic activity within Belconnen, enhancing the district's contribution to the Territory economy.
- **Preventative Investment:** Many recommendations represent preventative investments that will avoid more costly interventions in the future. For example, addressing infrastructure maintenance now prevents more expensive rebuilds later.
- **Multiplier Effects:** Public investments will leverage private sector contributions and generate multiplier effects through enhanced business confidence and investment.

Furthermore, the recommendations in this submission align strongly with existing ACT Government priorities and strategies.

Key Strategic Recommendations

1. Establish a Belconnen Renewal Authority or Taskforce

Recommendation: Create and fund a dedicated Belconnen Renewal Authority or Taskforce to coordinate action across ACT Government directorates.

Rationale: Belconnen faces challenges that cut across individual directorate responsibilities. A dedicated authority or taskforce would enable strategic planning, prioritise investments, and ensure cohesive implementation of renewal initiatives.

By 2021, the 2016 Belconnen Town Centre's Master Plan's predicted population growth of 8,600 by 2031 had already been exceeded. It is clear that better planning with realistic population predictions is essential to improve the quality of life for those that live, work, study and visit the Town Centre is required.

The proposed authority could:

- Coordinate across ACT Government directorates for integrated planning and delivery
- Develop a comprehensive renewal strategy for Belconnen with clear timelines and accountabilities
- Engage with community, business, and institutional stakeholders
- Monitor and report on progress against agreed outcomes
- Ensure investments complement each other and yield maximum benefit

The ACT's City Renewal Authority provides a relevant model that could be adapted to suit Belconnen's specific needs, enabling more coordinated and strategic urban renewal.

This investment would enable more coordinated, accountable, and strategic renewal across Belconnen, ensuring that planning, infrastructure, and community initiatives are aligned for maximum impact. It reflects best practice from successful renewal models and would support Belconnen's evolution into a well-functioning, well-connected urban centre.

If establishing a dedicated authority is not feasible, we recommend creating a structured inter-directorate taskforce as a minimum viable alternative. Belconnen's interconnected challenges spanning population growth, transport, economic development, and community wellbeing cannot be effectively addressed by any single directorate working in isolation.

The proposed taskforce could comprise senior representatives from Planning, Transport, Economic Development, Community Services, and Infrastructure directorates, with dedicated project management support, secretariat, and regular community engagement. This approach would align coordinate policy responses and break down information silos between directorates, ensuring that issues are understood and addressed holistically.

The Belconnen taskforce could serve as a proof of concept for cross-boundary coordination, with successful elements later adapted for other ACT districts facing similar complex challenges. This model recognises that effective coordination mechanisms can deliver integrated outcomes with minimal additional resources while establishing a replicable framework for district-level governance across the Territory.

2. Secure the Belconnen Bus Transitway

Recommendation: Commit full funding to complete the Belconnen Bus Transitway project by 2028 and accelerate preliminary planning for the Belconnen-City light rail connection.

Rationale: Better public transport connections between Belconnen and Civic will reduce traffic congestion and improve public transport efficiency. The Belconnen Bus Transitway will provide near-term public transport improvements while preliminary planning for light rail will minimise delays to planning future infrastructure.

The Belconnen Bus Transitway will:

- Provide dedicated lanes for high-frequency bus services between Belconnen and Civic
- Reduce travel times during peak periods
- Improve bus timetable reliability and frequency
- Serve as an enabling project for Light Rail Stage Three (City to Belconnen)
- Deliver immediate benefits while planning for longer-term mass transit solutions

We note that the ACT Government allocated funding for feasibility studies for this project last year. Furthermore, we note that in November 2023, the ACT Government committed to implementing bus priority measures on this route by October 2028. The upcoming ACT Budget must allocate sufficient funds to progress delivery of this project as outlined in the amended Belconnen Transitway Motion.

Accelerating preliminary planning for Belconnen-City light rail will:

- Minimise risk of delays like those affecting stage two
- Provide more certainty for broader government investment in complementary bus, 'park and ride', and cycling infrastructure
- Enable better planning within and around the Belconnen Town Centre

This investment would deliver faster, more reliable transport between Belconnen and Civic, reduce congestion, and lay the groundwork for future mass transit. It would ensure coordinated planning across bus, light rail, cycling, and park-and-ride infrastructure, align with the ACT's integrated transport and land use strategies, and support Belconnen's growth as a well-connected, sustainable urban centre.

3. Urban Greening and Environmental Conservation Uplift

Recommendation: Implement a comprehensive urban greening and environmental conservation program across Belconnen.

Rationale: Climate change impacts already affect Belconnen, with increasing urban heat, more frequent extreme weather events, and pressure on green spaces. Many of Belconnen's established suburbs have aging tree canopy that requires renewal, while newer areas have inadequate green infrastructure.

