



Belconnen Alliance for High-rise Apartments (BAHA)

~ Republic, Dusk, High Society, Nightfall, Wayfarer, Altitude, Sentinel, Linq, Oracle 1 & 2, Cirrus ~

THE ACT GOVERNMENT 2027 – 27 BUDGET SUBMISSION

1. WHY THIS MATTERS NOW – THE RISE OF VERTICAL SUBURBS

Canberra's population is projected to grow significantly over coming decades, requiring a major expansion of high-density and mixed-use development. High-density precincts accommodate populations and commercial activity comparable to traditional Canberra suburbs, while individual towers can house the equivalent of small suburbs or villages within the footprint of one urban block.

These developments function as **“Vertical Suburbs.”**

When well designed and supported by infrastructure, Vertical Suburbs:

- Reduce the need for greenfield land release,
- Improve environmental outcomes,
- Reduce reliance on private vehicles,
- Enhance social connection, health and wellbeing, and
- Support the ACT's broader climate and sustainability objectives.

However, current planning and regulatory frameworks are not delivering these benefits in practice. Instead, rapid densification is occurring without commensurate investment in infrastructure, services and amenity. This risks creating high-density precincts that undermine the ACT's environmental, social and liveability goals.

This risk is increasing as climate change intensifies extreme weather events and places greater strain on already-stressed urban systems.

Belconnen Town Centre (BTC) is now Canberra's clearest example of a Vertical Suburb in transition — and the consequences of failing to plan and invest accordingly.

2. BELCONNEN TOWN CENTRE: A SUBURB WITHOUT SUBURBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

BAHA represents over 8,000 residents living within a Town Centre footprint of **only 0.75 square kilometres.**

The 2016 Belconnen Town Plan projected a population of 8,450 by 2031. The 2021 Census already records 8,502 residents, meaning the projection has effectively been met 10 years early.

There are currently 10 additional apartment precincts approved or under construction. This will result in at least 22 high-rise buildings within five years, effectively doubling the BTC population.

A single precinct such as the 1.5-hectare Republic Precinct already accommodates a population and level of commercial activity comparable to established suburbs such as Dickson or Forrest. Individual towers house populations equivalent to small suburbs such as Hume or villages such as Hall — but within a footprint of only one city block.

Despite this scale of growth, infrastructure and services have not expanded proportionately.

BTC is now functioning as a high-density suburb without the service base, safety, transport, green space or community facilities expected of one.



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3. THE SYSTEMIC RISK: DENSITY WITHOUT CAPACITY

Rapid infill development without integrated planning is creating compounding pressures across interconnected systems:

- Energy and substations
- Security and policing
- Traffic and parking
- Greenspace and public realm
- Education and family services

These pressures are not isolated. They interact and amplify one another, degrading liveability and increasing long-term costs for government.

Without intervention, BTC risks becoming a case study in density without resilience.

4. ENERGY SECURITY IN A DECARBONISING CITY

The ACT's transition away from gas will significantly increase electricity demand. Most existing BTC apartment buildings currently rely on large gas hot water systems and will require electrification. At the same time:

- At least 10 new precincts will come online, and
- Demand for electric vehicle charging (cars and buses) will expand rapidly.

There is no publicly available evidence that current electricity infrastructure and substations in BTC have the capacity to absorb:

- Large-scale building electrification,
- Substantial population growth, and
- Transport electrification.

Without proactive investment and planning, BTC faces a material risk of supply constraints and system failure at precisely the time demand accelerates.

5. COMMUNITY SAFETY: A GROWING SERVICE GAP

Residential density has increased significantly, but publicly funded security and policing presence has not. All BAHA buildings report rising incidents of:

- Ongoing theft and break-ins,
- Vandalism and property damage,
- Aggressive intrusions, and
- Lift and infrastructure damage.

In response, owners' corporations have been forced to self-fund security services. The Republic Precinct alone now funds:

- Dedicated security guards and patrols,
- Comprehensive CCTV systems and monitoring,
- Ongoing repairs resulting from criminal damage.



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The annual cost borne by Republic Precinct residents for security is **\$350,000–\$400,000 per annum**. Despite this private expenditure, crime persists and police response times remain inconsistent. This represents a significant cost shift from government to residents and an emerging equity issue in service provision.

A visible and sustained public policing presence, supported by preventative security investment, is vital to stabilise safety and restore confidence.

