

MOLONGLO VALLEY COMMUNITY FORUM

The recognised community council for the Molonglo Valley district
ABN 42 539 844 893

The Plan Without The Community

A counterfactual analysis of the Molonglo Town Centre planning process

18 June 2026 | Molonglo Valley Community Forum

PURPOSE

This document asks a simple question: what would the Molonglo Town Centre look like if the Forum had never engaged?

The answer, on the documentary record, is: almost identical to what is being approved now.

That is not a reason to stop engaging. It is a reason to be precise about what engagement has and has not changed, and to be honest with our community about where the work is still to be done.

THE 2024 BASELINE

Everything that matters about the Molonglo Town Centre was designed in 2023 and committed to in the ACT Government's March 2024 tender (RFT PISL0002651, Attachment B – Statement of Requirements).

The tender set the commercial architecture, the staging sequence, the evidence base, and the planning driver. It was issued before the Forum was named as a required stakeholder. It was issued before the Master Plan was published.

It was issued, on the document's own terms, to meet a land sales calendar.

Clause 2.4.5 is the key clause. It instructs designers that reclassification from group centre to town centre "should be assumed to not change the MGC and Surrounds Concept Plan requirements other than potential to permit an increase in residential dwellings."

The label was always going to change. The obligations were never going to change. MA2026-08 delivers exactly what the 2024 tender specified.

WHAT HAS CHANGED

The Forum's engagement has produced real, documentable changes:

- The Forum is named in the Government's own consultant brief as a required engagement stakeholder (clause 11.1.5). That is a formal recognition that did not exist before the Forum advocated for it.
- MA2026-08 was notified before the Master Plan was released. The Forum raised the sequencing problem. The consultation period was extended. That extension happened because the Forum pushed for it.
- The Master Plan was published. Without sustained community pressure, the planning documents would have remained internal.
- The Forum's advocacy has created scrutiny – media coverage, a Standing Committee inquiry request, and MLA engagement – that makes it harder to proceed without accountability.

These are genuine wins. The Forum should own them.

WHAT HAS NOT CHANGED

The commercial architecture is unchanged. The commercial core remains an Englobo site, deferred to Stage 3, with no committed release date.

The two anchors in the Master Plan renders are the same big-box outlet and single-storey shopping centre that were in the 2024 tender.

The street-level retail that appeared in the 2023 concept design was stripped out – not as a result of community engagement, but on retail-consultancy advice, with no engagement with Canberra's business community.

Employment floorspace remains at zero. No precinct in MA2026-08 carries an employment obligation. The evidence base remains retail-only.

No employment study has been commissioned.

The planning driver is unchanged. The residential land release calendar is being met. The commercial heart of the district has no committed delivery date.

COMPARISON

Dimension	2024 baseline (tender)	Now (Master Plan + MA2026-08)
Centre classification	Group Centre – shopping destination with homemaker anchor	Town Centre – classification only; commercial obligations unchanged per cl. 2.4.5
Community engagement	Vision set at internal SLA/EPsDD workshop, 21 Jul 2023; no residents in the room (cl. 3.6.1)	MVCF named as required stakeholder (cl. 11.1.5); consultation period extended; Master Plan published
Commercial staging	Commercial core Englobo, Stage 3 open market (cl. 14.1.4, 16.1.4); homes first by design	Unchanged – commercial core still deferred, no committed release date
Commercial architecture	Big-box homemaker anchor + single-storey shopping centre; “park once” car park (cl. 9.1.6)	Unchanged – same two anchors in Master Plan renders; street-level retail stripped out
Employment floorspace	Zero committed; evidence base retail-only (Location IQ, Sep 2023)	Zero committed – no precinct carries an employment obligation
Planning driver	Sales calendar: ILRP dates Jun 2025 / Jan 2026 set the design timeline (cl. 2.1.4, 2.4.1)	Unchanged – first residential release this FY; commercial in unbound out-years

FAIR ATTRIBUTION

The Forum does not claim credit for outcomes it did not produce. This document makes no claim that the Forum secured the Master Plan publication, the consultation extension or the stakeholder recognition alone – these involved multiple actors.

