



**Andrew Barr MLA**

Chief Minister

Treasurer

Minister for Climate Action

Minister for Economic Development

Minister for Tourism

Member for Kurrajong

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Mr Tom Duncan

Clerk

ACT Legislative Assembly

London Circuit

CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Duncan

*Tom*

Thank you for your letter of 5 December 2022 regarding petition 031-22, lodged by Ms Nicole Lawder MLA. The petition draws the Assembly's attention to the condition of the Richardson Shops, with some having been vacant for an extended period of time. The petition also highlights the concern this is causing some Richardson residents.

Support for business owners

While the ACT Government does not provide direct incentives to business owners to occupy privately owned shop fronts, like the Richardson Shops, it has and continues to provide a wide range of supports to businesses. The 2021-22 Budget committed \$475 million in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to support local businesses. This includes wide-ranging initiatives like the Business Support Grants and the Small Business Hardship Scheme, and waivers and reductions of a wide range of Government fees and charges. Further, the Canberra Business Advice and Support Service (CBASS) provides businesses with up to four hours of free, tailored, specialist advice including financial, legal, and advice to help pivot or close a business.

Residential and commercial vacancies

Because the Richardson Shops are privately owned, there are limitations on how the Government can intervene in commercial leasing arrangements. However, there are a number of holding costs for property that disincentivise leaving a property vacant and without income, including the costs of the mortgage and government taxes. The ACT's property taxes are an economic incentive to rent out any property that is not being used. Property owners in the ACT pay General Rates regardless of whether

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the property is occupied to help fund the essential services and infrastructure all Canberrans rely on, like schools, hospitals, public transport, and community facilities. If a property sits vacant, General Rates are still payable for the property even if these services are not being used. In summary, there are existing economic incentives for ensuring properties are made available to the leasing market where possible.

#### Condition of Richardson Shops

The ACT Government notes the current condition of Richardson shops, including the loss of the supermarket in recent years and understands the concern this causes local residents. As Richardson Shops are privately owned, including the car parking area, there are limits to what the ACT Government can do to revitalise them. The occupation and use of buildings is governed, in part, under the relevant Crown lease for a site. Access Canberra is responsible for investigating complaints made in relation to non-compliance with Crown leases, which includes issues associated with vacant commercial properties.

The ACT Government has recently contacted the leaseholder of Block 4 Section 454 Richardson to remind them of their obligations to maintain the leasehold, including keeping it in a clean state, under the *Planning and Development Act 2007*. Should members of the community like to report any further incidents or unsafe deterioration of the building's condition, they can lodge a complaint directly to Access Canberra by phone or via the online reporting tool available at [www.accesscanberra.gov.au](http://www.accesscanberra.gov.au).

City Services also engages in a program of upgrades to shopping precincts across the ACT, where identified public space can be upgraded for improved amenity and to support local businesses and residents. As part of this program a new play space was opened next to the Richardson Shops in late 2020. The upgrades at the Richardson shops playground included elements for swinging, climbing and exploring including skate ledges and ramps, replacement climbing structure, nest swing and a spinner with plenty of space for relaxing under shaded seating areas, new landscaping and rubber softfall for safety.

City Services is only able to do public space upgrades like this on area owned and managed by the ACT Government. While the Richardson shops and the adjoining carpark (Block 4, Section 454) are privately owned, TCCS owns, manages and maintains adjoining Block 12, zoned PRZ1 – Urban Open Space (and in use as a playground), and also Blocks 15, 16 and 17 which are zoned CZ4 Local Centre, but used as unleased open space.

#### Value of local centres

The ACT Government recognises the important social and economic role played by local centres in our community. The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) is currently undertaking the ACT Planning System Review and Reform project, this includes the preparation of district strategies covering the nine urban districts of the ACT. District strategies are a new level in the planning system that provide greater spatial and policy direction at a district scale.

The draft Tuggeranong District Strategy identifies the Richardson local centre as one of a number of 'possible' centres for investigation of appropriate planning and non-planning initiatives to support its

viability and role as a community meeting place. Further work will need to be undertaken to confirm the Richardson local centre as a candidate for this investigation, including demographic and economic analysis.

The draft Territory Plan and district strategies, including the Tuggeranong District Strategy, are now out for community consultation and residents can provide input through the yoursay website at: [ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project | YourSay ACT](#).

Further information on the planning review and reform project can be found at the following link. <https://www.planning.act.gov.au/planning-our-city/act-planning-system-review-and-reform/draft-district-strategies>

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Barr', is positioned above the printed name.

Andrew Barr MLA  
Chief Minister

21 February 2023