The 2025-26 Budget should fund:

- Accelerated street tree planting program targeting areas of low canopy cover
- Conversion of suitable public spaces to water-sensitive urban design features
- Enhancement and protection of significant environmental areas, including Ginninderra Creek corridor and Umbagog District Park
- Community-led greening initiatives and education programs
- Integration of green infrastructure into all public works and development projects
- Substantially intensify tree planting around Lake Ginninderra and associated waterways so that they serve more effectively both as the 'lungs' for the town centre and surrounds and also effectively as wildlife corridors.
- Water quality improvements in Lake Ginninderra and associated waterways

This investment would deliver multiple benefits, including reduced urban heat, enhanced biodiversity, improved water quality, carbon sequestration, and more attractive public spaces for community use. It aligns with the ACT's climate adaptation strategies and would build resilience to climate change impacts.

Comprehensive Recommendations

4. Deliver More Active Travel and Recreation Infrastructure

Recommendation: Fund comprehensive upgrades to active travel and recreation infrastructure across Belconnen, with particular focus on West and North Belconnen.

Rationale: Belconnen's active travel network contains significant gaps, particularly in newer areas and connections between suburbs. Enhanced active travel infrastructure would promote healthier lifestyles, reduce car dependency, and provide equitable access to recreation opportunities.

Priority investments should include:

- Completion of the Lake Ginninderra Circuit with accessible, all-weather paths
- Enhanced connections between suburbs and key destinations (shopping centers, schools, recreation facilities)
- Upgraded facilities at existing sports grounds and recreation areas
- New recreation facilities in underserved areas, particularly in West and North Belconnen
- Implementation of separated cycleways on major corridors
- Improved wayfinding and lighting along active travel routes
- Investigate potential upgrades to the Belconnen Library and Community centre to meet the growing demands of the community

Funding should enable a strategic, district-wide approach to active travel and recreation infrastructure rather than the current piecemeal interventions. This should encompass both sporting infrastructure and green spaces, as well as community facilities such as the Belconnen Library and Community Centre to allow community groups to use these facilities.

This investment aligns with multiple ACT Government strategies, including the Transport Strategy, Climate Strategy, and Wellbeing Framework. It would deliver measurable benefits in physical health, mental wellbeing, environmental sustainability, and community connectivity.

5. Bus Stop and Service Improvements

Recommendation: Fund comprehensive upgrades to bus stops across Belconnen and enhance service frequency and coverage.

Rationale: Public transport accessibility is uneven across Belconnen, with many bus stops lacking basic amenities such as shelter, seating, and lighting. Service frequencies in some areas are inadequate to meet community needs, particularly outside peak hours.

The 2025-26 Budget should fund:

- Audit and upgrade of all bus stops in Belconnen to ensure compliance with accessibility standards
- Installation of shelters, seating, and lighting at high-use stops
- Real-time information displays at major stops and interchanges
- Review and enhancement of service frequencies and routes, particularly in underserved areas
- Increase the capacity of peak services.
- A new West Belconnen Rapid Service from Ginninderry to the City
- Implementation of demand-responsive transport services for areas with lower density or specific needs
- Investigating pedestrian connections to each bus stop and turning desire paths into paved walkways for ease of accessibility
- These investments would enhance public transport accessibility and attractiveness, leading to increased patronage, reduced car dependency, and improved outcomes for vulnerable community members who rely on public transport.

This investment would improve public transport equity across Belconnen, support sustainable travel choices, reduce car dependency, and ensure the town centre and surrounding suburbs are better connected in line with the Territory's transport and urban growth strategies.

6. Implement a Community Safety Pilot for Belconnen

Recommendation: Fund a comprehensive Community Safety Pilot program focused on evidence-based interventions in Belconnen town and group centres.

Rationale: Community consultation consistently highlights safety concerns in public spaces, particularly around town and group centres. A coordinated, evidence-based approach is needed to address both actual safety risks and perceptions of safety.

The proposed pilot could:

- Fund lighting upgrades in identified priority areas
- Implement targeted CCTV monitoring in high-risk locations
- Apply Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles to public spaces
- Engage community in safety planning and implementation
- Measure and evaluate impacts to inform future investments

This investment would address community concerns, enhance actual and perceived safety, support business activity in centres, and provide valuable evidence to guide future safety initiatives across the Territory.

7. Belconnen Business Centre Support Program

Recommendation: Establish and fund a dedicated business support program focused on stimulating investment and redevelopment in the Belconnen town centre commercial precinct west of Belconnen Mall.

Rationale: The commercial precinct west of Belconnen Mall shows signs of underinvestment and requires revitalization to fulfill its potential as a vibrant mixed-use business district. Targeted support would stimulate private investment and create employment opportunities closer to where people live.