It claims only that the Forum's advocacy was a material factor in each, which the documentary record supports.

Equally, the Forum does not accept blame for outcomes it did not produce.

The commercial architecture, the staging sequence and the employment gap predate the Forum's engagement on this specific amendment.

They were baked into the 2024 tender.

The Forum is trying to change them. It has not yet succeeded.

WHAT THIS MEANS

The Forum's submission on MA2026-08 is the live instrument.

The five asks in that submission are the specific changes needed to convert the current plan from a group-centre-with-a-new-name into a genuine mixed-use town centre.

The legislative proposals in the MLA letter are the structural fixes that would prevent the same outcome recurring.

70,000 people are coming.

The Forum is how they get a town centre worth the name.

19 June 2026

Territory Plan Section
Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate
By email: terrplan@act.gov.au

Submission – Minor Plan Amendment MA2026-08 – Molonglo Town Centre and Surrounds

WHO WE ARE

The Molonglo Valley Community Forum (MVCF) is the recognised community council for the Molonglo Valley district, confirmed by the ACT Legislative Assembly in February 2021. We represent the residents of Coombs, Wright, Denman Prospect, Whitlam, Molonglo, Bandler and Sulman – a district the Government has promised will be home to 70,000 people. This submission reflects positions endorsed by the MVCF Executive Committee.

OUR POSITION

We support taller buildings in the town centre. We support tree retention under the Urban Forest Act 2023. We support the family-friendly dwelling mix incentive.

What we cannot support is an amendment engineered to hold a 7,000-dwelling target while committing not one square metre of employment floorspace. MA2026-08 sets heights, zones and dwelling yields with precision. On jobs, it is silent.

Density without employment is a dormitory. Gungahlin showed Canberra how that story runs. We will not accept a re-run in Molonglo.

WHAT THE AMENDMENT DOES – AND WHAT IT DOES NOT

The amendment does three things:

1. Rezones the M1 site (opposite the school, east of John Gorton Drive) from RZ3 to RZ5 – the first in-globo release, with a target of around 700 dwellings.
2. Divides the town centre and surrounds into seven height precincts (A to G) under Figure 26A, with heights from one storey to 16 storeys and landmark buildings permitted in precincts D and E.
3. Introduces a family-friendly incentive of up to three additional storeys where the dwelling mix is at least 35 per cent three-bedroom or larger, no more than 25 per cent one-bedroom and no more than 40 per cent two-bedroom.

Each height precinct carries a dwelling expectation. None carries an employment obligation. The amendment lifts heights specifically to absorb the roughly six hectares lost to tree retention and protect the 7,000-dwelling target. That is active, deliberate protection of residential yield. No equivalent mechanism protects jobs – because no jobs target exists.

THE SEQUENCING PROBLEM

This amendment was notified before the Master Plan was released. Residents were asked to comment on heights and zones before they could see the land use plan those heights would serve.

We raised this in our pre-release briefing, and we acknowledge the extension of the consultation period to 26 June.

The Government's own tender documents explain the rush. The March 2024 Statement of Requirements for the town centre urban design consultancy (RFT PISL0002651, Attachment B) records that the project "was transmitted to SLA with extremely short timeframes to deliver" (clause 2.1.4), and defines the consultancy's main objective as obtaining approvals to meet the Indicative Land Release Program – first residential land releases in the SDP1 area "by the end of June 2025 and for SDP2 area by January 2026" (clause 2.4.1).

The sales calendar is driving the planning calendar. That is the wrong way around, and this amendment is its instrument.

THE DOCUMENT RECORD

The same Statement of Requirements shows what was actually being designed. The tender is titled Molonglo Group Centre Stage 1 throughout. Clause 2.1.7 describes the centre as "the primary commercial centre for the community in the Molonglo valley" – a shopping destination, not an employment centre.

