

Councils unite on ad hoc planning

By Peter Reynolds

THE community councils of Canberra have called on the Legislative Assembly to conduct an independent and thorough review of planning processes in the ACT.

The first of what will now be regular meetings of the Combined Community Councils was held last Saturday and was mainly based on concerns councils had about planning.

The councils put forward a motion outlining their concerns about the fragmentation of planning in the ACT and the absence of an overarching plan for the ACT; what they describe as a lack of transparency and accountability of the planning and development process in the ACT; and the inadequacies of the current system of community engagement.

The review called for by the councils would involve the ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA), Land Development Agency (LDA) and other relevant agencies with a view to the ACT Government establishing an independent, integrated and strategic planning and development system that contributes to the orderly and sustainable development in the ACT with consideration to bordering regions, and consistent with the social, environment and economic aspirations of the people of the ACT.

President of the Belconnen Com-



President of Tuggeranong Community Council Darryl Johnston.

munity Council Shirley Gourgaud said the motion was the result of a number of applications for multi-unit developments in Canberra's suburbs.

"There was a consensus among the councils that the fragmentation of planning is leading to an ad hoc approach to development," she said.

"There are a number of different departments all involved with the planning process, such as TAMS, ACTPLA, LDA, LAPS (Land and Property Services), and DHCS (Disability, Housing and Community Services) and there is no overarching



Chair of Woden Valley Community Council Jenny Stewart.

plan. Planning does not always fit in with other government policies such as transport and sustainable energy.

"There is also the issue of densification in the suburbs.

"All of a sudden, quiet little streets are having multi-unit developments built in them, which is increasing traffic four-fold and changing the character of the street just because they are zoned RZ2."

Chair of the Woden Valley Community Council Dr Jenny Stewart said a more integrated approach to planning was needed.

"There is a lack of vision on a strategic level in planning," she said.

"What's missing is something to link everything together and look at the overall cumulative effect that developments are having, rather than if they just meet all the guidelines."

Dr Stewart said the next few years would be significant in the future development of the city.

"The period before the next election will be crucial for the soul of Canberra," she said.

"We need to preserve the heritage of the city while allowing it to grow; the balance is just not right at the moment."

Darryl Johnston, president of the Tuggeranong Community Council, who hosted the meeting, said it was a positive experience to get all councils together to discuss their issues.

"What we recognised is that we have a lot of issues in common and that we should be working towards becoming a unified voice for the community," he said.

"It is difficult for one council to deal with the range of issues that we face, so if we can combine our resources and forces, we'll be much more effective."

The next Combined Community Councils meeting will be hosted by the Woden Valley Community Council in March next year.

It is planned that the councils will meet once every four months.