



Griffith/Narrabundah Community Association's comments to the Inquiry into Environmental Volunteerism

Introduction

Since Blaxland Park was gazetted in 2013, the Griffith Narrabundah Community Association (GNCA) has had productive and successful interaction with the TCCS Directorate on a range of issues relating to the management and development of Parks, Reserves and open green spaces in our area of interest.

We are now involved with, several volunteer groups in Griffith. These include:

- *The Friends of Blaxland Park*, which was formed in 2017. This group developed a Master Plan for the Park, which has been endorsed by the government and resulted in the construction of pedestrian paths through the Park. It has planted and maintains more than 60 trees. The plantings are a mixture of native and deciduous exotic trees. A small native garden will soon be developed.
- *Griffith Woodland Volunteer Group* aims to enhance the biodiversity within the Griffith urban environment (La Perouse Park), by restoring the understory, reducing the number of invasive plants in a box-gum woodland and
- *The Friends of Bass Gardens*, which was formed in 1998 and aims to restore the understory of this four-hectare heritage park. It contains a wonderful range of native grasses and other small flowering plants.

We would like to point out that a 2019/20 survey by the Inner South Canberra Community Council involving 555 respondents, found that Inner South residents' four most desired features were:

- Streetscape (*street trees, vegetation, gardens, width of streets*) – 71%
- Open spaces (*parks, ovals and bushland for recreation*) – 69%
- Character (*well planned, peaceful, safe, community feeling*) – 62%
- Environment (*reserves, trees, vegetation, wildlife, flora and fauna*) – 60%

These results were confirmed in the ACT Government's 2021 community engagement process and underline the importance to residents of these four key features.

GNCA Policy and Recommendations

The GNCA endorses the results of the recent surveys undertaken by the ACT Government and the ISCCC. We support the establishment of volunteer groups to assist in maintaining these valuable features.

These groups also lead to a strengthening of local communities and provide a sense of ownership to areas in our suburbs.



A report on ACT Environmental Volunteers released in February 2022 by Dr Sophie Lewis, ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (www.actenvirovolunteers.com.au), endorsed the importance of volunteer groups. An estimate of the equivalent wage-cost for environmental volunteering work in the ACT contained in the report claims the value to be over \$21.5 million per year.

In the Griffith/Narrabundah area, there are some well-used parks, such as Light Street and Sprent that would benefit from the presence of volunteer groups.

We, therefore, **encourage the ACT Government to provide funding to facilitate the formation of new volunteer groups, where these do not already exist. (R1).**

The Commissioner's report makes several recommendations to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the environmental volunteering programs.

We have amended the first recommendation so that the availability of the data collected is considered.

There is a huge amount of useful information that could be provided by these volunteer groups, such as how many seedlings have been planted, how much watering has been done, how many hectares are being cared for etc.

This information is also important for the overall planning of Canberra.

This information should be readily available to the volunteers and, wherever possible, to the public. We, therefore, recommend that **the way metrics about volunteer contributions are collected held and made available is reviewed. (R2)**

It is crucial that the volunteer programs and community organisations are resourced appropriately. At present, most volunteer groups appear to start with a government grant to undertake a specified piece of work. It might be to plant trees, shrubs or grasses, or it might be to develop a plan for a park or reserve. After that work has been completed there is usually no recurring government funding.

We are recommending that this situation changes, so that it is easier for applications to be made for ancillary items such as irrigation and hydraulic improvements, playground equipment, park benches, cleaning graffiti, signs, lighting and paths, in association with purely environmental work. At present, applications must be made through unrelated programs with differing timetables, resulting in disjointed delivery of outcomes.

Regular weeding is an important activity for most parks (see the image below). If groups had funds for this work and a list of approved contractors, they could organise the spraying when it is needed. At present an *ad hoc* approach to TC&CS has to be made to organise the spraying.

We recommend that the ACT Government make available funds to be used by volunteer groups for park improvements and regular maintenance activities. (R3)





We appreciate the need to ensure everyone's safety and understand insurance requirements, but the prohibition of basic motorised gardening devices, which we use in our gardens at home is too cautious. It is a significant impediment to some volunteer groups doing their jobs, particularly when the contract mowers only operate wide-cut machines. We recommend that the regulations are changed to **allow for small garden lawn mowers and other low risk mechanical devices to be used by volunteer groups (R4)**. There is always some risk in using mechanical equipment, but the risks of harm to volunteers by using lawn mowers and small battery-operated trimmers, should be small enough for these to be used.

We would like to thank the staff of Transport Canberra and City Services for their support, dedication, enthusiasm and encouragement throughout the years.

The volunteer co-ordinators are the only contacts we would normally need, but it would be very useful to have **a detailed organisation chart to see who is responsible for such things as data collection, mowing, watering, pruning, tree planting, legal and financial issues. (R5)** so that we can be better informed on how the Directorate works.

Finally, we would like to endorse all the recommendations listed in the Opportunities Section of the ACT Environmental Volunteers report, with the addition we mentioned in R2.

Summary of the recommendations

Encourage the ACT Government to provide funding to facilitate the formation of new volunteer groups, where these do not already exist. (R1)

Review the way metrics about volunteer contributions are collected, held and made available. (R2)

The ACT Government makes available funds for volunteer groups to use for park improvements and regular maintenance activities. (R3)

Allow for small garden lawnmowers and other low-risk mechanical devices to be used by volunteer groups. (R4)

TCCS provides a detailed organisation chart to show who in the Directorate is responsible for such things as data collection, mowing, watering, pruning, tree planting, legal and financial issues. (R5)