Clause 2.4.5 deals directly with the prospect of town centre status:

"It is noted that a change in the classification of the MGC from a Group Centre to a Town Centre is currently being investigated by SLA and EPSDD as a result of the recent increase in population projections for Canberra including Molonglo Valley ... For the purpose of this RFT, this classification should be assumed to not change the MGC and Surrounds Concept Plan requirements other than potential to permit an increase in residential dwellings."

Read that carefully. On the Government's own instruction, "Town Centre" status was to change nothing except the number of dwellings. MA2026-08 now delivers exactly that – more residential capacity on the same group-centre commercial architecture.

The commercial design in the tender confirms the architecture:

- A homemaker retail centre beside the commercial core, served by "a single large multilevel underground car park beneath the commercial core and homemakers centre" (clause 9.1.6) – big-box logic.
- The "retail and commercial core along with homemaker retail centre is to be an Englobo site" (clause 16.1.4), and "the SDP2 Stage 3 will not be tendered under this consultancy" (clause 14.1.4) – the commercial heart deferred while residential design proceeds.
- SDP2 Stage 1 delivers the school sites, roads, enabling works and residential mixed-use first. The commercial core waits for Stage 3 and the open market.

The Master Plan released on 27 May 2026 carries this architecture forward: a "condensed urban core" roughly four hectares smaller than the previous concept, a big-box anchor across the street from a single-storey shopping centre as the only two anchors, "iterative growth" that defers commercial to a future demand signal, and the Rouse Hill precedent held up as the model – where the plan's own dates show 15 years from shopping centre (2009) to mixed use (2024).

The result: 7,000 dwellings committed. Zero committed employment floorspace.

THE COMMERCIAL FLOORSPACE CLAIM

The Government points to a headline figure of around 85,000 square metres of commercial space for the town centre. That figure does not survive scrutiny.

A large share of it – on our reading, 40 to 50 per cent – is big-box homemaker retail, together with the library and the police station. A library and a police station are civic facilities, not commercial

floorspace. A homemaker centre is a single big-box format, not the fine-grain specialty retail and employment that defines a town centre.

Canberra's retail hierarchy sets the benchmark. A town centre sits above a group centre and below the city, and is expected to provide in the order of 400,000 to 800,000 square feet – roughly 37,000 to 74,000 square metres – of specialty retail. Counting a hardware store, a library and a police station toward that benchmark does not meet it.

Strip the civic and big-box floorspace out of the 85,000 square metre figure and the genuine specialty retail and employment offer is far smaller. More importantly, none of it is committed. The amendment commits 7,000 dwellings to the square metre. It commits not one square metre of employment floorspace.

THE LAND RELEASE PROGRAM CONFIRMS THE DEFERRAL

The two most recent ACT Housing Supply and Land Release Programs confirm what the amendment implies. Molonglo 1 – around 700 dwellings – is released this financial year. Molonglo 2 – around 420 dwellings – is released next financial year. Both are residential.

The commercial core, the library, the police station and the college appear in neither program's release year. They sit in the indicative out-years, which the Government is not bound to deliver and which past programs show are routinely not delivered. On the public record, the residential land is being sold now while the commercial heart of the district has no committed release date at all.

WHAT WE ASK

We ask that MA2026-08 be revised before it is made, to do five things:

1. Mandate commercial floorspace ratios. Write minimum non-residential floorspace requirements into the precinct provisions – particularly precincts D and E, where the tallest buildings and landmark sites sit. Height entitlements should carry employment obligations, not just dwelling yield.
2. Guarantee an anchor tenancy. Withhold the commercial core land from release until a significant anchor employer or government tenancy is secured. Do not let the englobo sale proceed on retail hope alone.
3. Disperse commercial zoning. Require active ground-floor commercial across multiple precincts – including the Noisy Sub-Precinct – rather than concentrating all non-residential use in a single core parcel.
4. Put commercial in the first stage. Condition the M1 release and the first land releases on employment floorspace being delivered in the first construction stage, not deferred to Stage 3.
5. Commit dedicated bus lanes along the full length of John Gorton Drive. A town centre for 70,000 people needs trunk public transport from day one, and the road reserve decisions are being made now.