6. MOVEMENT FAILURE: TRAFFIC AND PARKING UNDER STRAIN

Traffic volumes and bus movements now far exceed what was anticipated in the 2016 Town Plan. Construction activity has compounded disruption, with road and lane closures continuing for years at a time:

- Cameron Avenue (Republic Precinct – 7 years),
- Emu Bank (Cirrus and Ethos),
- Market Lane (Markets Apartments).

Daily congestion is increasing and parking demand now exceeds supply. Commercial viability is being affected, particularly where:

- Ground-floor businesses have no visitor parking, and
- No-parking zones (e.g. Grazier Lane) are routinely ignored, creating pedestrian safety risks.

Movement systems require redesign for high-density reality, not suburban assumptions.

7. LOSING GREENSPACE IN THE “BUSH CAPITAL”

Canberra’s policy framework aims for a **30% urban tree canopy by 2045**.

Multi-unit developments in BTC zones require approximately **20% canopy cover**. Currently canopy cover per resident is less than half what it was at the beginning of the BTC Plan. This reduction brought about by the increase in population and removal of trees to build.

In practice:

- Tree loss has occurred at scale,
- Rooftop gardens have only partially replaced removed canopy, and
- Usable public green space has declined.

As BTC densifies, greenspace becomes more critical — not less — for:

- Heat mitigation,
- Mental and physical health,
- Social cohesion, and
- Climate resilience.

Without deliberate intervention, BTC risks becoming a high-density heat island rather than a climate-ready community.

8. FAMILIES WITHOUT A SCHOOL

BTC’s population is projected to double within five years. New developments increasingly include larger apartments designed to attract families. Despite this:



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- There is no primary school within BTC, and
- The nearest school (Florey Primary) is approximately 3km away across major roads.

It is not reasonable or safe to expect young children to travel these distances unescorted, nor is it certain that surrounding schools can absorb projected enrolments.

A high-density suburb without a local school is structurally incomplete.

9. HIGH CONTRIBUTION, LOW RETURN

Despite its small footprint, BTC is:

- The **third largest suburb by population**, and
- Among the **top eight contributors to ACT Consolidated Revenue**.

BAHA apartments alone currently contribute approximately **\$9 million per annum**.

With population expected to double, BTC may become the ACT's highest-contributing suburb.

However, infrastructure and service investment has not kept pace with this contribution.

A growing imbalance between fiscal contribution and public amenity now exists in the BTC.

10. WHAT GOVERNMENT ACTION IS REQUIRED

BAHA seeks funding in the 2026–27 Budget for an **Integrated Belconnen Town Centre Infrastructure and Services Study** that:

- Assesses cumulative impacts of densification,
- Treats BTC as a single interconnected system,
- Aligns infrastructure capacity with population growth, and
- Delivers a staged, funded implementation plan.

To support the integrity of this process, BAHA requests that:

All new Development Approvals and land sales within BTC be deferred until the study is completed and its recommendations are adopted.

This is not an anti-development position. It is a pro-planning position.

11. IMMEDIATE PUBLIC REALM INVESTMENT AT LAKE GINNINDERRA

Lake Ginninderra is Belconnen's defining public asset. However:

- Lakeside commercial lots are deteriorating or vacant,
- Weeds and poor lighting reduce safety and amenity, and
- Public spaces are increasingly neglected.

With Belconnen's 60-year anniversary events likely to be centred on the lake, early investment is required to deliver:

- Improved lighting and pathways,
- Traffic and parking improvements, and
- A cleaner, safer, more attractive public realm.

This investment should not be event-driven but form part of a sustained renewal strategy.

See Attachment 1 as examples.



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12. CONCLUSION – A VERTICAL SUBURB NEEDS HORIZONTAL SUPPORT

Belconnen Town Centre is already functioning as a Vertical Suburb. Its population density now rivals established suburban communities, but without equivalent services, infrastructure or planning coherence.

The issues identified in this submission stem from rapid, uncoordinated growth within a constrained footprint. Without intervention, these pressures will intensify and generate higher long-term costs for government.

BAHA therefore requests that the 2026–27 ACT Budget fund:

- 1. An integrated BTC services and infrastructure study,**
- 2. A temporary pause on new approvals pending that study,**
- 3. Early investment in Lake Ginninderra public realm upgrades, and**
- 4. The extension of Margaret Timpson Park.**

This represents a timely opportunity to ensure Canberra’s densification strategy delivers on its promise — environmentally, socially and economically — rather than becoming a case study in avoidable decline.

Submitted by The Belconnen Alliance for High-rise Apartments

Convenor: Margaret Kenna
(margaretkenna@bigpond.com)



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Attachment 1 – example of neglect Lakeside