The proposed program would:

- Provide incentives for building upgrades and adaptive reuse of existing commercial spaces
- Support place-making initiatives to enhance the precinct's attractiveness
- Fund public realm improvements to complement private investment
- Reduce regulatory barriers to appropriate redevelopment
- Facilitate business networking and collaboration

This investment would stimulate economic activity, create local employment opportunities, enhance the district's commercial offerings, and increase the ACT Government's revenue base through increased economic activity and property values.

8. Equitable ACT Government Employment in the District

Recommendation: Allocate funding to increase ACT Government office accommodation and staffing in Belconnen, commensurate with the district's population and needs.

Rationale: Despite being home to approximately one-quarter of Canberra's population, Belconnen hosts significantly fewer ACT Government jobs, relative to its population share. Increasing government presence in the district would enhance service accessibility, stimulate local business activity, and reduce commuting needs.

The 2025-26 Budget should:

- Fund a review of ACT Government accommodation strategy with a view to increasing presence in Belconnen
- Identify and fund opportunities to relocate suitable government functions to Belconnen
- Ensure equitable distribution of frontline services across the territory

This investment would deliver multiple benefits, including improved service accessibility for Belconnen residents, reduced commuting pressures, enhanced local economic activity, and more efficient use of existing commercial infrastructure in the district.

9. Expand Funding for Local Shopping Centre Improvements

Recommendation: Significantly increase funding for the shopping centre improvements program.

Rationale: Many of Belconnen's local shopping centres were established decades ago and require renewal to meet contemporary community needs and expectations. These centres play a vital role in community life but often lack the resources for necessary upgrades.

The 2025-26 Budget should:

- Allocate funds to expand the shopping centre improvements program
- Prioritise centres with demonstrated maintenance and functionality issues
- Implement improvements based on community input and needs
- Address accessibility, safety, amenity, and functionality requirements
- Support complementary initiatives by business owners and community groups

This increased investment would revitalise important community hubs, support local businesses, and enhance neighbourhood amenity.

10. Deliver Education to Belconnen Town Centre

Recommendation: Allocate funding to identify, secure, and commence planning for a school site in the Belconnen Town Centre.

Rationale: Simultaneous decreasing land availability with new residential developments in the Belconnen Town Centre reinforce the need to identify and secure land for a school in the Belconnen Town Centre.

The Belconnen Town Centre is projected to add over 3,000 new homes in the next decade, increasing the total number of dwellings to more than 11,500, which will significantly boost the local population and demand for educational facilities

This Budget should:

- Fund a detailed needs analysis and site identification study
- Allocate resources for site acquisition if required
- Commence master planning for a contemporary education facility
- Explore opportunities for integrated community facilities within the school development

This investment would support Belconnen Town Centre's development as a complete community, reduce transport pressures, enhance educational outcomes, and align with the Territory's infill development objectives.

11. Protect and Expand Community and Recreational Space

Recommendation: Fund the protection, enhancement, and expansion of community and recreational spaces across Belconnen.

Rationale: As Belconnen's population grows and becomes more diverse, demand for community and recreational facilities increases. Many existing facilities require upgrading to meet contemporary standards and changing community needs.

The 2025-26 Budget should:

- Expand Margaret Timpson Park into Block 45 Section 54 Belconnen.
- Allocate funding for needs analysis and forward planning of community infrastructure
- Provide resources for upgrading existing community facilities
- Support establishment of new multipurpose community spaces in areas of need
- Ensure protection of existing community-purpose sites from inappropriate development
- Fund partnerships with community organizations for facility management and activation
- Investigate potential upgrades and improvements to the library services and spaces in the ACT

This investment would enhance community wellbeing, support social cohesion, provide opportunities for physical activity and recreation, and ensure Belconnen residents have equitable access to essential community infrastructure.

Conclusion

Belconnen stands at a critical juncture. As Canberra's largest district, it requires strategic investment proportionate to its size, population, and growth trajectory. The twelve recommendations presented in this submission offer a balanced approach to addressing immediate needs while establishing foundations for sustainable long-term growth.

The BCC acknowledges the fiscal constraints facing the ACT Government. However, we emphasize that these investments represent essential forward planning rather than discretionary expenditure. Without coordinated investment in this budget cycle, our district faces compounding challenges that will require more costly interventions in the future.

We believe that targeted investment in Belconnen today represents responsible fiscal management that will yield dividends through enhanced liveability, economic activity, and community wellbeing. The recommended investments also align with and advance key ACT Government priorities and strategies.

The BCC stands ready to work constructively with the ACT Government to refine and implement these recommendations. We offer our extensive community networks, local

knowledge, and engagement capabilities to support successful outcomes for both Belconnen and the broader Territory.

We thank you for considering this submission and look forward to discussing these recommendations further as the 2025-26 Budget is developed.