The Government has repeatedly stated that the Molonglo Town Centre will serve a future district of approximately 70,000 residents. A centre of that scale cannot be planned solely as a residential destination. It must also function as an employment, service, retail and civic hub – one capable of reducing cross-city commuting, supporting local economic activity, and providing the range of services expected of a town centre within Canberra's hierarchy.

A CONSTRUCTIVE PATH

We are not asking the Government to conjure demand. We are asking it to use the levers it already owns: rate and land-tax relief for early commercial occupants, reduced lease variation charges, fit-

out support for first movers, and staged land release tied to employment outcomes. If a precinct delivers jobs, release the next parcel. If it does not, hold.

These mechanisms cost little against the decades-long cost of a dormitory district.

CLOSING

The Forum has asked the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning to inquire into the Molonglo Town Centre planning process. That request stands. It is not a reason to delay fixing this amendment – it is a reason to fix it properly.

We support height. We support density. We support trees. We ask the Government to match its precision on dwellings with the same precision on jobs.

We are available to discuss this submission at any time.

Yours sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature and name of the sender.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Terrplan](#)
Subject: Submission – MA2026-08
Date: Wednesday, 24 June 2026 12:18:09 PM

You don't often get email from [REDACTED] [Learn why this is important](#)

Caution: This email originated from outside of the ACT Government. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Hi Team,

We need employment in this area as a key - both Government and Private. We also want good transport links throughout and over a bridge to Tuggerong Parkway. We want:

- Employment space committed in the plan, not just promised.
- The commercial core built before the residential towers fill in around it.
- Bus priority on John Gorton Drive from day one. Also, Bus priority to tuggernong parkway as per the new bridge connect.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Terplan](#)
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Submission – MA2026-08
Date: Friday, 26 June 2026 8:05:24 AM

You don't often get email from [REDACTED] [Learn why this is important](#)

Caution: This email originated from outside of the ACT Government. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

To whom it may concern,

I am a resident of the Molonglo Valley and I'd like to express a few words about the future development of the new town centre.

Planning in Molonglo has been subject to notorious problems:

- the Coombs shops tenancy issues
- traffic congestion on Cotter Road, as a result of planned increases in population density before the delivery of crucial infrastructure projects
- overall population projections being severely underestimated
- active infrastructure projects promised but yet to be delivered after a decade
- back-and-forth changes to the plans of a dedicated Coombs-Wright village

What I want to see is a proactive approach, rather than reactionary, to these issues.

I want to see a future-proof strategy for Molonglo that puts residents ahead of the one-off financial benefits derived from land sales.

I want to see a commitment to local employment opportunities and provisions for key commercial tenancies.

These commitments are important for the communities that already live in Molonglo, and I want to see them realised ahead, or together with, the development of residential towers — not as an afterthought.

The planning of the new town centre is a key opportunity to demonstrate the government's commitment to the future of Molonglo, and I hope we will not let it slip away.

Kind regards,

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Terrplan](#)
Subject: Submission MA2026-08
Date: Friday, 26 June 2026 10:40:42 AM

[You don't often get email from [REDACTED] Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>]

Caution: This email originated from outside of the ACT Government. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Regarding Submission MA2026-08

It is absolutely essential that the first consideration for the Molonglo town centre development is construction of the commercial / retail section.

The population around the town centre already exists in Denman Prospect, Whitlam, Coombs, Wright and beyond and already requires a town centre and will be well used while the housing development takes place. Civic buildings should be included at this first stage, the police station and library.

We do not want housing first and a long wait while residents travel out from the area to work.

Retail and commercial construction first.

Regards,

[REDACTED]